

Lost Dog Prevention

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You've probably read enough articles about what to do when a dog is lost, like put up posters. And you've been lectured about not letting the dog run loose. But, there are a few other things you can do to help prevent your dog from getting lost, and things you can do that may help it find itself.

Before getting a new dog, go over all fencing with a fine toothed comb to make sure there are no methods of escape such as loose boards, gaps under fences or between boards, areas that could be quickly dug under. Any gap along the bottom of a fence, even if too small for the dog to fit thru, should be lessened or it could well attract the dog's attention as a spot to dig under. Gates should be preferably locked or at the very least spring loaded to close quickly and tightly if left unlatched. Children and non-dogwise neighbors and relatives are notorious for leaving gates open. If there's been heavy wind or snow, check fencing perimeter before letting the dog out to make sure the fence is undamaged.

When a new dog first comes to your home, take it on area orientation walks thru the neighborhood, and near the end of the walk tell it "Go home!" preferably in a firm voice that a stranger might give to a dog cruising thru their yard. Give a treat when the dog gets inside your door. When in a new place for a couple of days while traveling, orient the dog as much as possible with walks around the neighborhood, often going back to your vehicle, RV, hotel room, or visited house. It's good to give a treat when the dog gets inside the visited home/room too. If the dog gets lost in an unfamiliar place, they'll have a better chance of knowing and wanting where to come back to. Been there, done that, it worked!

Train your dog to go directly from your house to your car by giving him a cookie when he gets in the car (preferably inside a crate for his safety). Also do the reverse, always giving the dog a treat for going straight inside the house after a walk or a ride. This focuses him in on getting to that safe location, something the dog might keep in mind when running loose, or a give a better option to that dog that might otherwise think of making a break for freedom for the fun of it.

The dog should also be taught to not leave an open crate in car, open car (if dog is inadvisably riding loose in the car), nor go thru a door to an insecure yard without a release word such as "ok." Teaching them to sit at that door first is better. All people (kids, friends, relatives, one time visitors) entering or leaving the house/gate must be instructed asap to slip thru the door quickly and with the least door gap. No hanging out and chatting with the door open while coming inside! Repeat visitors or family members should also know to body block the dog in case the dog does decide to bolt out a door, and the dog should be restrained from the door area when infrequent visitors are there. The best option is to have a buffer area between the dog's part of the house and that door to freedom where the dog cannot go. For example, if you come inside the house via a utility room, baby gate off the utility room so the dog can't get in there.

Train an emergency "come." Many people ruin their "come" by mis-training (scold when dog finally comes back, tell dog to come for something it doesn't like like a bath, allowing dog to play catch-me-if-you-can). So, train an alternate come with a different word, or a certain whistle. Use this rarely, and 100% *always* give a goooooo goodie and plenty of praise for it, then let the dog continue whatever it was doing. Never use it in a non-emergency without that Gooooo goodie.