Encountering Loose Dogs

Meeting a loose dog while walking your own on leash can cause anxiety in both you and your dog. While loose dogs aren't always out to do harm, an off-leash dog approaching an on-leash dog can be seen as a threat to the on-leash dog.

The on-leash dog has no way to protect himself, show submission, or escape because of the human holding the leash. Humans are also known to tighten up their dog's leash when threats approach, making it even harder for their dog to react properly.

Most off-leash dogs are running free in the park because their owner doesn't follow leash laws and wants his dog to have plenty of freedom. This is only safe if he has full voice control, which a large percentage of dog owners do not.

When encountering an off-leash dog, one that isn't running straight at you screaming, with his teeth bared, step in front of your dog. Tell the other dog firmly to "Go Home!" or whatever words you choose to make it clear you do not want him to approach. Many dogs will give you a quizzical look, because everyone else loves them, and turn away. Stand still with your dog, making sure they retreat.

This is often where the owner realizes his dog is approaching you and hollers across the park "He's friendly!" I holler back "Mine isn't!" which usually causes the owner come retrieve his dog more quickly, often grumbling about how I shouldn't have brought a mean dog to the park. You know, my on-leash dog, who isn't mean, but the trick works.

If the dog keeps coming closer, seems friendly, and your dog is agreeable, loosen your leash so your dog can greet properly. He may lie down and roll over, submitting to the other dog, he may sniff parts, and do the doggie handshake (nose to tail x 2) he may bark or something worse. If he does something worse, the loose dog will, most likely, run away.

If the dog is coming at you in an aggressive manner, turn into an ugly human. Step in front of your dog and tell the loose dog where it can go, in a firm loud voice. Make a scene so anyone else in the area knows you are in trouble. Do not run. Do not turn your back on the dog. Let go of your dog's leash. He needs to be able to submit, defend himself, or run away. You cannot help him at this point, as much as you would like to. If you have a small dog, do not pick him up, this can cause the other dog to jump up and take you and your dog to the ground.

I have been in a situation where a dog broke through a wooden fence, ran straight for me and my dog, and latched onto my dog before he could escape. All of us were on the ground, only able to get free of the loose dog when a stranger came and grabbed the

loose dog from behind so we could run home. Luckily this is not a common situation, but there are people out there willing to help, especially when dogs are involved.

If multiple dogs are approaching, react vocally, loosen your leash, be the calm, human in charge. If you panic it can cause worse reactions from your dog, and/or the loose dogs. If you can, move away slowly, keeping an eye on the dogs. If you have treats or a ball, throw them as far away from you as possible and move in the opposite direction.

Loose packs of stray dogs may exist in certain areas but most of the time the loose dog you come across will be someone's pet who has made the mistake of getting out of his yard or away from his owner, and he most likely wants to return home.

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Bring Rover Over

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