**Laura’s Library**

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Word count: 937

**1. The Magic of Agility Training**

by Laura Dayton

A dog may come upon an agility course and run a tunnel or even a hurdle or obstacle or two. If he has a friend and they get a case of the ‘zoomies’ they may even run through four or more! But in 30 years of agility I can say with confidence there is no way, no how a dog can run twelve or more obstacles without a human.

That’s why they call agility a Companion Sport.

Once you’ve run with your dog you discover this isn’t the only reason. Agility is more than just companionship. It takes a bond.

For your dog it represents freedom and fun. A make-believe romp over hills and rocks, through wooded forests and mountainous ravines, all in the company of the one they love. It’s more fun than peanut butter on a hamburger patty, but they can only enjoy it with you.

If you are not in the equation, the agility course is just a couple of obstacles. For your dog, it only becomes this fun, magical adventure when you take them through it. You are absolutely essential for your dog to love agility.

As for you, the agility course can represent a number of things. It can be a mental and physical challenge. For the competitor there are myriad rules to remember; for the fun runner there are twists and turns to maneuver and a time clock to beat. For dog owners there is the joy of giving your pet a game he loves and a sport that exhausts him—particularly for owners of herding breeds who have found that hours of walking never seem to wear out their tireless pets!

And that my friend is why since the 1970s, agility has remained the most popular dog sport!

**Have Fun or Go Home!**

There is a motto in agility: Have fun or go home! It is at the essence of the sport. Your dog will never compete to win a ribbon or prize money. A dog may run fast out of fear—but he runs out of control. A dog runs fastest when he’s happy.

Everyone has seen a dog with the case of the zoomies. I’ve seen them get this on my agility course and no human could run those dogs through the obstacles as fast as those dogs went! Split-second precision timing, through tunnels over hurdles and the A-frame and turning on a dime! Of course, in no particular order but they were fast as bullets!

We also know that dogs are highly empathetic and pick up on our moods. If we go out on the agility course with a bad attitude, our dog is going to know. A dog with a bad attitude is not a fast dog.

Happy dogs run fast. Therefore, if you don’t enjoy yourself your dog won’t enjoy the course and won’t run fast. You’ll be even more miserable, so thus the motto, either have fun or don’t come in the first place.

**The Happy Sport**

Everyone who loves the sport of agility has discovered the bond that grows between handler and dog. While to the observer’s eye the two may be separate on the field, there is never a second that dog is not taking instruction from its handler on precisely where to go and from what direction to approach the next object. Many people forget that a dog’s eyes are to the sides of their head giving their vision incredible width.

Further, the dog is being cued not verbally but by the entire body language of its handler.

A casual observer to an advanced agility run may not notice the handler close to the dog at all as it seemingly knows its way back and forth through the course at an amazing speed, but its every move is being guided. No two courses are ever the same in agility. No dog has ever walked the course prior to when it runs it.

**The Agility Bond**

This amazing coordination between handler and dog has its repercussions in a bond that goes beyond the course. From the first weeks of training eye contact usually increases between handler and dog. Many of my clients have reported back that their dog decides to sleep on their side of the bed after beginning agility training.

There are other more subtle signs. A little more cuddling. A little more leaning on the leg. Just a feeling that the dog is wanting to be closer. Or maybe are they trying to say “Thank you” for playing this new game with me?

Dogs love to perform. I used to say they were all little Michael Phelp’s. Now I say they are all like Simone Biles. They have the DNA of Olympic champions, and they love to show it off. When a new dog first drops a pole on a hurdle, I always tell the handler, “Your dog just learned where its back legs are. They may do this again, or maybe a third time, but I guarantee you they will never do it a fourth time. Dogs don’t like to fail.”

I’ve never been wrong.

If you give your pup a chance to fly on the agility course, you’ll find these Angels with Paws really do have wings. They will return your patience with performance and a bond that cannot be gained from other companion sports.

Agility suits some breeds more than others. The herding breeds and mixes excel whereas extremely large breeds cannot even compete due to their size. Many herding breeds single-track their rear legs to better negotiate narrow cliffsides in their native highlands giving them an advantage on the 12-inch-wide boards on the Boardwalk and Teeter. But any dog with energy and a love to run and jump will enjoy the sport of agility. Just keep it fun.

