

Finding a Lost Dog

There are a number of things you can do to prevent pet loss, or to find a dog, once it has become lost.

(The names of the dogs and people in the case histories have been changed to maintain privacy.)

Prevention is key. If you have socialized and trained your dog, and continue to give him ample opportunity to exercise and venture beyond the boundaries of the back yard with you (walks, dog class, pet fairs, dog sporting events, etc.), he will be less likely to want to venture off on his own. If you have neutered (spayed or castrated) your dog, he or she will be less likely to wander in search of doggie dates. If you have seen to the dog's basic needs for food, water, shelter, mental stimulation and safety, he will be less likely to need to wander to find it elsewhere. In other words, **SOCIALIZE, TRAIN, NEUTER, and CONTAIN.** This is Dog Scouts' credo for responsible dog ownership.

How does Socialization help?

A well socialized puppy is a well adjusted adult dog. By taking your puppy out regularly to see and smell new sights, environments, people, and other animals, he will become used to these things and not become frightened by them. It is crucial that this socialization take place when the puppy is in his critical socialization period (7-12 weeks). It's pretty much too late to try to make up for lost work after that time. That's why they call it a critical socialization period. A well-adjusted dog will be less likely to startle and bolt at the appearance of something strange.

Case History: Drury was on his way from Colorado to enjoy a week at Dog Scout Camp, when his owner stopped at a friend's home to stay overnight. The friend thought that he'd do Drury's parent a favor by taking him for walk outside. Drury was not socialized with adult men, and was fearful of them. So much so that when the door was opened, Drury bolted out and ran away, jerking the leash right out of the friend's hand. He wouldn't let anyone catch him, because he didn't like strangers (not enough socialization as a puppy). He roamed the streets in this strange city for several days before they were able to recover him. He had apparently been hit by a car, as he was bleeding and had missing fur and an injured leg.

How does Training help?

Training your dog to come to you when called, and to respect boundaries is an important step to keeping him at home, where he is safe. Teaching the dog to come to you for cookies, praise, walks, games and other favorable things will produce a strong desire to obey that command. If you ever call your dog to you to lock him up, end his fun, punish him, shove a pill down his throat, or put him on leash, he is more likely to associate "come" with having something awful happen to him, and he'll want to run the other way. Can you blame him? Once your pup or dog is responding favorably to your voice in general, and particularly his name, and the command "come," or "here," you can use it to call him back from the edge of the property, or the areas in which you don't want him to go. Always reward this choice (he could have ignored you, and ran away) with a yummy treat. You can also teach your dog to come to a whistle (see whistle training).

Another type of training you'll want to do is a "Leave it" command. This is a type of impulse control, which can do wonders to keep your dog out of trouble. "Leave it" means to ignore whatever it is that you're looking at and thinking about. You can use it to disengage your dog

from thinking about chasing a deer into the woods, or from running into the street after a Frisbee that the wind took way too far into the wrong direction (please don't play Frisbee with your dog anywhere near a street or other hazardous environments).

Many dogs are lost each year, because they initially ran off after something interesting, and then just got lost or disoriented when they found themselves in a strange place. Please see the part of this web site that teaches you how to train your dog to "come when called" and "Leave it" (notes from Dog Scout Class). Also the section on whistle training may be helpful.

Case History: Sue's house was at the edge of the woods. Her dog, Chuck, would always venture into the woods to explore. She would call and call, and he either couldn't hear her, or didn't want to end his fun by returning home. Sue learned whistle training in obedience class, and it has been a life-saver for her. Chuck could hear the whistle, and associated it with roast turkey. Now, instead of staying gone for hours and hours, with his parents worrying and not knowing where he is, he returns immediately for the whistle. (Note: it is not recommended that you let your dog wander into the woods unsupervised in the first place).

How does Neutering help?

Dogs don't have matchmakers or computer dating. Their bodies have been programmed to meet up with members of the opposite sex at every opportunity, for purposes of breeding. The female announces her "availability" with the scent of her heat periods. Every male for miles around is aware that she is in heat and is ready to "accept visitors." The male's hormones compel him to follow the scent. His powerful sense of smell lets him follow it to the source. He can tell the age, physical health and stage of the heat cycle the female is in, just by smelling her urine. He probably can't tell what breed of dog she is, or how she wears her hair, but he doesn't care... he is programmed to seek out and have sex with as many females as possible whenever possible. If it sounds a little like all intact dogs think about is SEX, well that's basically because that **is** what they mostly think about.

