For many dog owners, a fenced-in, off-leash dog park can be the best thing in the world. There are definitely some great benefits to bringing your dog to a dog park.

**DOG PARK PROS:**
- They provide a safe environment for your dog to run and play freely.
- They are the perfect venue for socializing your dog - a place where he can learn how to get along with other dogs of all breeds, sizes, ages, and temperaments.
- They’re a sure-fire way to absolutely exhaust an energetic dog.
- They offer us the opportunity to socialize, make new friends, and get a bit of exercise ourselves.
- They are a source for building strong communities.
- They’re a place where you don’t have to worry about offending non-dog-lovers.

Of course, there are some negatives too...

**DOG PARK CONS:**
- If the park isn’t fenced-off, there’s a chance your dog could run-off and become lost or get hurt. These parks aren’t recommended.
- It can be a dangerous place at times: you may witness fights between dogs, or your dog may be preyed upon by more aggressive dogs.
- Your dog can pick up bad habits like fear, aggression, rough play, and he may begin to ignore his commands.
- Illnesses can be passed from dog to dog. If it’s a concentrated area, or not well kept, it’s also easier for the soil of the park to become contaminated.
MAKING THE EXPERIENCE BETTER FOR EVERYONE

A dog park is all about community. In order to make everyone's time at the dog park more rewarding, here are some guidelines to follow:

- Visit the park without your dog first to see if the park is right for you and your dog.
- Even if you're socializing, remain vigilant at all times. Don't take your eyes off your dog.
- Ensure that your dog is properly trained and at minimum, knows the "Come" command, when called.
- If you know your dog has aggressive tendencies, don't bring him to an off-leash park - there are plenty of other ways to exercise him. At the very least, muzzle him and avoid pronged collars.
- Consider a professional dog trainer if your dog becomes aggressive or has developed other bad habits at the dog park.
- Don't mix on-leash with off-leash dogs. Unleash your dog as soon as you get into the park. Dogs on leash can be aggressive to both off-leash and on-leash dogs. If you find you are in an on-leash/off-leash situation, it is common courtesy to keep your dog away, unless the other owner says it's okay.
- Don't let your dog wander off - accompany him at all times.
- Puppies under the age of six months that haven't been immunized or socialized should not be at the dog park.
- If you are ever unsure of an encounter with another dog, make sure to move your dog along while the experience is still positive.
- Avoid packs: they are an invitation for the harassment of one of the dogs in the pack. In fact, if you see pack behavior brewing, alert the owners of the dogs involved immediately.
- Don't bring young children into the park. Many dogs are not socialized around children and your child could get hurt.
- It's a good idea not to bring toys, but if you must, bring extra toys and be sure to return "stolen" toys.
- Don't bring treats to the dog park - it will invite possessive/aggressive behavior, and unwanted pawing and sniffing.
- Bring plenty of doggie bags and remove all feces so that your dog does not contribute to the contamination of the soil.
- If your female dog is in heat, don't bring her to the dog park. She'll be preyed upon and may cause aggressive behavior in other dogs.
- Keep a watchful eye on un-neutered male dogs and make sure they aren't harassing other dogs.
- Discourage digging and fill any holes that are created.
- Band together with fellow dog owners and set up an informal committee to care for and maintain the off-leash park.
- If a grassy section of the park has been cordoned-off, respect this, as these areas must be temporarily "rested" for proper rejuvenation.
- Listen to your gut. If something feels wrong, put your dog on his leash and leave quickly.