Word Count: 872

**2. Why It Hurts So Much to Lose a Dog**

by Laura Dayton

Calling a dog "man's best friend" hardly seems to cover the relationship between dogs and people. They are loyal, kind and offer nearly unconditional love, endless joy and enthusiasm, and occasionally too much affection. They are always happy to see you, never tire of your presence and never mind if you make a fool of yourself. They are some of the greatest creatures on this planet, truly wonderful companions who feel like members of the family, and the only animals that specifically evolved to be friends with humans.

It seems pretty clear that they love us back. Every pet owner has personal anecdotes, and the internet offers plenty of videos of dogs sharing good times with their owners. As author Kinky Friedman said, "Money can buy you a fine dog, but only love can make him wag his tail."

There's plenty of science to back it up, too. First identified by psychologist Sigmund Freud, in the company of dogs’ people experience a certain sense of calm and openness. Scientific researchers have found that blood pressure in humans goes down in the company of dogs. More recently is was discovered that humans release the pheromone called Oxytocin when petting a canine.

This chemical has been called the "love" hormone because it is released when women give birth to increase the bonding process. And no, contrary to old wives tales, having a lot of dogs will not prevent a husband from 'playing the field.'

Just looking at dogs can make some people smile. It's no wonder dog owners miss them so much when they're gone. As many of us know, unfortunately, humans tend to outlive dogs, so as *A Dog's Purpose* author, W. Bruce Cameron, wrote, "When you adopt a dog, you have a lot of very good days and one very bad day." When a beloved pup passes away, the loss can feel unbearable. In fact, sometimes that loss can feel as bad—or even worse—than the loss of a human friend or relative.

That's not just anecdotal, either: Research has confirmed that for most people, the loss of a dog is comparable to the loss of a human loved one, in almost every way. According to **Scientific American,** "symptoms of acute grief after the loss of a pet can last from one to two months, with symptoms of grief persisting up to a full year (on average)."

Why do humans feel such a deep loss for their pups? Because dogs are so much more than pets. The loss of a dog is so painful because people are losing a little life that we were responsible for as well as a source of unconditional love and companionship. There's a reason that most emotional support animals are dogs. Research has shown that dogs help people get out of their homes, serve as catalysts for trust and social interaction. They serve as a "social lubricant” which promotes interaction and conversation between strangers.

Losing a dog means losing that motivation to leave the house for a walk in the park, losing the reason to chat with a stranger on a street and losing that easy conversation starter, too. Also, losing a dog usually means losing someone who totally gets you. Or gets you enough that they don't mind whatever it is you're doing and can comfort you when you need it. Research shows that dogs learn to interpret human emotional states from their facial expression alone and there is evidence to believe they can literally smell emotional changes within our bodies.

Scientific studies also indicate that dogs can understand human intentions and try to help their owners to avoid people who may have bad intentions toward them. Basically, when you lose your dog, you lose your back up.

While losing a pet is painful and overwhelming, it can also be a very lonely process as many people don't understand the feeling of loss and don't recognize that the grieving process for a pet can be as long as that for a human. Because of that, the community support typically associated with death is absent when a pet dies. Typically, friends aren't dropping off hot dishes or sending bereavement cards. To make matters worse, grieving owners may feel embarrassed over the extent of their own heartbreak and feel ashamed to reach out to friends for comfort.

If you have lost a pet, take time to grieve. Reach out to your other pet-owner friends for a sympathetic ear. Find a support group locally or check out these websites: the Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement and the Pet Loss Grief Support website.

If a friend has lost a pet, take the loss seriously. Consider sending a sympathy card or bringing them some food as you would for someone who has lost a human friend or family member—even if you don't fully understand their grief. This is about your friend's loss, not your feelings about pets. While there's no easy way to help alleviate someone else's grief, at least make every effort not to make things worse by telling someone it was "only a dog."

As any pet owner will tell you, there's no such thing.

Word count:987

**3. Your Dog Isn’t Just Making You Feel Good;**

**He’s Making You Healthier**

by Laura Dayton

It’s hard not smile and get a good feeling while watching the tumbling antics of a three-year-old playing with a furry, clumsy six-month old puppy. You wouldn’t think that the companionship of a golden retriever would have the same kind of happy (and lifesaving) effects for a 70-year-old grandpa, but it does. Science has proven that dogs aren’t just man (and woman’s) best friends, they’re also life-extenders.

Just looking in a dog’s eyes, or stroking his coat can cause a human body to increase its production of a hormone called oxytocin, which lowers blood pressure and creates a calming feeling of wellness. This “magic effect” only occurs between a human and a dog (plus one marine mammal), but not with a horse, a goat, a bear, a deer or any other mammal. Just a dog.

