

**The person responsible for a dog's well-being and safety can lose it by accident, or through carelessness.** Dogs have been lost by: their families, new adoptive homes, foster homes, doggie daycare centers, groomers, kennels, breeders, shelters, rescue workers, pet sitters (professional, family, or friends) and veterinarian clinics.

### A LITTLE PREVENTION CAN SAVE A LOT OF ANGUISH

**#1 TIP: Always keep the dog on a leash when outside your home.**

**#2 TIP: Your dog should always wear a collar that has current license, rabies, and ID tags attached.**

**#3 TIP: Get your dog microchipped.**

**Micro-chip implants** Ask your vet about this fast, easy, painless, and *permanent* way to identify your dog. It's smaller than a grain of rice, is NOT cost prohibitive, and helps to positively identify a pet that was stolen. The vet inserts the chip implant via a normal needle (immunization shot size) between a dog's shoulder blades. When a "stray" is picked up without a collar, one of the first questions asked is, "Does it have a micro-chip?" A hand-held scanner is passed over the dog's shoulders to find and "read" information imbedded on the chip. Lost for *years*, numerous dogs have been returned to their rightful families *because* they were microchipped.

**Tattoos** A permanent, "visible" ID. Calling the Tattoo Registry will match the dog's ID to its rightful owner. Identification numbers/letters may be located inside a dog's ear, or on its underside, like an inner thigh. The person holding a dog must know enough to look for a tattoo, which is easy to find upon examination.

A shelter facility *might* not have a scanner, but checks for tattoos, a person *might* not know much about either, but will try to trace old tags. Your dog CAN slip through the system, but a permanent ID will help decrease the odds.

**Collars** It's surprisingly easy for a dog to slip its collar – just ask someone who's been left holding the leash. Slipped collars waiting to happen: squirrels that need to be chased; unleashed, intimidating dogs heading for yours; strangers (usually men-sorry guys!) approaching your dog quickly and in a direct manner; trying to lead a dog where it doesn't want to go; and sudden loud noises – see "Big Noise Events." You should be able to fit two fingers between a collar and the dog's neck. Check the collar frequently and adjust to ensure a snug fit - puppies grow fast and adult dogs gain or lose weight, just like us humans. If the dog's just been bathed or groomed, put the old (or new) collar back on *immediately*. Put on old tags, *rather than none*, then go get new, updated tags NOW. A fluorescent or brightly colored collar helps a dog be more visible, especially at night. You can also buy a collar with your contact information already on it – just supply the maker with ID details - always include a 24/7 number. A collar (with current tags) is still the standard way to identify a "stray," but just remember - there's no *guarantee* that a lost dog will still be wearing its collar when found. Give pets a safety net using some form of *permanent* ID.

**Tags** A current license and up-to-date rabies tag should be securely attached to a dog's collar at all times. The rabies tag *must* be valid – strangers need to know if a dog they just found has been vaccinated recently. Countless strays are found with no identification other than a plain collar, and never reunited with their families. People don't put old, new, "bulky," or noisy tags on collars. Take care of *noisy* – buy tag covers at pet stores. Outdated or expired tags, or disconnected phone numbers are difficult to trace. **WITHOUT TAGS - NO TRACE.** You might not know that your dog's been safely found and being held somewhere *if* the licensing authority or the vet's office is closed and a tag can't be traced immediately. An ID tag with your name and phone number allows people to call you right away, day or night. Listing two 24/7 numbers gives them *twice* the chance of reaching you. You see ads for custom ID tags everywhere, so get one ASAP. Some big chain pet stores have automated booths that make tags within minutes for a nominal cost. After choosing from a variety of colors, sizes and shapes, you provide the information to be imprinted and then watch while the machine engraves it for you. For a quick fix for *temporary* use during transports or emergency situations, put contact information on a sticky label on the inside *and* outside of a collar, and attach a sturdy round tag (sold in bag lots at office supply stores) or a *small* luggage tag. Tags can get lost, or scratched, worn and unreadable, especially if the lost dog's been wandering for a long time.

**Leashes and Cable Runs** Check often and replace immediately if frayed, worn, or chewed.

Many dogs are lost with a leash or cable line still attached to their collars. Either one can be dragged around for weeks or snag on something almost immediately and hitch the dog to a place you might not find so easily.

