

Doylestown Dog Park Orientation



A dog park is a great place to run!



- Dogs need exercise! Opportunities to run free and fast, chase balls, sniff and explore.
- The average walk on leash just doesn't fill the bill.
- Tired, satisfied dogs are more content and less likely to be destructive.

Are dog parks safe?

Dog parks can be wonderful.



But when the wrong dogs collide and owners aren't prepared, dog parks can also be dangerous.

Our goal is to help you identify red flags and appropriate signals in canine communication.



The dog park is not a good choice for all dogs.

Not every dog is a “dog park dog”.



Your dog is not a “bad dog” if she simply doesn’t enjoy playing with unfamiliar dogs at the dog park.

Stranger danger!

- Dogs who are “fine” with dogs at home may not be fine with all the dogs at the park.

Your dog is interacting with dogs he doesn't know.



- Even a dog who has other dogs living at home with whom he plays well, won't automatically be good with unfamiliar dogs of varying sizes, temperaments and social experience at the park.

Don't bring a dog with social issues to "get over" his problem.



Not appropriate for the dog park:

- Aggressive dogs.
- Very shy dogs.
- Puppies under 6 months.
- Dogs who are possessive or guarding of toys, food or YOU.
- Unvaccinated, injured or ill dogs.
- Non-neutered dogs.

He'll more likely get worse, not better.

***“A dog park is for
socializing, not for
socialization”***

– Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, CDBC

“It’s a terrific place for a dog who understands how to read and respond appropriately to the body language of other dogs. It’s a great place for a dog who enjoys the company of other dogs and likes to engage in appropriate play.

It is not a good place for a dog who is socially challenged.”

- Whole Dog Journal – Volume 14, No. 6

Read the rules – and follow them.



Doylestown Dog Park Rules Review

Children *under* the age of 14 are not allowed in the park. Children ages 14-17 must be accompanied by an adult.



Never trap a dog for a child to pet.

Running, squealing children are a dangerous mix in the dog park!

Dogs must be spayed and neutered.



Don't bring your picnic into the dog park.



High value treats are not a good idea in a crowd of dogs.
*If you know your dog is likely to guard food, toys, or you,
he is probably not appropriate for the dog park.*

No chain collars, prong collars or shock collars in the park.



Remove any unnecessary harnesses or straps .

**Dogs can become tangled and panic.
They are next to impossible to separate
without serious human and dog injury.**



Be polite



- Scoop the poop – your dog's and anyone else's.
- See someone who needs a bag? Share!
- Toss all garbage – yours and anyone else's.
- No glass containers. No food.

**Feces and garbage may carry bacteria and parasites.
Keep the park clean!**

Our park has separate areas for large & small dogs

- Large dogs belong in the large dog area.
- Small dogs belong in the small dog area.
- Your small dog may love big dogs, but some large dogs may see your small dog as a squirrel or a squeaky toy.
- Collisions could result in injury.
- Small dogs in the large dog area could result in tragedy, even if your little dog generally likes to play with the big ones.



Most little dogs don't know they are small!

You planned to spend a fun day at the dog park, not the veterinary clinic!



It's all fun and games until someone ends up in a cone!



Pack wisely

- Bring extra poop bags, in case stations are empty.
- Bring a towel, in case park is muddy.
- Keep a first aid kit in your car.
- Bring your cell phone and the number of the nearest veterinarian/emergency clinic



On-leash greetings can be problematic – the tension on the leash prohibits the dogs from communicating well.



Wait until you are off leash inside the park to let them meet.

Before you go in, scan for safety.

- Watch and listen.
- Are these dogs your dog should play with?
- If you note a bully on the playground, wait, or come back another day.



Red flags

- **High tails are red flags.**
- **Stiff bodies, tense movements.** Arousal can turn into aggression.
- **Dogs hunched, slinking, crouching, hiding, running to the**
- **Hot pursuit.** Stalking in ambush. Ganging up on smaller, weaker dogs.
- **Vocalization** – angry barking or growling from dogs -or their owners.
- **Owners not stepping in when needed** – or absent. As well as owners constantly micromanaging when they don't need to.