This wonderful hormone is often called the “love hormone”. When women give birth their bodies produce oxytocin in large quantities because it increases the bonding of the mother to her newborns. Some women buy their husbands dogs believing the myth that this will keep them from straying or cheating on them, but no scientific proof there. I can say it draws the attention and focus of your pup.

I use a dog’s natural pharmacy at the start of all my training sessions. When training I always use treats, but very small ones so your pup can eat it in a second and immediately go back to work. They may be small, but I always use high value: beef, chicken, turkey, freeze dried liver, freeze dried hearts, Wild Wienies, almost any training treat by Stella and Chewy. If the treats are large, break them, or cut them ahead of time so they are tiny. You might save a couple full size for what I call “Bonanza” treats, when your dog finally masters a particular trick or command. Always reward with voice and physical petting.

As far as treat bags, I use the cheapest aprons from Home Depot in the paint department. Two open pockets, easy access, and washable. If you want to buy a fancy one, make certain you can access the treats fast, dogs and puppies in particular need to be rewarded as soon as they’ve performed the task or they will not relate their performance to the treat. Get used to holding a treat with your thumb in the palm of your hand; as soon as your dog executes a command you treat. Holding the treat this way you should still be able to give hand signals.

**Use Your Dog’s Inner Pharmacy**

Just as pre-schools and most good Junior and High schools have kids cue up outside the door before class, you want your pup to show you some respect and his full attention when you are about to train him. Take out a small bit of treat and either run it past his nose or let him eat it so he knows what’s in store. He should be either sitting or standing in place, eyes focused on that treat you have in your hand. Gently say his name, and use the word Stay, even if he doesn’t know what that means yet, then say Looky-Looky, or Go Eye-to-Eye, or Focus Fido (Dog’s Name) Focus or whatever short command you want, then take the treat to his eye and then to yours. Don’t wear dark glasses. Repeat until you catch him looking directly in your eyes for at least three seconds, five to nine seconds is great, then reward him. This is not a staring contest, it just takes a few seconds to trigger a response in both your bodies to release a little oxytocin, which will calm him down and focus his attention on you. If he’s a puppy, you might use this little trick again before the training session is over.

Puppies in general have a learning attention span of 7 ½ minutes, after that they may be performing because you’re pulling them along on the leash, or they want more treats. Their minds, however, have reached their limit for learning and your dog will start losing focus. Some dogs, like Border Collies, consistently defy this rule of thumb, but when your dog starts looking around, he needs a break. Fifteen minutes will usually do, if you throw a ball or you’re in a class where he can play with other dogs. If not, he may need a longer break. Begin each session with Looky-Looky.

At home practice Looky-Looky and also teach your dog to enjoy lying next to you and just being petted. The same with other family members. Their touch can also stimulate the health benefits of oxytocin, as well as dopamine, and if your dog learns to enjoy sliding up to people in chairs and being petted, or little dogs who like to sit in laps, then look into Therapy Dogs in your area to learn how your dog can be trained to go into hospitals and care homes and provide this service to those incarcerated by age or disease. It’s a very rewarding experience.

We have known for years that dogs have a positive effect on humans. Therapy dogs have been visiting hospitals and rest homes for decades to cheer up people and put smiles on their faces. It’s only been recently that researchers came across the scientific reason these four-footed fur-babies had such a calming effect on humans that blood pressure actually lowered during and after their visits. It wasn’t just the dog’s cuteness and soulful eyes, it was an actual chemical, much like the endorphins long distance runner’s produce. This chemical is oxytocin, appropriately referred to as the “love hormone” in scientific circles. Just take a look at your own love-bug and you’ll realize he/she couldn’t be responsible for being a catalyst to manifesting anything less wonderous in their humans. No wonder they’ve earned and always kept the title of our Best Friend.

Word count 764

**4. Why I Love the AKC**

**(And it Isn’t Just About Show Dogs!)**

by Laura Dayton

You just purchased off the internet a Papillon delivered by USPS for quite some money, and she arrived just fine several weeks ago in California from North Carolina. She is precious and has had her 3-month shots and third parvo and even her first puppy class at 10 months you call up for her first groomer’s appointment and Mimi and Mimi’s Pups and Cut’s answers the phone.

“Sure, we’d love to book Winnie’s first appointment for a wash, I bet she’s so cute,” coos Mimi on the phone.

