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GOLDEN RETRIEVER
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Training Tip

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Shy Dogs and Dog Parks

By Dennis Stauffer, *Kennel Manager*

With summer upon us and the increasing numbers of dog parks popping up, many people wonder if a trip to the dog park is the right thing to do. It's important to remember that not every dog is suited for this activity, especially dogs that are extremely shy or those that are puppy mill survivors. Watch your dog's body language: If he or she doesn't appear happy or relaxed interacting with a number of dogs, then a trip to the dog park is probably not for you and your dog. Just because your dog plays in the yard with one or two other dogs does not automatically mean that a trip to the dog park will be equally well received.

Because of the number of puppy mill breeder dogs that come into our program, and with the success of Project Home Life, we conduct Shy Dog Park outings at Golden Gateway. (If you happen to be the adopter of a puppy mill survivor, please contact Heather Hatt [heather@dvgr.org] for more information about Shy Dog Park.)

Whether or not you have a shy dog, there are certain etiquette rules you should follow at any dog park:

- **Be in charge:** Ensure your dog knows you're in charge and that you're the alpha. Train your dog to come when called. Consider using a word or phrase that he's not likely to hear from others at the park for this.
- **Use caution when entering:** Well-designed parks use a double-gate entry to avoid an escape. Don't rush in; take your time with your dog still on leash to get accustomed to other dogs and the park. If there's a whirlwind of activity at the gate, it's best to wait.
- **Pay attention:** Keep your eye on your dog at all times. This is about your dog socializing more than you socializing with other humans.
- **Know canine behavior signals:** Look for relaxed ears, wagging tails, and play bowing. Ears pinned back and seeing the whites of eyes are signs of trouble. Growls can be

common in play, but curled lips and snarling are not. When you see these danger signals, it's time to re-direct your dog with a treat or leave.

- **React if a fight breaks out:** If dogs go at each other for more than a few seconds, separate them with a long stick or use a water pistol (or hose if there is one). Never step in with your hands or body. If the fight does not subside, each owner should approach their dog from the back, gently grab hind legs and lift them like you would a wheelbarrow and start moving back. Do not reach for the collar.
- **No puppies:** First, puppies that haven't had all their shots can be subjected to disease. The dog park is not the place to learn socialization. Dogs should be at least 6-months-old before going to the park.
- **Don't go:** If your dog isn't vaccinated, doesn't have flea/tick protection, or isn't spayed/neutered.