

Based on prior experiences, this document provides general guidance – not rules set in stone. If your dog is lost, contact, seek advice from, and work with animal control and care professionals.

**It seems like forever, but you finally spot the dog – now what? Be prepared to outsmart it. Be forewarned, not shocked - your dog might not run to you AND might run away from you. ALWAYS have a leash and a quart-sized bag of “bait” in your vehicle. NEVER walk around a search or sighting area without the leash and bait.**

Wrap the leash around your waist like a cinch belt, so it’s outside, handy, and ready to use. Carry at least 8 hot dogs or an equivalent amount of food, such as bits of liver, chicken, and meatballs. As an added incentive, bring along a favorite toy or item normally associated with happy playtime. “Cesar” brand dog food comes in a small plastic tub with a peel-off, soft foil top. Tubs pack easily in a pocket – get non-gravy varieties to store in the car as “emergency” bait.

**Remain calm upon arriving at a sighting location where your dog’s been seen recently.**

Don’t slam the door to your vehicle, don’t shout, and if you see the dog, *don’t* rush towards it. A dog might feel safe and stay hidden under a deck, *or* bolt - knowing escape routes are limited. A dog sitting in an open field might wait to see what you’re up to, *or* bolt - just to be on the safe side. You never know how close you’ll be allowed to get, so give the dog time to adjust to your presence. Start talking, using familiar phrases that *usually* get a positive response, such as “want to go for a ride?” or “do you want a cookie?” Say whatever makes a dog the happiest and gets the quickest response. Never approach a dog head on. Turn, face sideways, and *walk very slowly* with arms close to your sides. The dog must accept every step you take, even if it takes you a half hour or longer to advance 100 feet. Never show your teeth if you smile – that’s the same as baring your teeth (growling) in canine language. Never stare at the dog – not only is that a challenge, a predator stares at its intended prey before attacking. Avoid making *any* sudden body movements. Stop moving and sit down if the dog is going to bolt.

**If the dog stays put, slowly lower yourself to the ground and immediately assume a non-threatening position BELOW the dog’s eye level – on your belly, sitting, kneeling, or flat on your back.**

You must try to be positioned as low as you’re supposed to be, otherwise you’re still “dominant.” Many people have to earn their dog’s trust, just like a stranger would have to do. This is not unusual. Keep the dog’s attention focused on you by talking. Speak to it slowly, using soft and reassuring tones. Use only positive and happy phrases such as “what a *good* girl!” or “puppy-puppy-puppy!” Now, try to get closer towards the dog by crawling. Let its body language be the guide as to how fast and far you go. Get within 40 feet *or* to a point where the dog will be able to see and smell the food you’re going to toss. Whenever you move, do it slowly. To help ease the dog’s anxiety, make submissive gestures every few minutes, such as closing your eyes for a few seconds and bowing your head down and off to one side.

Bait food bits are used to lure the dog towards you, so eventually it’s standing next to you, wanting more. Hold the bait out, pretend you’re eating some and *enjoying* it. :O Smack your lips and lick your fingers. Say “It’s pretty good stuff....do you want some?” and immediately start to share a little of the bounty. With a gentle *underhand* motion, toss a few thumbnail size bits of food in the general direction of the dog. Toss each tidbit so it lands progressively closer to you and wait for the dog to eat before you offer more. The dog might grab a tidbit and retreat a little, or move closer to you. **Praise all forward movements.**

**DON’T OVERFEED A DOG! Why should a wary dog come to you if it’s no longer hungry?**  
**DON’T RUN OUT OF FOOD! Why should a wary dog go to someone who has nothing to offer?**

Luring a dog successfully can take minutes, hours, or repeated attempts over time. When the dog is less than an arm's length away, you should already know what will work best - a gentle hand or quick grab. Cautious ones often back away when you reach out towards them, or try to touch their head or neck area. Offer food in just one hand (low to the ground) and keep your "good" hand free and *dry* (not "slippery"). If the dog's being friendly and has a collar, stroke it softly under the chin and gently attach a leash to the collar with your other hand. If the dog seems happy but isn't wearing a collar, try to get an adjustable collar or lead over its neck (*two* leads are better). Be gentle, but quickly adjust the collar to a snug fit. What if the dog's at ease, has a collar, and is taking food from you, but looks like it's going to bolt soon? *Focus* hard on the collar and grab it the next time the dog bows its head and is eating out of your hand. Quickly attach a leash and wrap it around your wrist several times so it can't jump away and take off. What if the dog is friendly and eating from your hand, but doesn't have a collar and won't let you pat it? Grab the dog by its neck or body as it eats from your hand, and pull it towards you. Hang on using a whole body hug and quickly slip a lead (or two) around the dog's neck, putting on a snug collar ASAP.

**For personal safety, the "grab/hold/body hug" method should only be attempted on your own dog.** When trying to catch a dog, you can startle it a little or a lot, and it can startle *you* with a yip, nip, or *bite*. If the dog has lost a considerable amount of weight, its collar might be loose and easier for you to grab. A loose collar also allows a dog to slip out of it easily. Hold on tight and take up any slack immediately.

**Let the dog find you, instead of you trying to find the dog.** Look along the dog's usual travel route for a good ground location to put a blanket, then get into position and wait with the bait and "happy" items. If you know the dog's approaching, throw down a light trail of bait leading to you. Even if a dog's caught off-guard momentarily, you're in an excellent position to start talking and offer it good food and toys.

Many lost dogs are exhausted and can be further stressed by well-intentioned people that hang around in groups for too long. If attempting to lure, a dog must be focusing all of its attention on just one person. Everyone else should "disappear" into key locations so they can see where the dog goes if it bolts, *and* be prepared to lure the dog should it come anywhere near them. Work your group efforts efficiently. If determined to follow a dog that bolted, be discreet and TRY not to let the dog know you're chasing it. *Many* an elusive dog has known the exact location of the searcher who is tromping around in the woods. There's often more than enough room for a dog to stay out of sight and still remain in the immediate area.

Newly adopted and fostered dogs get lost, as do "rescued" ones during transport - it's not that uncommon. If you don't know each other all that well, teach the dog to recognize you and trust your scent. Let the dog start associating you with food and water that appears every day on a regular basis, at a specific spot. Even when it's out of sight, call the dog by name or *give it a name*, and talk to it as if it's listening to you. Sit down for quiet "bonding" visits - in time, the dog may come out so you can see it, and later allow you to "be" there as it eats. It's not always easy, but a new and happy life is still a reality for many lost dogs.

**NEVER grab a dog you don't know – you risk being bitten or seriously hurt, *and* you'll have to receive preventative shots if the dog's rabies vaccination history is unknown or isn't up to date.**

**DON'T give *unlimited* food or water to a dog that's been lost for a great length of time - you might make it seriously ill or worse. See a veterinarian immediately or go to a 24-HR emergency clinic.**