

## MODIFYING DOG AGGRESSION



Q. I just recently adopted a dog that is not good with other dogs. He will lunge and bark when he sees them and I am not sure if he wants to play or hurt them. People have been telling me to take him to the off-leash park to socialize him, what do you think of that?

A. This is common advice from well meaning friends but unfortunately it is not great advice. When rehabilitating an aggressive dog the best course of action is to always speak with a professional trainer or behaviourist with extensive experience with dog aggression and behaviour.

Using the wrong techniques such as bringing an aggressive dog to the off-leash park will likely not help your dog learn to be friendly but can actually increase aggression. It gives him an opportunity to practice his aggression which makes it a more ingrained behaviour and harder to modify.

Of course there is the important point that it is not fair to the other dogs at the off-leash park to be used as test subjects. Some dogs are sensitive and may have longstanding effects, or learn to also become reactive as the result of an attack. Not to mention the danger of injury. The off-leash park is a place for well socialized and friendly dogs to get together and exercise and play.

In my experience, 85% of aggression cases are based on fear. Bringing a dog into the park and surrounding him with what makes

him afraid and then trying to correct him for acting out may only worsen his fear, suppress his feelings and he may redirect his aggression towards you to make the punishment stop.

To change aggressive behaviour we create a new positive emotional response to seeing another dog by starting at a distance where the dog is comfortable and slowly decreasing that distance as we find success. With hard work it is possible to change his behaviour!