**Wait until troublemakers leave.
Or come back another day!**

ENTERING THE PARK

A few dog park basics:

- Keep your dog on lead until safely inside the gated area.
- One dog family in the pass-thru at a time.
- Stay back from the gate until others have exited. Close the gates behind you!
- Wait to go in if there are dogs congregated at the gate.
- Move away from the gate and steer clear of heavily congregated areas – ***keep moving.***



Social Protocol

- The first few minutes is a period of introduction, arousal, attaining social equilibrium.

It is stressful.

- **The gate is a hot spot.**

Trouble is likely there.
Wait for the gate to clear, avoid walking straight into crowded, high traffic areas.



SUPER-vision: **Keep your dog in sight at all times.**

- Monitor his behavior. He may be “fine” but is the dog he is playing with having fun, too?
- Think of the park as a place to go for a walk. Don’t stand and chat; walk and visit.

Keep moving!

- **Pay attention to your dog**
- not your phone, your book, or texting your friends.



Canine Communication 101

Knowing what your dog and other dogs are saying can mean the difference between a great day at the dog park, and a bad one.



Canine Communication 101

“I’d like to play.”

Soft expression, relaxed jaws, play face. >



“I’d like to meet you.”

“I’d like you to leave me alone.”

< Look-away, lip lick, ears back, avoidance.

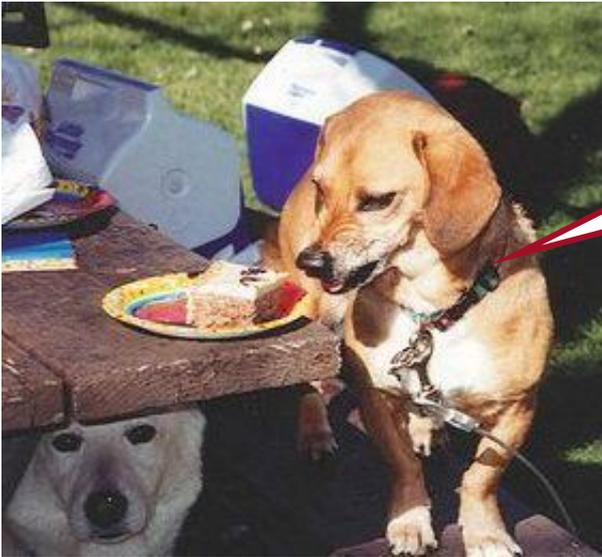


Uh-oh.

“You’re playing too rough.”



