



Jasper County Animal Rescue League and Humane Society
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Canine Escape Artist

Escaping From the Yard

Escaping can be a serious problem for both owners and dogs. Dogs running at large are at risk for getting hit by a car, in a fight, injuring someone or destroying someone's property. You can be held responsible for any harm your dog causes while he is out roaming. Omaha city ordinance requires that your dog be kept on a leash at all times unless confined to your property. If an animal control officer picks up your dog, you will have to pay a fine.

Why do dogs escape?

- They are bored and looking for something to do.
- They are looking for a mate.
- They are scared and trying to escape from something.
- They suffer from separation anxiety.

What can I do?

First you must determine why your dog is escaping and then work on the underlying problem.

Your dog may be bored if:

- He spends long hours outside with little or no interaction from the family.
- His environment is sterile. There are no toys or playmates to entertain him.
- When he escapes, he goes to an area where he has fun like the neighbor's yard to play with another dog or a yard where lots of children play.
- He is an adolescent dog (under 3 years of age) or a very active breed.

Suggestions:

- Take your dog to Bone Jour dog day care a few times a week to break up the routine.
- Provide the dog with appropriate busy toys. Kong type toys that you can stuff food treats in will reward and encourage the dog to play with his toys. (See our Dog Toys handout)
- Take the dog obedience classes and practice the new commands daily.
- Provide appropriate outlets for the dog's energy by increasing his people time. Spend at least 20 minutes twice a day playing fetch or hide and seek with your dog.
- Walk your dog daily. This is good physical and mental exercise for both of you.
- Consider keeping your dog inside while you are gone.

Your dog may be looking for a mate if:

- He or she is not neutered or spayed. Intact animals have a strong desire to find a mate, which will make it very difficult to prevent them from escaping.
- Your dog is 6 months or older.

Suggestions:

- Neuter or spay your pet. Studies show that neutering will decrease sexual roaming in about 90% of the cases.
- Every year millions of unwanted pets are euthanized. Please don't contribute to the problem by letting your dog breed indiscriminately.

Your dog may be scared if:

- Your dog is pretty timid and shy or noises like thunder and fireworks scare the dog.

Suggestions:

- Identify what is causing the dog to be fearful then see our handout Fearful Behavior in Dogs on techniques to desensitize the dog to the fearful stimulus.
- Provide your dog with a safe place. Observe where the dog likes to go when he is scared and make sure he has access to it. Don't force him into an area or he will feel trapped.
- Leave your dog inside when he might be exposed to the fearful stimulus.

Your dog might have separation anxiety if:

- He escapes within a few minutes after you leave.
- He escapes every time you are gone but remains near the home.
- He displays other behaviors that indicate he may have separation anxiety like frantic greetings, following you from room to room, or anxious behavior when you get ready to leave

Some factors that may contribute to separation anxiety include a change in family schedule or structure, a move to a new house, or time spent in a shelter or boarding kennel.

Suggestions:

- See our handout on separation anxiety about desensitization and counter conditioning techniques.

What you can do in the mean time:

Most dogs do not jump over fences, but rather climb over or dig under. Listed below are some things that might help prevent the dog from escaping, but the reason why the behavior is occurring needs to be addressed.

- Add an extension on the top of the fence that angles 45 degrees inward.
- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence or place large rocks there.
- Make sure there is nothing near the fence that the dog can use to easily jump over like a doghouse or log pile.
- Use a trolley system, but make sure there is at least a 4-foot distance between the end of the leash and the fence.

These are only band-aids and if the cause is not fixed then the dog's behavior will be directed in other inappropriate behaviors like digging, chewing, or barking.

What NOT to do:

- Never punish after the fact. The dog will not associate punishment with escaping. It may make the dog afraid to come to you.
- If you catch your dog in the act, try to interrupt the behavior by a loud noise or a squirt of water. Remember to be effective, the correction must happen while the dog is either climbing or going under the fence and it must not be associated with you.

Door Dashing

Having a dog that stampedes out of an open door, bowling adults and children out of his way as he goes is a danger to himself and to others. This is a very dangerous habit for a pet since it means they could become lost, or injured by other animals and vehicles. There are two games for creating better door manners:

Crazy Door Syndrome

With your dog on a short leash (4 – 6 feet), walk up to the door. Open the door a tiny bit, then shut it fast. Never shut it ON the dog. The idea is to startle him, not hurt him. Repeat this until your dog stands back a bit to see what this crazy door is going to do.

When he stands back more, open the door a bit wider. Shut it suddenly if the dog moves toward it. Repeat. When the dog makes no moves toward the door, PRAISE, PET, TREAT. Let him know the exact behavior you want and give him positive reinforcement.

Outside Alone

Another game that can work is to put the dog on a leash, open the door and when he runs out, close the door on the leash and wait. Timing is very important because you do not want to shut the door ON the dog or give the dog too much lead and snap him back when the door closes. If he has too much lead, pull some through so he has only a foot or so of leash. After a few minutes, he'll get bored.

Open the door and invite him back in and praise him when he is inside. Pretend you had nothing to do with him being stuck outside. Repeat. Soon he'll start to wait until he sees what you're going to do before he goes through the door.

What do I do when my dog DOES escape out the door?

Coming back to you when he is called is one of the most important lessons you will ever teach your dog.

- With the dog on leash stand still and let him get interested in something else. When the dog is looking away say the dog's name and give the command "Come" in a bright cheerful voice.
- If he turns and comes towards you crouch down and pour on the praise "Good Come, Good Come." When he gets to you give him a treat.
- If he doesn't turn towards you give a gentle tug on the leash and when he does turn towards you follow the above steps.
- This is shaping his behavior with positive reinforcement; he will soon be running to you for his praise when he hears his name and the command "Come".

Remember the command to Come is a command linked with trust. Never call your dog to you to reprimand him or you will lose his trust and he will hesitate to ever come to you again.