



EVALUATION GUIDE

Dog Park Evaluation Guide

A toolkit to help you evaluate public and private dog parks and make more informed decisions about where your **silly goose** plays off-leash.





BEFORE YOU UNLEASH

Dog parks can be one of the best parts of your dog's week. The zoomies, the sniff circuits, the full-body-wiggle greeting with their favorite park friend. **For a lot of dogs, off-leash play is where they come alive.**

But not every park is the same, and not every visit goes smoothly. Public parks and private membership parks each come with their own set of considerations. This guide covers both. Whether you're scoping out a new neighborhood park or considering a membership somewhere, the questions here will help you think through what to look for, what to ask, and how to set your silly goose up for the safest, happiest time off-leash.



PUBLIC & PRIVATE DOG PARKS CONSIDERATIONS

Public Dog Parks	Private/Membership Dog Parks
Free or low-cost, open to all	Paid membership or day pass
Minimal or no entry requirements	May require vaccination proof, temperament screening
Typically unstaffed; dog owner self-regulation	Often staffed with attendants monitoring play
Variable maintenance	Typically better maintained
No control over capacity or who enters	Capacity limits and controlled access



Remember: neither is automatically better. A well-managed public park can be great. A poorly run private park can have real risks too. The questions below apply to both.



IS YOUR DOG READY FOR A DOG PARK?

It's okay if the answer is "not yet" or "not ever"! Many dog owners choose not to visit dog parks. Group training classes, structured playdates, or calm walks with a buddy can be great alternatives. Remember, like humans, some dogs aren't social butterflies and may prefer to just hangout in their backyard.

Is your dog up-to-date on all vaccinations?

Be sure to talk with your vet about bordetella, leptospirosis, and canine influenza, in addition to core vaccines, flea, tick, and heartworm preventatives.

Is your dog old enough?

Puppies under 4 months who haven't completed their vaccination series should not visit dog parks.

Does your dog have reliable recall in distracting environments?

Is your dog comfortable around unfamiliar dogs and people?

Does your dog resource guard toys, treats, or water?

Is your dog showing any signs of illness?



EVALUATING THE DOG PARK

First and foremost: scout it first. We highly recommend going to the dog park, speaking with staff and getting a full tour of the facility before bringing your dog.

Is the park fully fenced with secure gates?

Check for gaps at the bottom of the fence and along gate edges. Additionally, double-gates at any entry point are critical safety features for escape prevention.

Are there separate areas for small and large dogs?

What is the ground surface?

Concrete, asphalt and even artificial grass can get dangerously hot in Texas. If you can't hold your hand on the surface for 5 seconds, it's too hot for paws!

Is there shade and fresh water available?

Is the park clean? Are waste stations stocked?

Are there visible hazards? Broken fencing, standing water, toxic plants?

Are the other dog owners paying attention?



FOR PRIVATE OR MEMBERSHIP-BASED PARKS

What are the entry requirements?

Each dog park will have their own vaccination, spay/neuter and temperament screening requirements, so it's important to be prepared before your first visit.

Is there staff on-site actively monitoring play? Does the staff know how to safely break up a dog fight?

Is there a capacity limit, and is it enforced?

What is their policy for handling aggressive behavior or repeated incidents?

Do they carry liability insurance?

What happens if a dog is injured on the premises?

What are the communication protocols to clients when there are safety or emergency incidents?



WHILE YOU ARE THERE

Stay off your phone. You are your dog's first line of defense.

Watch your dog's body language. Are they relaxed and engaged, or tense and avoidant?

Watch the other dogs too. If the energy feels chaotic or owners aren't paying attention, it's okay to leave.

Keep a leash in your hand at all times, even at an off-leash park.

Be cautious with treats and toys. These can trigger resource guarding in other dogs.

Don't stay too long. Tired and overstimulated dogs are more likely to get into trouble.

Know when to leave. If your dog is hiding, clinging to you, or standing by the gate, they're done. Respect it.

Pick up after your dog. Every time.

A nationwide study found intestinal parasites at 85% of dog parks sampled. Prompt waste removal is one of the most effective things any owner can do.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

*Asking questions is an act of love. This guide exists to help you ask the ones that matter most for the care of your **silly goose**.*

ABOUT ROLAND'S SILLY GOOSE CREW

Roland's Silly Goose Crew is an Austin, Texas 501c3 nonprofit founded after our dog Roland was killed at a local dog daycare in October 2022. He escaped through an unsecured door and was hit by a car. There were no consequences, no required reporting, and no required proactive disclosures to other families.

We started RSGC so no other family would face what we did without information, resources, or recourse. Through free evaluation guides, community partnerships, and legislative advocacy, we're working to bring transparency and accountability to the dog care industry.

Support Our Mission

Every guide we create and distribute is free. Your tax-deductible donation helps us reach more families, develop new resources, and advocate for stronger protections for dogs in Texas.

rolandsillygoosecrew.org/donate



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SOURCES

akc.org • avma.org • DOGPARCS Study, Oklahoma State University/Idexx, Parasites & Vectors (2020) • aspca.org • vet.cornell.edu • sdhumane.org • vcahospitals.com • petsit.com • azhumane.org

