



# Escape Prevention Tips: How to Help Prevent Your Dog from Getting Lost

There are many reasons dogs might choose to attempt to escape; excitement, the prospect of chasing something, stress, or even boredom. We recommend the information below to make sure you have strategies in place that will offer your dog the fewest opportunities to make an escape.

## Identification

- **Make sure your dog is wearing a collar with up-to-date tags.** If your dog escapes, it is important to have your contact information on the dog so that if found they can be returned to you without going to a shelter or vet clinic (which may have fees associated with redemption).
- **Ensure that your dog has an UP-TO-DATE MICROCHIP. This is ESSENTIAL.** If your dog escapes without any identification, you can still be contacted if they are picked up and taken to a shelter or vet clinic and scanned. Microchips cost between \$20-\$30 and last your dog's entire life. *You do not need to continue to pay a microchip company for them to continue to work;* you simply have to keep the information up to date, which generally can be done easily over the phone or via the company's website. So many animals who end up in shelters are not reunited with their original humans simply because they were not chipped. This is one of the easiest ways to ensure your dog makes their way home!

## Home tips

- **Use “airlock/catch-pen” systems** like baby-gates and x-pens in front of any exits to prevent door-darting. This way, any person walking in and out must go through one door and close it with the dog behind it, before opening the second. You can also consider “retractable pet gates” for deliveries.
- **Close windows and add screens or child-safety devices** that keep windows from opening more than a few inches.
- **In the car, ensure that your dog is either in a crate, securely on leash,** or that their harness is fastened with a harness seatbelt before any door is opened. Same for windows that are open more than a crack.

## Walking Equipment

- **Use secure walking equipment, sized correctly for the dog.** We recommend a harness with both front- and back-clip attachment options, such as Ruffwear or Freedom harnesses. If using a front clip, double clipping the lead to a martingale collar can provide two points of contact. If clipping the leash to a back clip, adding a safety strap can provide a similar second point of contact in case the dog slips out of the harness.
  - **Option 1: 6ft nylon leash.** We do not recommend the use of retractable leashes due to their risk of injury and failure, especially with large dogs.
  - **Option 2: A Biothane longline.** Though they take a bit of practice, a 12-15ft longline can make a HUGE difference for you and your dog, especially when paired with Decompression walks. Check out our **Decompress for Success** handout to learn more! Our favorite local company is [hightailhikes.com](http://hightailhikes.com). Their blog has lots of free training info!

## Training

- **Enroll in a basic training class** such as East Bay SPCA Skill Builders, sign up for a private training session, or attend a recall workshop to teach your dog how to come to you when called.
- **Enlist the help of a certified trainer on recall.** If planning an off-leash adventure, feel confident that you and your dog have practiced recall to the point where your dog will come to you quickly and consistently in new environments before taking them off leash completely.
- **If you are still practicing, let your dog drag a Biothane longline** (not a retractable leash) during your outing so that if your dog does not respond to you immediately you can simply get within 20-30ft of them, and step on/pick up the line. High Tail Hikes makes “drag” lines lacking the end loop specifically for this purpose.
  - **NOTE:** While many believe electronic collars (shock collars) as the only way to be completely sure your dog will return to you, a recent study in the UK found that using positive reinforcement was not only more effective than using aversive methods, but decreased the stress associated with the training for the dogs. You can read the study [here](#).

## Yards

- **If possible, do not leave your dog unattended in a yard,** as they may bite holes through the fence, break through loose boards, jump over the fence, dig, or cause general destruction to your fence or yard. It is important to note that tethering a dog in the yard can result in injury and cause more stress for the dog, and doing so for extended periods of time is illegal in California.
- **Check your fence for height and loose boards** and check boards monthly after adoption. Many dogs can jump fences that are 6-8ft high. You may need to replace your fence or add height if it is necessary to leave your dog unattended.

- **If desired, add a “coyote” roll-bar to the tops of fences and gates,** even if the fence is over 6’, but especially if it’s lower. Or, add an “eave” of 3’ that goes in towards the yard, at the top of the fence. Ensure that items that your dog can use as a “ladder” aren’t pushed up against the fence.
- **Consider lining your fence with heavy, flat concrete or brick paving stones** to prevent digging. Or add gardening mesh under the soil/fence, going in towards the yard for 1 or 2 feet. This prevents digging tunnels under the fencing.
- **Keep the gates to your yard locked so no strangers can leave them open accidentally.** Some dogs also know how to open latches that are not locked.
- **Clear communication.** You can add signage to make sure doors, windows, and gates are not opened by mistake. Clear instructions can prevent errors by visitors, delivery personnel, and even family members.
- **Explore leaving enrichment to occupy your dog when you are gone.** If boredom or separation distress are contributing factors, having tasty puzzles to work through can help to keep your dog occupied constructively. For a comprehensive look at enrichment, see our *Constructive Canine Enrichment* handout!