

## **Spring Renewal: Preparing for Park and Cottage Season with your Dog**

Has it been a while since you've been out and about in a busy area with your dog?

Spring is getting ready to do its thing, and the use of dog parks and cottage time is about to increase exponentially for those valiant dog people who have toughed it out all winter. The same goes for the towns and cities where people and their dogs seem to just appear with no warning, come the first warm sunny day.

If you are one of those that instead spent more time doing short leash walks, park walks, were dependent on nice weather, and cottage is only a summer gig, you are in for frustration and potential issues. Like weekend warriors, suddenly getting more exercise and social time can increase the incidents of conflict between dogs or people, as well as injuries from lack of conditioning or park hazards.

Here are some tips for re-entry into summer and the great fields and lakes of play:

Prepare for the season by gradually increasing your walk times with your dog if you have been cutting them short. This is good for both you and your dog and gives you plenty of opportunity to gradually work on focus, attention, and distractions.

For coated dog types, make a grooming appointment to de-shed the dog well before you head to the lake or cottage and practice drying out their coat with a hair dryer to nip those lovely hot spots in the bud.

Ensure your dog has flea, tick, and heartworm disease meds on board, that they have their leptospirosis vaccines and that you have your first aid kit and extra poop bags wherever you go with your dog.

Practice your recall cue conditioning by saying the word you use as a cue, reward with high value treats, and do this several times a day, in the house and on walks. This is a classical conditioning concept that does not require you to have a lot of space to do it, it is just "word" and feed.

Work on your go-to-mat/place behaviour. This may sound silly as, obviously, your dog is not relaxing on a mat in the park, but the general increase in visitors when the weather gets nicer, both at your home and at the cottage may be a stressor for your pup. Let your visitors know that the mat is off limits to guests, especially kids, so that your dog feels safe. Your dog knowing how to chill out and relax with visitors and not be under foot can be less stressful for all involved.

If you have not got a solid “leave it” and “drop it”, do that now. Generalize it well and reward the heck out of it. This is especially important if you have one of those dogs that eat things they shouldn’t or steal other dog’s toys. This is a safety issue and also reduces the likelihood of conflict with other dog owners.

KEEP MOVING. Don’t stand around. Keep your dog in sight at all times and pay attention to what they and the other dogs are doing.

Follow the dog park rules. Pick up after your dog. Study up on dog body language and appropriate play.

Have fun!



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