Neutering removes the hormone-producing ovaries in a female dog, and the hormone-producing testicles in a male. Without these, the female will not experience a heat cycle, and will not be looking to accept a mate. The male will not be constantly wondering where his next sex partner will come from, and will not need to constantly comb the county looking for a hot date. I actually think that most "wandering" occurs because dogs are in search of a breeding partner. All of this unpleasantness is eliminated when you have your dog neutered. The dog's mind is free to think about other things (like YOU, his parent), when it is not being ruled by its hormones, and obsessing about sexual matters.

Case History: Lonnie's Doberman, Razor, had the "wanderlust." She was always dragging him home from several blocks away. She tried punishing him, but of course that doesn't work. The motivation to roam was still right there in his testicles. She thought that after eight years of age, it was a little late for neutering to do any good. One day, after dragging him back from the busy main road at the nearest cross street, she shook her finger at him and said, "Don't you ever do that again!" Razor looked at her defiantly and uttered a low growl, as if to say, "You can't tell ME what to do!" She went out and had him neutered, and not only did he stop running away, but, afterwards he was "glued" to Lonnie and her husband. If they were out in the yard, running the lawn tractor, he would walk along almost at heel, with them. He never ran away again after he was neutered. He never growled at her again, either.

If you want more case histories, just visit your local pound or animal shelter, and see how many dogs are picked up roaming the countryside, or surrendered by their own parents with the excuse, “runs away too much.” It’s a shame when there’s such an easy solution.

How does Containing help?

Containment means keeping your dog safe, cared-for and healthy, as well as keeping him confined to your yard. It means seeing to your dog’s needs in every way.

It is our job as the “dog parents” to provide a life for our dog that is complete with a balanced diet, health care, exercise, mental stimulation, safety and love. If your dog has enough food, water, shelter, care and physical and mental exercise, and feels safe and loved, why would he want to leave (unless maybe you have neglected to socialize, train or neuter him)? If on the other hand, your dog is living a prisoner’s existence tied or fenced alone in the back yard, it’s no wonder he seeks a change of scenery. It would make sense for him to take off every time he was able to escape.

This web site is filled with ideas of things you can do to enrich your life with your dog. You could participate in agility or therapy dog visitations, or Dog Scout Troop activities. You can teach your dog tricks, or refine his manners so that you can take him on trips with you. A life of boredom is worth trying to escape from. A dog should be a member of the family--and can be, with proper training. If your dog is escaping from your back yard or running out the door every chance he gets, because he’s trying to put a little “spice” in his life, why don’t you just provide the spice that he needs.

Case History: Sissy was already given up by her original owners, who kept her locked up in an apartment closet all day. Her new owners were not much better, and kept her shut up in the balcony of a condo, where she could see the world going by all day, but couldn’t interact with it, except to bark at it all. Kim, a neighbor, offered to let the dog out to play during the day for the owners. Soon, Sissy was bonding more with Kim than with her owners. The people finally decided to just let Kim have the dog. In her third home in less than six months, Sissy had finally found happiness with a member of Dog Scouts of America. With Kim’s knowledge, she was able to understand Sissy’s many bad behaviors. She enrolled Sissy in obedience classes, took her backpacking and hiking in the parks, and taught her to play flyball and agility. She even brought her to Dog Scout Camp, where she gave a few of us a scare, when she ran off and became lost for a short time one day. With new outlets for her sporting breed energy, Sissy became a different dog. While Kim could not make up entirely for Sissy’s lack of socialization as a puppy, she still made a lot of progress with training and patience. Kim told me that without the tools she learned from Dog Scouts, Sissy probably would have ended up at her fourth and final home—the dog pound. But, with a responsible owner in charge, Sissy is happily living in Kim’s home for life, with plenty to do to enrich their bond together daily. Sissy doesn’t try to run away any more.

You may or may not have known that the above things could have helped keep your dog safely at home, but if he’s gone NOW, the previous advice is not much good to you. Let’s see if we can help you find your lost dog. Let’s solve the mystery by using our detective skills.

Why, how, and when did “Rover” escape?

A detective would ask you questions like “When did you first discover the dog missing?” The answer could give you a clue as to why the dog left and where the dog could be. If it was about the time the school bus let the kids out, maybe he followed some kids home. If it was about the time the hot air balloon passed overhead, maybe the dog was so terrified that he climbed out of a 6’ fence, to run for his life (this happened to my dog).