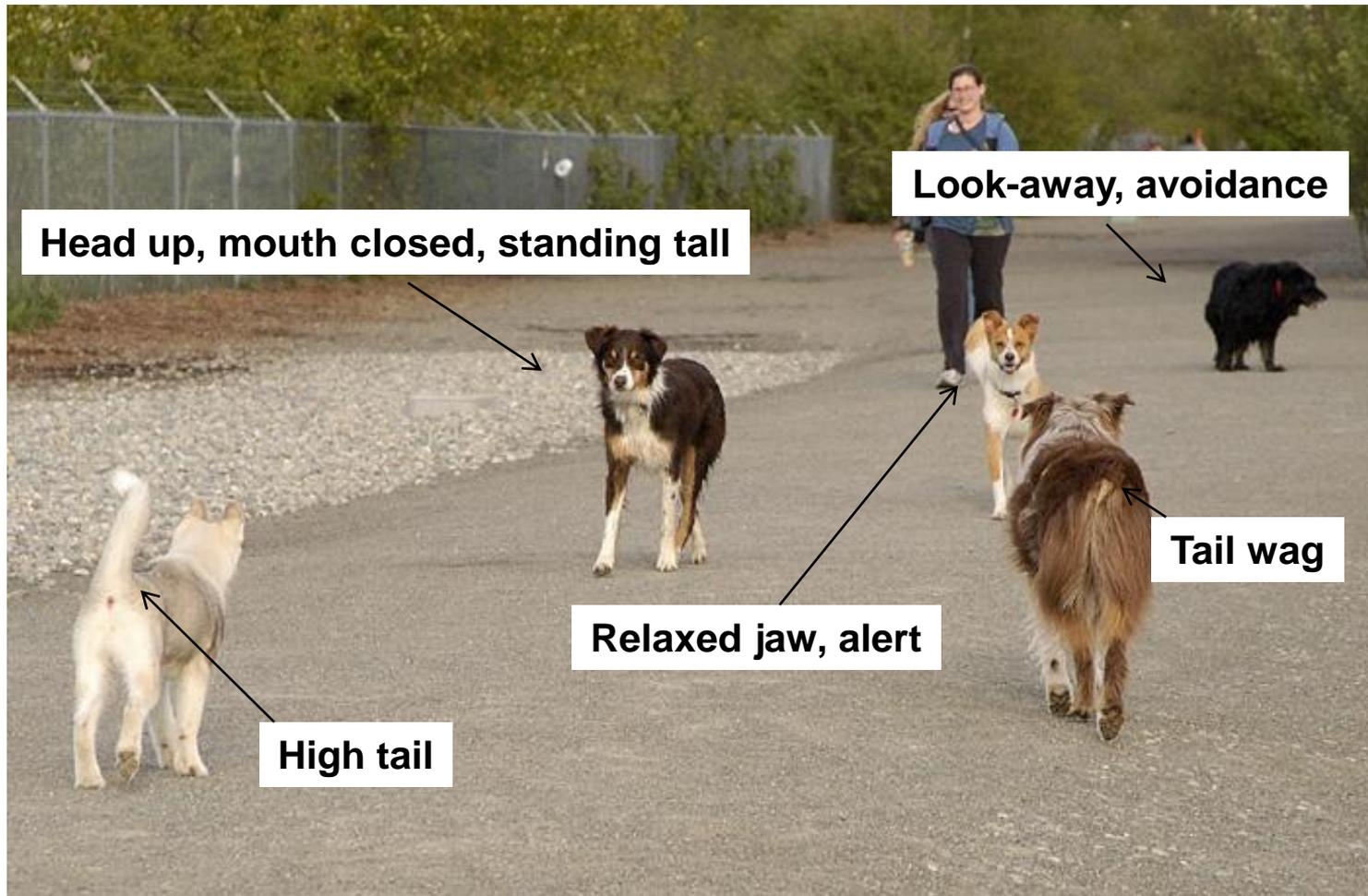
“You’re too close to my stuff.”



“You’re scaring me.”



Dogs begin to size each other up and communicate their intentions from a distance.



First greetings are generally brief & circular



- First name, last name (nose to tail).
- Often followed by shake off, and take off.
- The three-second rule is usually a good time frame. Then call your dog away, even if things are going well. Let them re-group and re-approach if they want to – or not!
- If either dog appears uncomfortable or too intense, call your dog and move away.

It's not rude, it's appropriate!

Sniff and be sniffed.

That's how dogs get to know each other.

< Notice the dog at left looks away and politely presents itself for smelling.