“Oh you know she is,” says Tammy, everything we wished for. She’s our first purebred and we couldn’t be happier.

“So do you have her chip number” Mimi asks?

“Her what?”

“She should have come with an AKC chip number, it should be in her paperwork.”

Tammy takes a look through some paperwork and doesn’t see anything saying AKC. “I don’t see anything that says AKC, I see NKC? What’s that?”

“I think you you’ve been had lady.” Mimi said.

Thank goodness, not completely. The National Kennel Club sells pedigreed dogs and keeps excellent records that can be submitted to the AKC for acceptance and only nominal filing fees. There is nothing illegal about another group offering services as a Kennel club, except for the fact that the American Kennel Club’s nearly 200-year head start has established them as the one and only Kennel club and breed standard organization the world will likely ever need.

**It's A Name Game**

The AKC, American Kennel Club, is top dog when it comes to issuing a pedigree. With its roots in the early 1800s the association garnered worldwide recognition in 1877 with the first Westminster Dog Show. That tradition has carried over and today’s AKC still hosts this distinguished show, amongst 1,000s of others, and also recognizes more than 200 breeds today.

To become a breed under the auspices of the AKC a canine must present many generations of stock that have passed rigorous physical, attitude and genetic testing to produce a “breed standard.” The breed might not be perfect; in fact, many purebreds have inherent dispositions toward certain diseases and behavioral quirks. Yet when you purchase an AKC Breeder Bred pup, you pretty much know what you’re going to get.

**AKC Certifications and Competitions**

As a kid I fell in love with ***The Shaggy Dog*** in the Disney film of the same name. I’d always dreamed of owning a dog like that and when I finally had the time and means to do so, a friend of mine suggested I consider the Bearded Collie instead of the Old English Sheepdog. I had never heard of the breed, but I googled it, took one look, and said to myself, “If I could wake up to that silly face I will be the happiest woman for the rest of my life!”

That statement has proven itself to be true! I purchased my first Bearded Collie in 1989 and am now on my fourth. Each of them has been my best dog ever. I love the breed, but they are a handful.

One by one they introduced me to the sports of agility, herding and the show ring, and by dog three I had championed in all three. Almost all my competitions have been AKC but I have also competed in other sanctioned agility events. As a bonafide diehard agility enthusiast I’ll run any course, any place, in any weather!

The number one rule of AKC Competition is the safety of the dog comes first. That’s one of the reasons I prefer its competitions. In addition to sporting activities the AKC has obedience and behavior certifications you can earn. As we become a more dog-friendly society these certifications are becoming the gold-standard. AKC Canine Good Citizenship certifications may allow you to board dogs over the weight limits at motels, hotels and BnB’s, receive the same privileges as service dogs at restaurants and be admitted to other venues.

**Any Dog Can Be an AKC Dog**

Any dog can now become an AKC dog, they no longer have to be pedigree dogs. However, only pedigree dogs can compete in the show ring which is called conformation, and from which other pedigree dogs are bred. Conformations dogs must be in tack (not spayed or neutered.)

You can register mixed breed dogs that you know their lineage, including the popular “Doodle” breeds. Many Doodles come from responsible breeders that are working to establish these wonderful breeds for inclusion as recognized AKC breeds. It takes many years and generations to establish a clear breed standard in every aspect from appearance, behavior, intelligence, physiology and other genetic factors.

Even if you have no idea what breeds make up your fur baby you can still register it with the AKC. You don’t need a DNA test, but sometimes these tests are interesting to learn more about your dog’s individual quirks. Most veterinarians offer DNA testing at affordable prices.

For more information about AKC registration or events in your area contact [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).

Word count: 887

**5. Are Dogs Getting Smarter?**

by Laura Dayton

Sometimes I wonder if we are just getting doggie dumber. Every pup I meet in class seems to be giving me more challenges at an earlier age. Where have they learned this stuff? Pups used to be so easy, now every little fur baby is a new challenge, but an enjoyable one!

Have they become smarter? The answer is simple Darwinian theory. We raise bright pups and breed the brightest and therefore over the years the brighter pups become more dominant in the population. It may not be true worldwide, but certainly in America we have bred a bright breed of pups. People ask me all the time, “My puppy is sniffing everything, he wants to go everywhere, I can’t get his attention to focus on anything! Is there something wrong with him?”

My answer is always the same. Do you want the puppy that is just walking along with you, hardly interested in anything until you tap his head and say, ‘Hey dude or dudette, look at mommy,’ and the pup finally looks up? Sure, that pup is easy to control but that puppy is not very bright.