The detective would also try to see if there was a “motive.” What would have caused your dog to run off? Was there a motive? Has he been trying to dig out for the last two weeks, ever since the neighbor started a compost heap on the other side of the fence (and they just threw the turkey dinner carcass on the heap)? Was he over-stimulated by some wild animal or passer-by, and snuck through a gate not shut properly by a delivery person? Was he trying to escape to get back to a former owner (like “Lassie come home”)? Was he bored senseless and chewed through his rope to leave the monotony of his back-yard prison behind? Was he trying to escape some sort of abuse? If the dog has the motive, he only needs to wait for the opportunity to come along.

True story: When I was a kid, I really disliked my mom’s spoiled rotten toy poodle. He peed all over my favorite jacket one day when my mom wasn’t home. Man, I laid into him with screaming and shoving his nose in it (all the things you’re NOT supposed to do), and I tossed him out the front door and told him not to come back (I didn’t mean it—I was just trying to scare him). Well, this spoiled little dog that never left the yard marched straight out to the road and flagged down the first car that came by. When they stopped and opened the door, he jumped in with them. I can only imagine what he must have told them... He decided that he couldn’t stand his evil step-sister any more and he ran away from home. But toy poodles don’t run on foot, they hail “cabs.” (It was just our neighbor, by the way, who recognized the little monster as our dog, and delivered him back to our house. I watched it all from behind the foyer curtain).

Did your dog have an opportunity? Did you leave the door open? Did someone ELSE leave the gate open? Did your dog sneak out the door when company was over? Did your dog discover a hole under the fence (or make one)? Did your dog’s tie-out chain break? Did your dog squeeze through an open window in your car while you were in a store or restaurant? Did you leave your door unlocked, and a friend or relative stopped by and accidentally let the dog out?

True story: My goat let all my dogs out one day, because he could open gates. I didn’t even know the dogs were gone until my neighbor four doors down called to say he had found my dog. Imagine my surprise, when I didn’t know they were all missing! They were just in the back yard seconds ago! The goat opened the gate to get INTO the back yard.

By analyzing the motive, opportunity and means your dog had of escaping, it might help you to track down his whereabouts.

Where do dogs like to go?

Your dog may not go far from home. Before you panic, search the house carefully. Once I found my Cocker Spaniel snoozing behind the water bed pedestal, and he didn’t respond when I called him. I thought he had gotten out. A friend of mine lost her dog, so they got in the car and searched the neighborhoods. When they pulled back in the driveway, they spied

him on the ROOF! He had climbed up a snowdrift and was having a ball up there. Search every hidey-hole you can think of. Then ask yourself, "Where does my dog like to go?"

If your dog does not normally stray from home, perhaps he has gotten himself "trapped" somewhere. I've heard of dogs sneaking into the car and ending up at work with the husband, or becoming wedged in a drain pipe, or stuck someplace where he can not get out. Search in nearby locations before going far and wide. Do any hunters set animal traps near you? Did someone leave an exposed hazard, like a lid off the septic tank, or the gate open to a backyard pool? Could he have gotten into a storm cellar or under a crawlspace? Was he wearing a collar that could get caught and trap him there (or anywhere else)?

Chances are, he went to an area familiar to him, like a neighbor's house, or the park around the corner. My senile dog used to like to sneak off to a beaver pond about a half mile down the road. My Doberman always hung out at the corner bar--who knows why he stopped there! (Of course, after neutering him, he never ran off any more).

If he's not in a familiar place, possibly he followed another dog, a child, or other animal to another location. Where do the other dogs, children, or other animals hang out? Is there a shopping center near you, where the dog would seek out friendly people, or food? Is there a farm near you, where the dog would go to watch the sheep? Think of what could have attracted your dog... a flock of birds, a person on a bike, an ice cream truck?

When you've searched everywhere for several hours, it's time to get serious about admitting that your dog might be lost.

There are some things that you should always keep handy, like a recent color photo of your dog and a strip of your phone number to attach to the bottom of the picture or flyer (the kind people can tear off to call you). Of course, if you're REALLY prepared, you'll have a "lost dog" flyer all made up that you can just drop a picture into and start stapling on telephone poles. Get your posters made up and post them everywhere.

Contact everyone you know that could help you find your dog:

Animal Control – The very first call you should make is to the pound, shelter, humane society, or who ever else is in the business of rounding up stray animals in your county. You may even call the police, though it is not their job to help you find your dog, and they may tell you so. But, they may also offer to help.

Veterinarian – Heaven forbid that your dog gets injured while on a jaunt, but if he's not used to roaming the streets unaccompanied, chances are he could get hurt, and he might end up at the vet. If you have informed the vets offices that your dog is missing and may turn up there, they will know to call you if some good Samaritan finds your dog injured along the roadside.