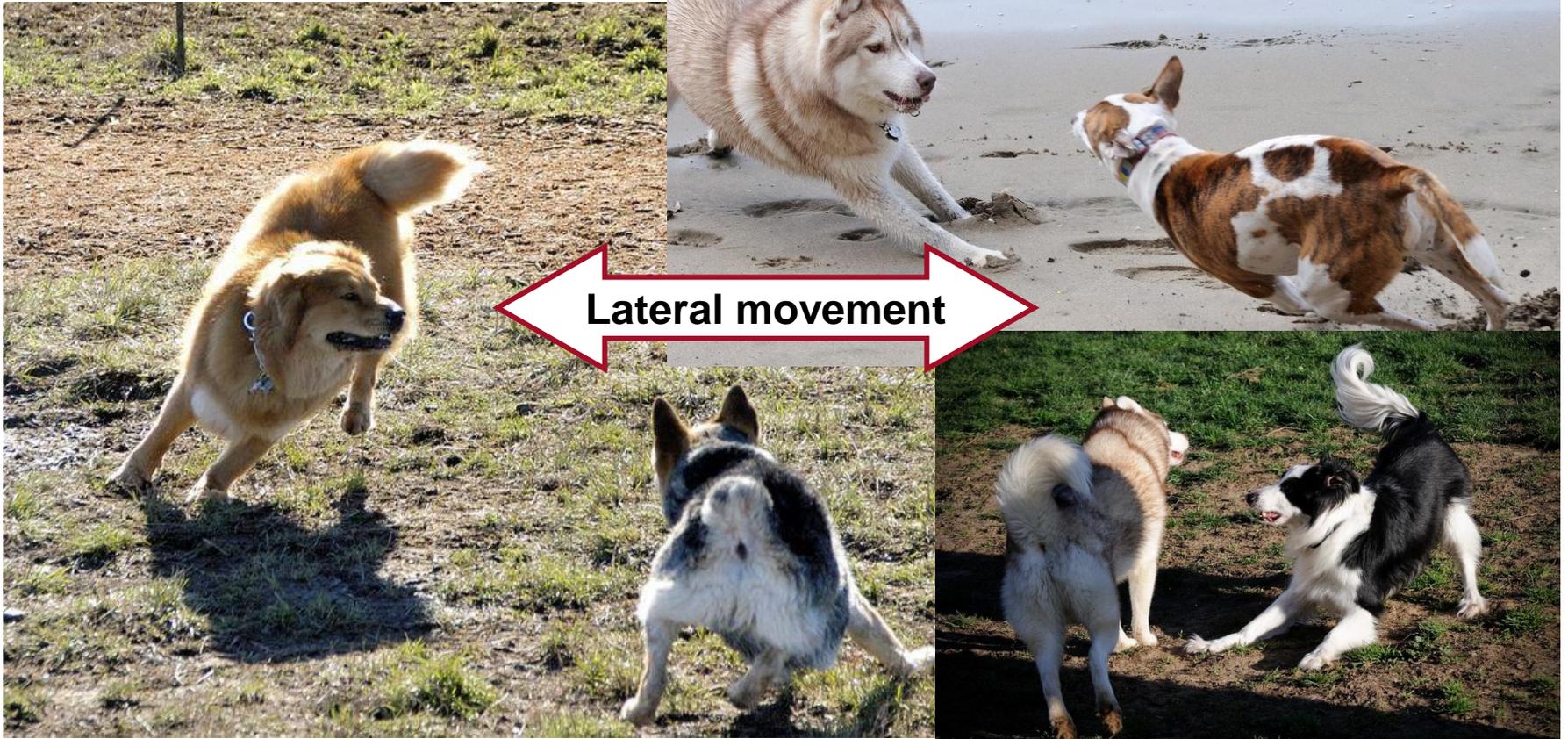
What's in your wallet?

Good signs – fair play

- Role reversal.
- Starts and stops.
- Play bows, loose bodies, lateral movement.
- Relaxed, horizontal, swishy tails.
- Self handicapping.
- Shows bite inhibition. No body grabs or gripping with jaws.

Play bows, loose bodies, lateral movement. Relaxed, horizontal tail, swishy wags.

Both dogs are having fun!



Self handicapping - adjusts for other dog's size, needs and play style.



Slows down and is careful when needed.

In healthy play, role reversal is frequent.

- Bekoff & Allen - 1998



Note curving posture of both dogs.

**In healthy play or social negotiation
submissive rolls are offered not forced.**

Pushed down and pinned is bullied, not submissive.

Even when it's going well, continue to monitor arousal levels closely!

Just like kids on a play ground, what starts out fun could end up in tears!



Cooperative play ^ side-by-side sharing.

^ Note: high tail and hair raised on spine of brown dog.

Red flag!

v Competitive exchange, arousal rising
Dogs face-off – “it’s mine!”



Hackles raised
eyebrows lowered

When in doubt, call him out!

Interrupt any “fun” at the expense of another dog’s comfort.

This is often a problem when dogs form a “pack” (often dogs from the same household) & gang up on a third dog.



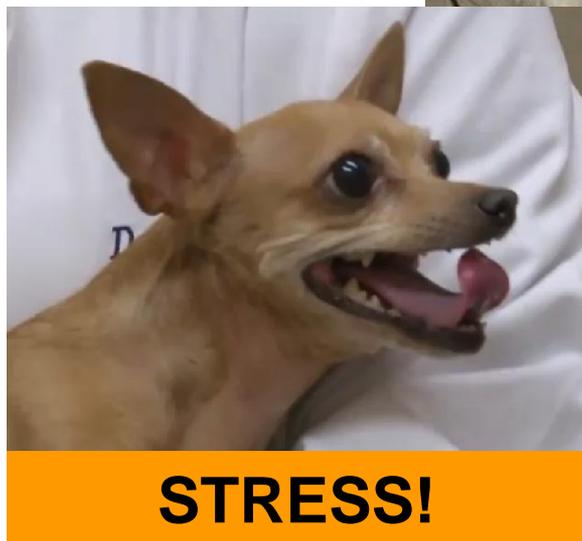
Calming Signals

Norwegian dog trainer and behaviorist Turid Rugaas coined the phrase “calming signals” to describe the social skills, sometimes referred to as body language, that dogs use to avoid conflict, invite play, and communicate a wide range of information to other dogs.