At 2-4 months you want the puppy to be interested in everything! He’s the smart guy that is going to give you the most joy, and challenges those first few months--but just as with bright children, that pup is gonna keep you on your toes. You’ll just have to trust me on this, but you’ll reap the rewards with a wonderful companion for life and without the college bills!

Did you lose my answer in all that? Are dogs getting smarter? Heck yes!

**6 to 8 Weeks**

Your little guy can see, walk, hear, pee and poop, so now is the time to teach him or her some lessons. The crate should have been available, and the pup should know that is home, a place with things that smell of you, water, treats, and where you have never forced him to go, but where he can sleep in close quarters to you and always return warm and protected.

Now you want to bring him out of his crate and introduce him to some training. That is going to start with a bonding exercise. In time your pup will know you are his best friend; in the beginning we start this process with a little trick and treat.

**Science Magic: Oxytocin**

Only one land mammal can elicit in the human being a hormone called oxytocin--sometimes called the love hormone, but scientifically it is the same bonding hormone women secrete when having babies. I won’t hold you in suspense because you know what animal can do this for humans and it is of course the dog!

Science has now proven why people feel good around our canine friends. Humans actually experience a lowering of blood pressure when petting a canine companion, along with a raise of dopamine, one of the feel-good hormones, so the good that dogs bring humans isn’t only in the fun in the games they play, but in the companionship, they bring.

When you begin your training session with your new puppy use this little trick to put him in the mood to work for you. Another instinct dogs have been taught since they were first domesticated is to perform a job for their handler, this is particularly true of working and herding breeds. You will find your dog is waiting for his command, eager to perform it for the reward of a treat or a “good dog,” or a scratch behind the ear. With the exception of some miniature dogs, most dogs were bred to do a job for us, take great pride in doing so and receiving a nod of approval from you, or a treat, as a reward.

**Focus, Focus**

Just as a young toddler, your puppy loses his focus quickly. Keep training sessions to under ten minutes, then give him a break and some water. Don’t overtax him with more than two training session per day. When you resume get his focus again by taking a small bit of treat to their nose, then to their eye. Say “looky-looky”, “eye-to-eye” or “time-to-work” and make a quick 2-3 second eye-to-eye contact bringing the treat to your eye and saying, “good dog” and treat. Don’t make it a staring match, just a quick 2-4 second direct eye contact every time before you start your training.

Work with you dog until you see him losing interest: looking around, sniffing the ground and otherwise losing focus. Give him a release command. A clap of the hands and “That’ll do!” as they say in herding, or “Good boy,” “That’s enough!” And let him know the lesson is over for the day! Show him your hands are empty of treats and start walking away.

Once you begin your pup with the “looky-looky” eye contact you will have an animal who knows you mean business. Today’s dogs know when school starts and ends. Use these new tools no matter where you train your dog, even at home. It helps to focus your dog’s learning, just like children learn better in a classroom. The AKC and also You Tube offer 100s of free learning tools for obedience, tricks, agility, nose, work, Rally and other games that can all be enhanced by learning how to begin and end a training session for today’s smarter pups!

Word 1446

**6. Stop Dog Fights Before They Start**

by Laura Dayton

On your cross country trip you stop at a small-town watering hole towards the end of their local Pumpkin Throwing contest and grab a table in the corner to take in some local color. The place looks right out of the old west, with worn leather bar stools, an old mahogany bar and a dusty six-point stag head still hanging from the wall. Your waitress is coming your way when one of the guys from the bar starts getting loud and steps off his stool, and your waitress scoots back around the bar.

Next thing you know another guy stands up and walks toe-to-toe in the other dude’s face and the voices raise until the first guy shoves the other hot head back a foot or two. Suddenly the bartender rings an old bell from behind the bar and shouts “Mike and Nick, knock that crap off or get outta my bar now!” The two hot heads look at each other for a while, then one of ‘em knuckles the other on the shoulder, breaks into a grin and sits back down.

When the waitress returned, she said, “Don’t mind them, they’re brothers and been fighting since they were in diapers! So, what can I get ‘cha? We got half off beer and wine and appetizers!”

**Read the Language**

There was no question a fight was about to break out and we recognize all the signals in people. It starts with posturing, that flat-footed step from the stool and stare that said, “I’m challenging you!” Even if some hot head charged through the door with no warning, if he was running with his fists clenched, lips pursed and teeth showing with a red face you would know he was about to wallop someone. We recognize these signs of impending aggression in humans, but they are just as obvious in dogs, if we know what to watch for.

