

Re: Dog size and dog park design

To whom it may concern:

Dog parks can provide areas for dogs to play hard and socialize, especially in an urban environment. But because they permit unfamiliar dogs to interact, they are not without peril. I am familiar with two situations in our area in which dogs have been killed in a dog park. In one case, a Golden Retriever was killed by a large, very dog-aggressive dog that should not have been taken to the park. In the other, a young dog of about 12 pounds body weight was killed by a larger dog. To reduce the possibility of a serious injury, it is my opinion that dog parks should have separate areas for large and small dogs.

While it would theoretically be possible to have one area for large dogs and another area for calm, safe dogs of any size, the problem lies in who decides that a 70 pound dog will be safe with a small dog. Unless there is an independent evaluator stationed at the park to evaluate the behavior and temperament of the larger dog, then the decision falls mainly with the owner of the large dog. Some owners are very astute in assessing their dogs' behavior and safety around unfamiliar dogs, others are not. This may be because either they lack skills or experience in evaluating behavior, or because the pet has not been observed around a sufficient number of small dogs exhibiting a variety of behaviors to really know the dog's behavioral tendencies.

Although it can be beneficial to have friendly dogs of all sizes socialize, this can be a potentially dangerous situation in the real world, especially when you mix unfamiliar dogs in an unfamiliar environment. I personally would not take a small dog into an open play situation with unfamiliar dogs that could be nine to ten times his size. Even with dogs of apparent friendly, non-reactive temperaments, there is always the possibility that a bite could occur. If the biter is 80 pounds and the victim is 10 pounds, the results could be dire.

A third solution that could be considered would be to have three areas: 1) Large active dogs, 2) Small dogs, 3) Large calm dogs (that would be overwhelmed by active dogs in the Large dog area).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne Hunthausen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wayne Hunthausen, DVM  
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