Licks lips, yawns, looks away, ears back

Stress panting



STRESS!

**Eyes large,
pupils dilated,
ears and lips back**



Yawning

A measure of
anxiousness,
indecision or
conflict.

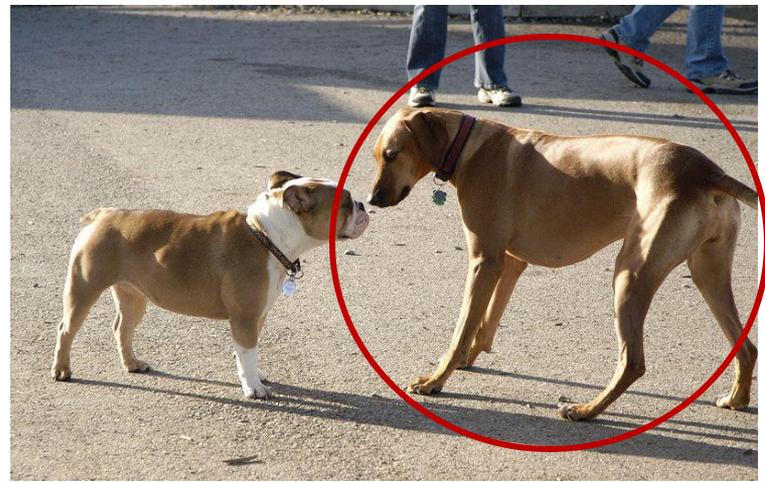


Sometimes a yawn is just a yawn.
Tired dogs yawn at the end of a long day.

But if the yawn is in response
to social pressure,
it's probably a calming signal.



I'm not comfortable, I need space.



^ Note: these dogs are asking their owners for support. v



An exaggerated look-away - sniffing.
"No time for you, I must have lost my wallet."



**Sometimes sniffing is just searching out a smell.
But when it is displayed in response to social behavior,
it's probably a calming signal.**



If your dog runs to you for assistance, help him out!

Move away to increase space and safety or step between your dog and the space invader to block his approach.

Don't trap your dog by grabbing his collar or hugging him into your legs.

A trapped dog cannot escape. If other dogs don't heed his request for space, his only option is to drive the invader away by snarling and snapping to create the space he needs.



Shaking off as if wet

- When there is arousal, excitement, conflict, or stress, you will often see a full body shake off as a dog leaves a stressful social interaction.
- Sometimes it appears when dogs seem to be “shifting gears” or changing strategy.



It could be an indication of the level of stress or conflict in a social situation.

Danger signs:

- High tail, tense muscles, standing tall.
- Stillness, mouth closed, direct stare.
- Strong focus, staring, stalking.
- Relentless pursuit, ganging up on small/shy dogs.
- Hall monitoring, social harassment.
- High arousal, intensity.
- “Fun” at the expense of another dog’s comfort.



Arousal

- excitement, anxiety, defense, fight or flight

“Increased heart rate and blood pressure and a condition of sensory alertness, mobility and readiness to respond.”