**A retractable leash does NOT give you optimal control and is often dropped when a dog bolts unexpectedly.** This type of leash hits the ground with a noisy clatter. A dog can be frightened by the leash as it retracts *and* by the sound of the handle being dragged over pavement. If it doesn't retract, the line will get entangled quickly and anchor the dog to a small area. *Some* dogs, lost or not, will chew through a leash, line, or cable that's holding them. Dogs in trouble don't *always* bark for help, and some instinctively remain still and quiet to avoid attracting the attention of predators - wild *or* human (unfortunately, we can be just as scary to a lost dog). Use a sturdy nylon leash to walk your dog, hold the handle tightly, **and wrap the leash around your hand or wrist a few times.**

**Doors** Dogs dash with surprising speed through doors that are left open. Newly fostered and adopted dogs are quick to learn the location of every exit. Some bolt upon arrival, while others wait a few days, weeks, or months. Family members, friends, delivery people, and tradesmen (painters, plumbers...) can inadvertently leave a door open too long or forget to close it entirely. Lots of "escapes" happen when children go in and out constantly. You're closing the door and not paying attention because the dog's nowhere in sight. The dog is actually nearby, alert, and ready to take advantage of this opportunity. It bolts outside before you can open your mouth in disbelief. Most dogs seem to excel at pushing on a partially opened door so they can get outside, *with or without you.* DO NOT open an exit door while trying to leash the dog – open it *after* the leash is on *and* you have a grip on it. Doors should not be allowed to slam shut. A dog can be startled or injured, and frightened enough to run away.

**Big Noise Events** Dogs can be scared by unfamiliar loud noises or ones that never bothered them *before now.* A large number are lost during the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday and on New Year's Eve because of fireworks celebrations. Thunderstorms can be an old *or new* phobia. Watch exit doors and don't leave a dog outside and unattended. Construction noises, such as: nailing guns, big delivery trucks, and a landscaper's power equipment are scary. Other triggers include: motorcycles, gunshots, vehicles backfiring, sirens, boat horns, and loud parties.

**Fences** A fenced yard DOES NOT guarantee your pet's safety without proper monitoring on your part! Gates can be left open or unsecured by family, friends, landscapers, meter readers, and general contractors. Don't assume a gate has been closed, *look* to make sure it is, before you open the door to let the dog outside. Dogs disappear from yards by digging under, jumping over, and climbing up and over fences. To keep a dog in, and other animals out, backfill holes, replace rotting or missing boards on wooden fences, and repair chain link. Watch the dog known as an "escape artist" *climb* up the chain link fence and leap down the other side. Amazing. Fences are supposed to enclose and protect our canine friends from harm, yet predators manage to get inside. A tiny dog "safely" inside a fenced yard can look like a food source to hawks, owls, coyotes and other predators. Snow banks and hard packed drifts can dramatically reduce fence heights, allowing a dog to jump a fence that was previously too high. A doghouse strategically placed next to a fence will provide a nice launch pad for a jumper. An evergreen on the other side of the fence can serve as a "ladder" down to the ground – great for agility training. **An electronic fence does not prevent other animals or people from entering your property and won't protect a dog from outside harm. Dogs with electronic collars continue to bolt from their yards despite "positive" reinforcement training – maybe they HAD to chase something or something decided to chase after them.** A dog bolted through its fence wearing an electronic collar and got lost. It just happened to enter a yard with a fence on the same frequency. The dog then chose to be "trapped" rather than "zapped." Now safely back home.

**NEVER leave your dog alone in a vehicle. NEVER leave your dog alone in a vehicle that's running.**

**Your dog could** be stolen if someone thinks it deserves a better owner who would *never* leave it alone in a vehicle.

**Your dog could** be stolen by someone who thinks it's special and gives it to a friend *or* sells it to someone else.

**Your dog could** get loose and lost, if a thief breaks into your vehicle to steal a camera, purse, or other like items.

**Your dog will go for an unexpected ride with the thief who steals your vehicle, unless it's first released.**

**New Home** Don't leave a pet at the old and now empty home while you're moving furniture into the new one. It's very easy for a dog to get confused and nervous when its family is gone *and* all the furniture has disappeared. Make arrangements so pets can come with you or will be properly cared for during this stressful time of transition. DON'T wash dog bedding or toys just before moving – the dog will take comfort finding its scent in the new place. Old familiar sights, sounds, spots, and scents are suddenly GONE, and now there's all new things to get used to. Make sure you give your pet ample time and opportunities to investigate and get accustomed to new surroundings. Some will adjust readily to change, while others take much longer to realize that this new place is now "home." Leash and walk the dog along your new yard's boundaries at least several times a day or more often if possible.

**Vacations** provide a dog with all sorts of new sights, sounds, and scents, which can be interesting *or* very scary. Have a good time and lots of fun, but please, keep your dog leashed so she doesn't get lost and goes home safely. Imagine losing your best friend about two hours from home! How about five hours away in another STATE? Eventually you have to go home, with or without your dog. It's not a pleasant scenario but it happens all the time. When taking your canine buddy on a trip, pack some clear and recent pictures of it in a suitcase. If your dog *does* get lost, use the pictures to help make some "Lost Dog" fliers for immediate posting and circulation in the area. If the dog's staying at home with a pet sitter, be it professional, friend, or relative; give firm, clear instructions: "Buddy must be walked on a leash or using his harness." "Buddy must wear his collar and tags at all times." Let outside "just for a minute," lots of dogs have bolted while under the care of a close family member or friend. Do NOT assume a well-behaved dog will respond to voice commands from someone outside the immediate family. Do NOT assume your dog will behave as she normally does while separated from the person or family she loves. Do NOT assume everything will be fine because your dog knows and likes the pet sitter. The sitter is not YOU. **Tell those taking care of the dog about any prior record of escapes.** No one needs/wants to learn the hard way.

