



# Pet Talk

By Tiffany Mason

Welcome to *Pet Talk*, an occasional column about homeless pets and related topics.

**(Editor's note:** This article was written by dog trainer Tiffany Mason of *Terric Canines* in Kalispell.)

Today we're focusing on an important issue for local dog owners, namely: Why do we have so-called leash laws? Being aware of applicable regulations can make dog ownership not only more responsible, but also safer and more fun.

So, the first thing to be aware of in that regard is Flathead County Ordinance No. 3, which states that *"It shall be unlawful for any owner of a dog to allow it to run at large within Flathead County."*

In addition, the ordinance consents to unleashed dogs in the county but they must

be under voice- or signal control at all times.

But if your dog is off leash outside of its yard there are consequences for ignoring the ordinance, including citations, fines and even impoundment.

In addition, owners who fail to comply can put public- and pet safety at risk. This may be frustrating for some owners, but leash regulations exist to protect all members of the community—including you and your dog.

No matter how friendly your dog is, other dogs and people may be intimidated if your dog runs up to them off leash. So, not only is it inconsiderate, but also a potential liability.

Many dogs, even the friendliest ones, will react negatively to another dog approaching them, especially when one dog is leashed and the other is not.

Although a leash keeps a dog tethered to its owner, the restraint also takes away the dog's ability to move away from an approaching dog. So, a direct approach from an off-leash dog is not only inconsiderate on the part of the owner, but that off-leash dog might well display aggressive body

language even if there are no real aggressive intentions.

In addition, remember that many people fear or dislike dogs altogether. So even a friendly off-leash dog can cause some people to become fearful.

Often during training, I have worked with reactive dogs in public to build the dogs' confidence in the presence of the thing feared most—other dogs!

Now picture this scenario: An off-leash dog suddenly appears and heads eagerly toward our training team. This situation can create substantial tension in both the owner and their dog as we try to avoid the approaching dog.

Often, the off-leash dog's owner will appear and assure us that, *"It's OK, he's friendly!"*

Which leads us to respond, *"No it's not, our dog isn't friendly and is actually scared"*

So, who is at fault if a dog fight occurs? Is it the leash-compliant owner whose frightened dog begins to fight in self defense—or is it the inconsiderate owner of the "friendly" dog?

Ironically, it's the people who respect local leash

regulations who can suffer the most in such situations. That's because even the most well-trained dogs can be unpredictable at times.

Another issue is that free roaming dogs also can be injured by other dogs, speeding cars, or by humans defending themselves. Such dogs also can be mistaken for strays—which consumes Animal Control patrol time and animal shelter resources.

So, all in all, having your dog off-leash and not under strict voice control is illegal, unsafe, and inconsiderate.

Of course, dogs do love running and if you don't have a fenced yard there are some great alternatives. Dog daycare, dog parks, and the cool new *Sniffspot* app offer some great alternatives. *Sniffspot* (<https://www.sniffspot.com/>) can put you in touch with local private dog parks you can rent by the hour for a reasonable fee.

And if you're struggling with leash manners, we can gladly teach you and your pet how to co-exist with the leash—so everyone can enjoy their walks. For more information contact *Terric Canines* dog training at (509) 307-6448.

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So that's it for today's Pet Talk. If you love pets please consider adopting one for yourself! You can also help spread the word among family and friends in rapidly growing Flathead County.

And don't forget the generous adoption incentives at the county shelter. First, a recent donation from a local animal lover has allowed the shelter to substantially reduce its adoption fees. Flathead Shelter Friends also offers a Senior Pet Voucher, which pays up to \$350 toward veterinary care for 7+ year-old adopted pets!

For more information, please contact Flathead County Animal Shelter, phone number (406) 758-1310, or visit the website at <https://flathead.mt.gov/department-directory/animal>.

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***Personal donations are always appreciated! For more information, see***

[www.flatheadshelterfriends.org](http://www.flatheadshelterfriends.org)