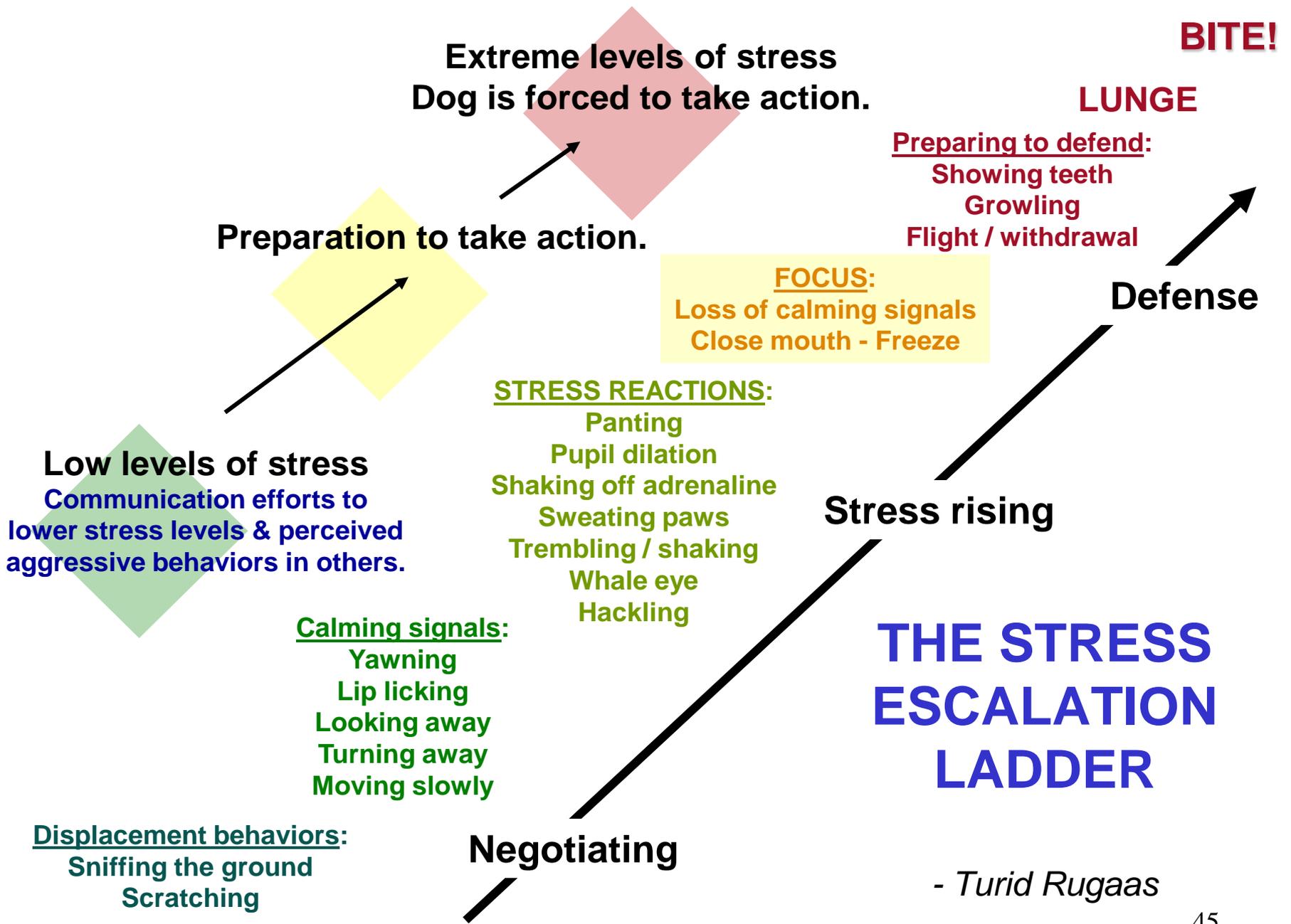


Tension

Height seeking

Conflict





Stiff, upright, tense, high tails

Tension, high arousal.



Friendly wags are broad, loose and horizontal.

Ears flip back, tail drops, shoulders hunch, back rounds, body lowers, head drops

