

## STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

## IN THE DOG PARK

### Does this sound familiar?

*“Every night after the dinner hour we routinely take our TM to the local dog park. Typically a great get-together as the same bunch of dogs and owners are always there. This one harassing Spaniel mix seems intent on bullying our dog but our big guy has been wonderful in ignoring him. All-in-all, our TM has made a lot of canine pals and seems to enjoy his socializing time. Last week everything was going great until this German Shepherd suddenly got an attitude and snapped at our TM. Our TM went crazy and went after the Shepherd full tilt. It was ugly! We were finally able to pull the dogs apart but I’m sure that our TM meant to kill him. We’re still taking him to the park but he seems to be a different dog there now. We definitely don’t let him play with the Shepherd. Any advice?”*



### This Breeder’s Opinion

It is this breeder’s opinion that a dog park is not the correct setting to socialize a Tibetan Mastiff. Those that would disagree argue the case that dog parks are ideal playgrounds. Within the confines of a giant fenced dog yard, puppies and dogs are released to intermingle and interact without the hindrance of leashes. And it’s true that some baby puppy TMs do enjoy all those rough and tumble play dates. They get much needed exercise and come home exhausted and content. Sounds great! Unfortunately TM puppies do not remain puppies and all dogs do not necessarily get along.

**Thaddeus Munch**  
Here’s a tip!

***“Tibetan Mastiffs have a natural inclination for guardian and territorial behavior. It is an owner’s responsibility to present controlled situations so that a young TM will gain confidence.”***

### All dogs do not always get along.

Most of us consider ourselves to be reasonable human beings who value peace, harmony and playing fair in the world’s sandbox. We generally just want everyone to “get along.” It seems that many owners have difficulty coming to terms with the fact that dogs are not children and that dogs can not be reasoned with or taught to value tranquility. Dogs do not view situations with logic but depend on the rules of pack mentality to dictate how they respond to situations. In the canine world one insecure or fearful dog catching the eye of another dog can mean a simple growl evolves into the equivalent of a bench-clearing hockey brawl. As a result, an owner may feel mortified at the behavior of his “well-trained” dog. He may find himself labeled as the guy with that “nasty beast.” It’s automatic that we want to place blame on one dog for starting it all and make concessions for the second dog that is only protecting himself. In reality, however, two dogs settling any question of hierarchy with a fight is acceptable dog behavior. Pack animals worry about such things as posturing, dominance and territory and they instinctively need to sort it out.

### Natural Inclination of the Tibetan Mastiff

What is accepted is that most TMs have a natural inclination for guardian and territorial behaviour. Depending on various influences in your TM’s life, those inclinations may be present at a very young age or your puppy may not feel the need to show off that part of his personality until he is challenged. An experienced breeder may guesstimate based on the level of gaudiness of parents or give a general time line of somewhere between the 7-24 month mark of a puppy’s life but it is really anyone’s guess when that moment will arrive. Whatever the age, there isn’t any reason to experience that point in time with an unleashed uncontrollable TM in the middle of a dog park.

So let's get back to the problems in the dog park. As a dog owner I definitely see more than one. Although the little Spaniel mix did not ultimately provoke a fight and was not involved in the altercation, there was most assuredly a red alert flag early on. The dog that typically feels the need to harass, bully or attack usually does so out of a sense of fear and insecurity. Confident dogs generally don't feel the need to overstate their case. While a TM owner may feel that it is "unfair" that his dog must "suffer" because another owner can't or won't control his dog, it is far better to keep everyone safe by removing your dog from the park.

Interestingly, as is often the case, the TM is not the one to attack first. For a long time now your dog has shown that he's a happy active dog with a pretty balanced character but it would not be typical for a TM to back down when challenged and pushed too far. It is generally agreed that a sound TM will only use as much force as is necessary to handle a situation but individual character, hormones, age and any previously unchecked aggressive behaviour may all contribute to a young dog reacting/over-reacting to harassment or a full-scale attack.

### Encouraging Behavioural Failures

An owner is setting his Tibetan Mastiff up to fail if:

- ✗ he does not acknowledge that dogs are pack animals and do not think as people do.
- ✗ he does not understand that a dog fight is normal conflict-resolving behaviour for dogs.
- ✗ he is not aware that his number one priority must be to make daily decisions to protect his dog.
- ✗ he does not realize that it really doesn't matter which dog starts the fight. Whether a TM attacks or is attacked, he will depend on his guardian characteristics for his lifetime.

### Alternative Strategies That Encourage a Win-Win Situation

The obvious answer, therefore, is to avoid the no-leash dog park scenario in the first place. To help ensure that your TM is safe and finds himself in positive situations, here are some alternative socializing strategies to depend upon.

- ✓ Enroll your Tibetan Mastiff in puppy kindergarten or obedience classes that place emphasis on bonding with your puppy. Stimulate his mind and teach respect of his space and the space of other dogs.
- ✓ Plan fun outings to pet-friendly establishments where you have direct on-leash care and control of your dog.
- ✓ Make an at-home play date. Let your TM romp in the safe confines of your fenced yard with a dog or two from the neighbourhood. Puppies and young dogs will create their own opportunities for play.
- ✓ Partner with other dog owners for on-leash dog walks along trails and reserves. Take a walk along a boardwalk. Dogs can still be social but it is better for everyone if these times are controlled situations.
- ✓ The more time you spend with your dog and the more time you spend *connected with* your dog, the better you will understand your dog.