**Adoptions** Dogs adopted from a shelter or rescue group are special, and deserve lots of love and attention. Show the dog around inside your home and go for leashed walks along the yard's boundaries several times a day. A newly adopted dog needs time to bond with its family and time to settle comfortably into a "forever" home. Walks are a great way to start establishing a bond and helps a dog to realize that *your* "territory" is also his/hers. Any dog can be a high "flight risk" upon arrival at a new home for the first few weeks and up until a month or so. Dogs can bolt easily if someone isn't holding the leash tightly or leaves a door open just a little too long. A lot of families that lose a dog they just adopted think the dog didn't love them enough – and so it bolted. Other families use that statement as an excuse because they're feeling guilty, so they lay blame on the dog. By innocence or lack of responsibility, both are being unfair to the dog and exposing unrealistic expectations. Making a dog feel like part of your family doesn't just happen overnight.

It's far easier to adjust your schedules to allow a few extra minutes each day to help a pet through this transition. If you think you don't have the extra time, remember it's you that wanted and accepted responsibility for the dog. Any dog that's put into a new situation can get confused and scared – and any dog can bolt, not just adopted ones.

**Foster Homes** Thank you all for opening your homes. You're another loving link in the chain of hearts. Assume the new arrival is really an accomplished escape artist – it's just not going to happen on your watch! The dog's coming into a strange place (your home) meeting strangers (you) and has no idea what's going on. Do you have other dogs that aren't enthusiastic or *are* overly excited about making the dog feel at home? A dog arriving at its foster home is a major change for everyone, and a common time for these dogs to bolt. Be prepared ahead of time so you can **put a local ID tag on the dog's collar immediately, if not sooner.** It's especially important if the dog's wearing out-of-state or expired tags or – horror - isn't wearing tags at all. The dog won't be with you *that* long. You'll get to it *soon*. You've *never* lost a dog before. You'll regret those thoughts if you spend *weeks* or *longer* searching for a dog that bolted while under your care. Many rescues already use temporary collars and tags to identify a dog in transport, just in case it does get lost. Now it's up to you to update the information on the tags to *your* place- where the dog now lives and is cared for.

**Rescue Workers and Transporters**

Thank you for making a difference in so many lives. Be careful when transferring dogs from one vehicle to another, from kennels or crates to a vehicle, and when making stops at shelters, foster homes, or vet offices. Be especially careful during long trips when you have to make a pit stop in a parking lot or rest area.

**TOO BUSY TO TAKE MEASURES OF PREVENTION? IF YOU CARE, YOU'LL MAKE TIME.**

Unfortunately, the only thing that prepares you for the ordeal of a lost dog search effort is first-hand experience. Start making *at least* 40 phone calls while trying to design and then print out *at least* 300 fliers for your lost dog. Spend money at a print shop or copy machine, *or* buy a large number of ink cartridges to throw away at home. Go to an unfamiliar city or town and then drive around its streets during rush hour every day for a few weeks. For a true-to-life experience, expand the driving exercise to a month or more. Carry lots of cash or a credit card. Talk to people until your voice is hoarse. You can break down at any point during the search to have a good cry. Go to bed, toss and turn, and then get up and repeat all search tasks, before and after work - *if* you still have a job. Skip regular eating habits and good meals in favor of fast or junk food. Make more phone calls and more fliers. You can attend an important event, cancel at the last minute, or go - and think about your lost dog the entire time. The emotional support of friends and family will decline after a length of time determined by *them*, not you. Tired of the constant pressure, you lose patience easily. For now, your "normal" way of life no longer exists.

**No one usually *expects* a dog to get lost or be stolen - assume it *could* happen and take steps to prevent it.**

"But I NEVER put her on a leash!"

"But he USUALLY comes when called!"

"He ALWAYS goes outside to do his business...and he always returns....until last night."

"The collar breaks the hair on her neck."

"I only let her off leash for a minute."

"I had no idea there were coyotes in the area."

"I had no idea my dog would run after that deer."

"I knew I should have plugged up that hole in the fence."

"We've been to this park tons of times without any problems....until yesterday."

"I don't need to use a leash, my dog obeys me...it was the other dog coming at us."

"The snowstorm damaged the electronic fence."

"I didn't think."

And the list could go on and on and on.....

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