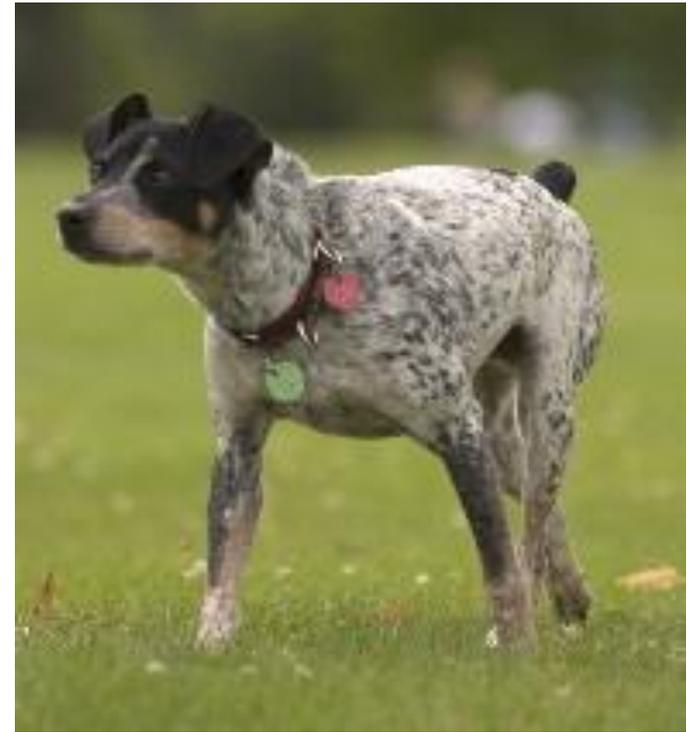




Trust your gut. If it feels dangerous, it probably is.



**Strong focus,
staring, stalking**





Vertical play

This level of sparring could easily turn into a fight.



What is a bully?

- One who targets the small and weak. One who singles out and picks on the young or shy dogs.
- A “Tarzan” on the play field, crashing around without paying attention to what others are communicating.
- The “fun police” who bosses all the others around.



Bully:

Arched neck, stiff front legs, direct assault.

Bullied:

Dropped head, low tail, looking for escape.

Time out!



Dogs use body blocking –

It could be a person or a thing that creates separation and safety.

^ Like a soccer goalie, this handler uses body blocking to give his pup a bit of relief from the invasive pup's advances.



Dogs use splitting – and so can you.



Casually insert yourself between dogs.

Don't step into a dog fight !! This is preventive to diffuse tension, not to split up a serious altercation.

Not sure if the dog being chased by your dog is enjoying the game? Test: Call your dog.

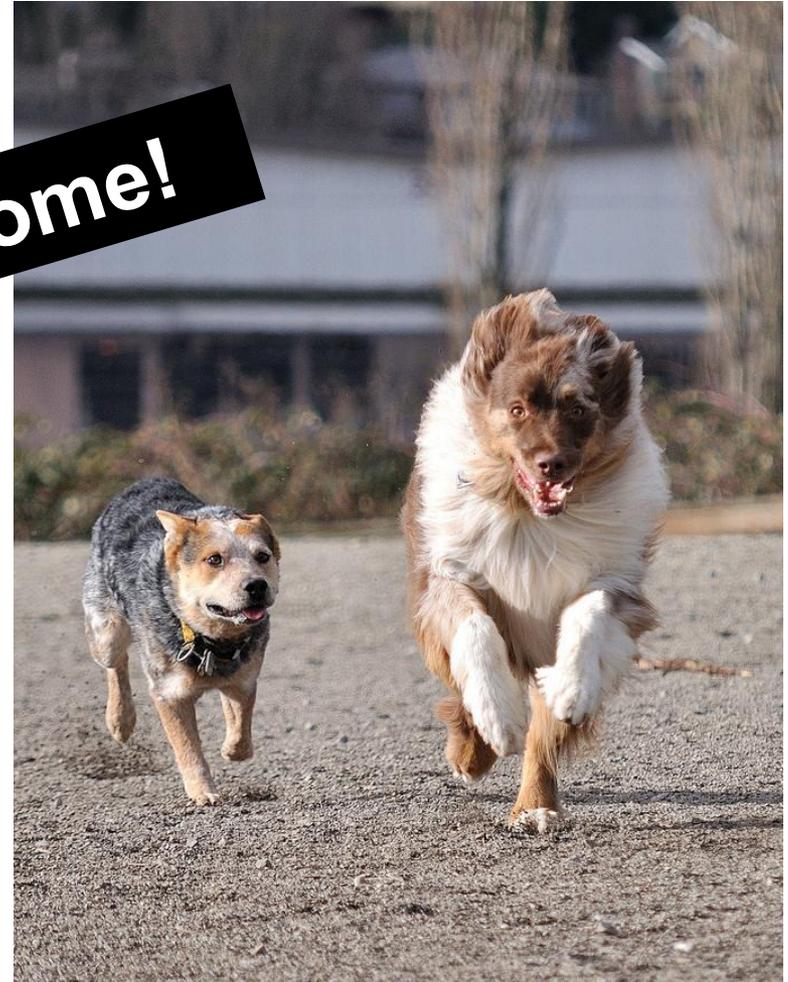


- If the other dog follows and continues to engage your dog, it was probably fine. You may allow play to continue.
- If the other dog looks relieved and dashes off to safety, you were right in separating them.