Utilities workers – While you're driving around the neighborhoods, if you happen to see a phone worker, paper deliverer, garbage collector, or utilities person, be sure to ask them about your dog. They drive all around and go everywhere, and often know the neighborhoods quite well.

School children – Kids notice everything, and they're usually more than happy to help. Make sure you give them a poster, so they'll know you're not just some pervert trying to kidnap them with the "Help me find my puppy" story. While they're cruising around on their bikes,

scooters or skateboards, you'll have a lot more pairs of eyes keeping a look out for your dog. And (you didn't hear this from me), you might try to ask the local schools for help. It's not their job to help you find your dog, but if you have helped the schools with your dog through the reading programs, or something, they will have more of a vested interest in your canine. The school may (if you have an "in" with them) announce on the loud speaker in the morning announcements that your dog has been lost. Think of how many extra pairs of eyes that would give you in your area.

True story: One of my obedience students came to class one week without the dog. I asked where the dog was, and was informed that someone had been seen taking her dog out of her parked car at the grocery store. The local school made an announcement, and sure enough, one kid noticed that the next-door neighbor had a "new dog" that he was keeping in the garage. The owner contacted the police, and showed up with them at the person's front door. They couldn't deny who the dog belonged to, as he was overjoyed to see his parents. He was back in class the following week.

You can download the following page and put one of your own dog's photos on the flyer. Change the number to your phone number, add any other information pertaining to your dog or the reward, print it off, cut between the tear strips and perforate at the black line.



"Gator" was adopted through a herding breed rescue group. He was found roaming at large (LOST?). He had so many bad behaviors when we got him that it's no wonder his owner never bothered to look for him in the pound. He was scheduled to die the next day, when the rescue worker found him and took him. He's now a Dog Scout, a Flyball Champion, and a great Frisbee dog and companion. He has lived with us for almost 9 years. We have transformed him into a very cool dog.

LOST DOG

Reward



Black & White Border Collie

Answers to "Karli"

Last seen near Splash Lake wearing red bandana

If SEEN, please call 555-555-5555

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Travel Packet:

You should also keep a set of information in your vehicle, especially when you're traveling. If you get into an automobile accident with dogs in the car, chances are that they could exit a broken window or smashed door. You could be unconscious and unable to see to the recovery of your pets.

A "lost dog" packet should consist of a recent photo of your dog, what name he answers to, the name of your vet (in case the dog is injured), any medication the dog is taking, instructions for what to do if your dog is injured (permission to operate, euthanize, or board until you come out of a coma), your home address and phone and alternate contact phone number (include cell phone numbers). Give as much information as possible with regard to capturing your dog (like "just open any car door, and he'll jump in", or "he will do anything for hot dogs," or "he prefers women and will run away from men"). This packet should be kept in a prominent place in the front of your vehicle, like the dashboard. This is where the police or emergency medical personnel will look when they enter your car.

If you make up the travel packet and the wanted poster before you ever need it, you won't be running around in a panic, not knowing what to do or what information to include when your dog actually becomes lost. I hope you never lose your dog. It's a very scary thing. If you are prepared, it will help you get your dog back sooner.

What to do if you FIND a lost dog:

- Look in the paper for a lost dog ad.
- Put a FOUND DOG ad in the paper (most places it is free of charge).
- Contact the local animal shelter, pound or humane society (that's the first place the owner should call, if the dog gets lost).
- If you keep the dog rather than take him to the shelter while seeking the owner, be prepared to answer phone calls.
- Ask the person to describe any identifying markings or mannerisms of the dog.
- If someone calls that you suspect is **not** the owner of the dog, but just wants a dog, ask them to identify the tattoo number on the dog (there doesn't have to be any tattoo on the dog—the REAL owner will know this, one way or the other)

Some people don't want to take the dog to the pound. That is the FIRST place an owner will look for a lost dog (or should be). It might be the best thing you can do for the dog to reunite him with his owner. At the very least, you should CALL the pound, to let them know the description and breed of the dog you have, in case the owner calls in.

You might also take the dog to the vet to see if they recognize him. Most pets make a trip to their doctor at least once per year, so the vet might recognize the dog and know who he belongs to.

Tell everyone you know that you have found a dog. If no one claims him after several weeks, contact a rescue organization, or take him in to the shelter, unless you decide you want to keep him. Remember that sometimes dogs become lost while their owners are out of the country or something, and the dog sitter may not go to heroic efforts to try to find the dog. The actual owner of the dog may not find out his dog is missing for weeks.