

The Canine Escape Artist

Does it seem like your dog has a never-ending ability to escape from the back yard? Every escape has the potential for a tragic ending. If your dog is running loose, he could be injured in a fight with another dog, hit by a car, or get hurt in a number of other ways. To prevent future escapes, you'll need to figure out how your dog is getting out, why he's so determined to do so, and how you can manage his behavior.

Why does my dog do this?

It could be boredom, an exciting person/animal on the other side of the fence, or the dog catches a good scent and follows it. Sometimes, it can be related to an anxiety of being left alone or a fear response to a loud or unfamiliar noise. If you've just adopted your dog, it's possible that everything is unfamiliar and they may be searching for their previous family.

How can I prevent it?

Check your fence line. Make sure that there aren't things for your dog to jump on or climb that will make it easier for him to escape. Be sure your fence is solid, without gaps or weak points that could be knocked over or pushed through. Check behind bushes for gaps that you cannot see. There are many products that can be used to make your fence more secure. Ask us for recommendations.

Play with your dog in your yard. Being present to supervise will help your dog want to stay in the yard. Keep your dog attached to a short or long leash in the yard in the beginning.

Teach your dog to pause at every doorway and gate, and wait to be released through. Have all family members practice this.

Provide your dog with daily physical and mental stimulation to prevent boredom. Regular walks, fetch, feeding out of food dispensing toys, training, and other activities can help prevent your dog from wandering.

Ensure your dog's collar or harness is fitted really well to prevent escaping when you take him on walks. Keep your dog on leash during walks and trips to the park to prevent them from darting away if they are startled.

Leave your dog somewhere safe inside your home when you are gone. Be sure any windows and doors your dog has access to are closed and locked. Leave your dog with safe toys, like a Kong, to keep him entertained when you are gone.

What if my dog escapes?

Make sure your dog is always wearing a collar with tags (with your phone number and address) and be sure that his microchip has the correct information as well. There are many GPS trackers that dogs can wear too.

If your dog bolts away from you, resist the urge to run after him. Instead, try calling "puppy, puppy, puppy" in a happy voice or whistle loudly. When he looks, turn around and run back towards your home to entice him to follow you. If that doesn't work and he's safe and nearby, go inside and grab a squeaker toy or a ball. Squeak or bounce the toy to get his attention. Hopefully, he will run to you to play with the toy.

If you aren't near home, try the happy "puppy, puppy" or whistling sounds, but run at a 45 degree angle so your dog sees you and hopefully runs towards you. If your dog approaches you, try crouching down and offering a treat. Talk in a "happy" voice to attract your dog.

As time goes on, your dog should learn that inside your home is a great place to be, and hopefully won't be as likely to run away. If you follow these guidelines, you should be able to safely manage your dog while you work on training.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.

Oregon Humane Society | 1067 NE Columbia Blvd. | Portland, OR 97211
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