**A truly safe dog park dog
keeps track of its owner & comes when called**



Come!



Joyfully, the first time!

Ask other owners for help

HOW you ask is important - be calm and supportive.

Owners may become defensive regarding complaints about their dog.

“Could you call your dog, please?”

“It’s okay, my dog is friendly - he’s just playing.”

“I know, but my dog is a scaredy cat, he doesn’t know that – could you please call your dog? It would help me out. Thank you!”

If a fight breaks out

- **Remain calm.** Kicking and screaming will only make matters worse. Some times just the action of humans surrounding the fight will disperse it. Get their attention and move away.
- **Avoid grabbing collars.** Dogs reflexively bite anything that grabs them in the heat of a fight – even their owners.
- **Insert an object between the dogs.** Spray water, citronella extra towel, jacket.
- **The safest way to separate dogs is the “wheel barrow” technique.**

Get behind the dog and grab the hind legs. In one smooth move, lift upward and quickly swing the dog away from the fray. Don't lean over the dogs. Lean back and keep your face away from the action. Let centrifugal force propel the dog away. Let go quickly if the dog wheels around.

Remember, you are more likely to be injured than the dogs are.

At the end of the day, you and your dog should leave the park smiling.



Thank you!

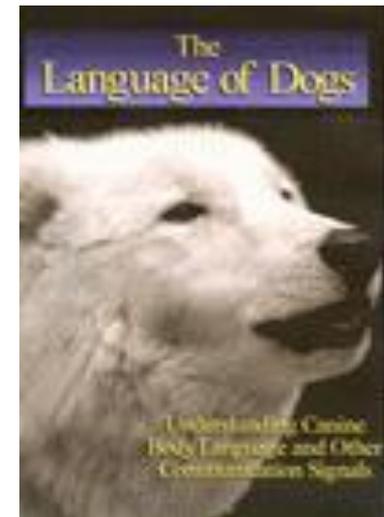
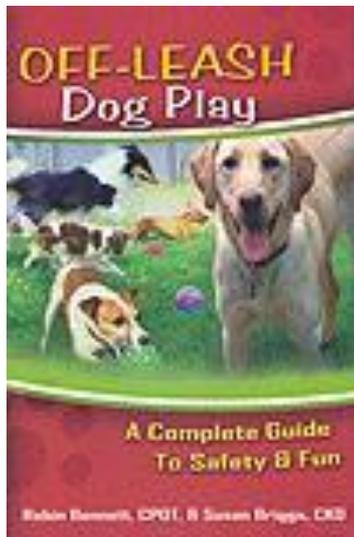
- For being a responsible and caring dog owner who wants to learn all you can to make coming to the park a **safe and fun** experience.
- For being a responsible citizen by understanding and agreeing to the rules of the dog park.
- For being willing to take your dog home when your dog is expressing dominance or fear at the park.
- For supporting the Doylestown Dog Park!



Recommended Books and DVDs

www.dogwise.com

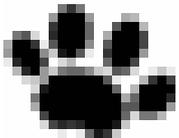
- Off-Leash Dog Play by Robin Bennett & Susan Briggs
- Visiting the Dog Park by Cheryl Smith
- *The Language of Dogs* DVD Set by Sarah Kalnajs



Useful Websites



- www.dogwise.com
- www.drSophiaYin.com
- <http://pets.webmd.com/dogs/guide/dog-park-behavior-know-risks-rewards>
- <http://www.thebark.com/content/behavior-dog-park-tips>



Thank You, Local Dog Trainers!

The following trainers assisted the Friends of the Doylestown Dog Park in creating the agenda for this orientation:

Melinda Berger, Dream Dogs, LLC

Susie Danzis, Training Tails

Diane Herstine, Bucks County SPCA

Linda Lelak, Pawsitive Paws

Deborah Lipartito, Trainer

Victoria Schade, Life on the Leash

Leigh Siegfried, Opportunity Barks



These trainers are also *volunteering* their time to teach the orientation classes. We play bow to them!

**Information for this presentation
was taken, with permission, from:**



**What is My Dog Saying at the Dog
Park? Dog Park Etiquette & Safety
by**

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