I have handled “in tact” -- that means with their testicles -- dogs in social situations for years and never had a serious incident. An incident, yes, but never serious. For those who don’t know, male dogs with their family jewels are prone to fight for no reason at all, but especially if a non-spayed female has been around in the last month and peed. They will fight over a ball, bone, food and sometimes affection given to another dog, even by a complete stranger!

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Red Lights and**  **What to Do** | **Dogs tail is low, no wag, withers may be up** | **Ears go back and flat, dog is crouching** | **Tail drops between legs** | **Growl or showing of teeth** |
| Talk in a cheerful voice, divert dog, be on guard |  |  |  |  |
| If attention is not shifting get ready to separate dogs |  |  |  |  |
| Separate dogs immediately |  |  |  |  |
| Separate! Shout, scream, spray water, pull by leash or by base of tail do not reach for collar. |  |  |  |  |

**Be A Responsible In Tact Dog Owner**

The other dogs in the park with spayed and neutered dogs have done their part to keep pet populations down and humane society kills down. They are our pet heroes. I don’t know why you may have chosen to keep your dog in tact, mine is because I show and breed.

But know if you choose this route, you must also take responsibility. First by breed. If you have an aggressive or bully breed that is prone to initiating fights, and you have chosen to keep that dog in tact, you need to assess your dog’s aggressive instinct. If s/he likes to pick fights, and you chose to keep your dog for breeding, then it is your responsibility to keep your dog away from other dogs when he is not serving that function.

If your dog does not exhibit aggressive behavior, is friendly and social with other breeds, but in tact, you need to keep a close eye on them. Many in tact dogs can play together without a problem, but hormones between in tact males can turn into dog fights, so you have to keep a vigilant watch. You have made the choice; it is your responsibility. The alternative is don’t bring your dog to off leash parks.

**The Tale of the Tail**

Napa has two great off-leash dog parks: Alston on the north side and Shurtleff on the east side. To avoid dog fights, the first thing you want to look for are in tact dogs, as they are the most often the perpetrators. Second, watch the dog’s tails, even in dogs who have no tails, watch their butts. A high held tail or rump means I want to play, a wagging tail means I’m friendly. When the tail stops wagging and lowers keep your eyes out. Watch the ears, if the ears start to go back and flat against the head to protect them in battle, get concerned. Don’t worry about the withers being up, it doesn’t mean anything but excitement but keep your eye on that tail.

If the wagging has stopped and the tail is lowering, get in position to separate the dogs. Watch for any lip movement. A growl and lips showing teeth is time to separate the dogs immediately--it only has to come from one dog, not both.

If the tails are up and still, talk in a neutral voice to the dogs with a high pitch at the end. They are surveying the scene.

“Hey, you guys want to play zoomie?” “Did you meet a new friend?” Keep your voice high pitched so the dogs want to be friends, even start to run so maybe they will take chase or fetch a ball.

If the dogs are still sniffing and tails are wagging, they may not be the best of friends but aren’t going to be enemies. One may try a play bow and get no response. However, if one or the other dog’s tail goes lower, or actually starts to go between their legs, separate the two dogs and don’t attempt further engagement.

The tail between the legs could be a sign of dog aggression if coupled with the pulling back of ears and lips. More often in dog friendly parks it’s a sign that s/he is scared and uncomfortable in this encounter and going into a panic attack. Stop all engagement and calmly separate the dogs, giving lots of space to the dog with the tail between the legs. If this is your dog, make certain the dog feels safe with you and stays with you until the tail is held in a neutral position again, especially if it’s a young dog that has been frightened by the social interaction.

Pay attention to these signs, that will happen in the first minute of contact with another dog, especially on leash, and you will never have a dog fight. Go your separate ways if the encounter didn’t work out. If the tails were high, the barks were high pitched and the dogs play bowed to each other to start a game of chase then, if you’re in a safe space, let the leashes go and let the dogs play to their heart’s content!

I show my dogs and therefore they are always in tact and I go to off leash parks all the time and never have a problem. I may sit and talk with people at the tables or eat my lunch. But I am always with my dogs, watching their behavior and the behavior of the other dogs, and watching for anything that I see that might turn into a fight. Vigilance and responsible pet ownership is all it takes to avoid dog fights, but I admit, owning Bearded Collies, probably the least aggressive of all dog breeds, makes it a bit easier for me.