What to do when you are searching or have found a dog.

SEARCHING FOR A LOST DOG

It is very distressing to lose a dog and for most people, there is an immediate sense of panic. Sometimes that can make it more difficult to think about what steps to take, especially in those first few moments. What is important to remember is that your pet is counting on you to find him/her. You need to be the coordinator of the search effort and you will probably need help. If you are lucky, your pup will find his way home, but the longer you wait to start a search the harder it will be. Generally, people who succeed in finding their lost pet:

1. Communicate regularly on social media and update posts daily or when new information comes in. It is important to keep people enthusiastically searching and regular communication is the key.
2. Make sure that if someone else is following the main social media post that they are responding regularly and appropriately. Don’t hesitate to join new groups in order to post.
3. Follow the advice of experienced searchers. Be persistent. Don’t give up.
4. Don’t listen to bad advice (“don’t worry he will find his way home”)
5. Take all help that is offered but make sure everyone on the team understands how to approach a lost dog. See calming signals in third section
6. Put together a team to make and post fliers, to search, to help keep an eye on posts and shelters. You can have someone create a texting group for your searchers. Provide searchers with fliers.
7. Do not assume your dog is stolen. This can limit the search in an unhelpful way. If you have or can obtain video or pictures or information that leads you to believe it is stolen, report to the police and Animal Control. Make sure not to encourage other people to send messages to someone you think is responsible. This can make the person cut off contact, delete the post and disappear. You will lose any chance of getting your dog back. In addition, it can close down the site and create legal issues for you. If you have good video of a theft, contact David Rose of Channel 13.

SEARCH STEPS

1. Leave gates open and put pup’s blankets or bed out on the porch so that dog can smell them. Remember dogs have a keen sense of smell. DO NOT put food out on your porch or cat litter. These attract predators and can keep your pet from returning home.
2. Update chip company with current contact information and status (lost, stolen).
3. Immediately post to Nextdoor in both the lost pet page, and the lost and found page for the neighborhood. Also post to Pawboost, Neighbors, any local sites and blogs and Facebook (for the Seattle area lost dogs of king county is a good one) and anywhere else you can find. Update the top of the post regularly rather than putting information only in comments where it can get lost. That way any shared posts will also show that new info. Make sure posts have a picture, have accurate cross streets and town (not just landmarks) and contact information. Also, should include any pertinent behavioral information. I would keep one piece of information back in order to deal with scammers.
4. You may run into some kinds of negative issues. If anyone texts you and asks you to put in a code they are a scammer. DO NOT reply. A new scam is pretending to be a tracker and asking you to pay in advance, then showing you a website for a legitimate tracker to validate. Don’t pay in advance. Don’t meet people alone especially if rewards are involved. Rewards, surprisingly, don’t greatly increase your chances but it Is a personal decision. If you get someone who is piling on about what you should have done or what a bad owner you are, take a breathe and choose to either ignore, politely acknowledge a positive intent, or report to admin if it breaks that site’s rules. Remember your dog needs you and your personal feelings of hurt are not helpful to the search.
5. Place an item with the dog’s smell in 2 Ziplock bags in the freezer and consider hiring a tracker. Many of them are not costly and most lost pet sites can make recommendations. The trail goes cold after 3-5 days so contact a tracker early, as they may not be available immediately. In this area one of the most used dog trackers is 3retrievers. They also track cats.

When Searching

1. How far away to look may depend on your dog. Is there another place he is familiar with and might head to? How old or large is your dog? Where can the dog look for food or water? Is he wearing a leash or collar that might get stuck?
2. Look under cars, in briars, on cliffs, in garages, sheds, closets.
3. Ask your neighbors to check in these areas and on their cameras. Some businesses can be asked to look at video footage as well.
4. Create several kinds of fliers and signs:

--- large neon signs with a large picture of the dog, phone number in large letters and the words “Lost Dog-Do not chase”. These should be in places where drivers will be likely to see them. Like this: (both these dogs are still missing)

A sign on a pole

Description automatically generated with low confidenceA picture containing text, indoor

Description automatically generated

---You can make them into yard signs by attaching them to wooden stakes or by gluing to a backboard and buying metal sign legs, or a rescue may be able to lend you some. I am painting over some old election signs with plastic spray paint so that I can lend. These signs need to be made waterproof with either tape or self-laminate or/and sheet protectors.

---There should also be some smaller paper fliers. Some quarter- page small fliers to give out and some full-page size signs for backstreets so that you can really flood an area with signs. These can be placed UPSIDE DOWN in sheet protectors and taped at the bottom. These will mostly be seen by people walking but still should be very visible and without a lot of wordage. Many pet search sites such as Pawboost have signage templates you can use that makes it very easy.

-- Signage is expensive so be prepared. Definitely a staple gun and some tape are a must.

1. When searching talk to everyone you see who is approachable. Ask them to take a picture of a flier with their phone and if that isn’t their thing give them a small flier. Your dog needs you to not be shy.
2. Follow every lead.

When you find your/a dog-Calming signals (there are great videos about this)

1. On Lost Dogs of King County, they talk about Calming signals. Dogs when they are lost are usually in a panic mode and do not act as they normally would. Some dogs come when you call but very frequently dogs when lost will run even when it is their owner calling them. It is super important not to chase the dog out of a relatively safe area and into somewhere less safe, like traffic. There have been MANY cases of this happening and it is often a terrible result.
2. The cliff notes on calming signals are this:

--Do not approach dog directly. Sidle slowly up

--Sit or lie down (not kneel or crouch) on the ground facing away or to the side of the dog and not close enough to make him nervous.

--drop smelly treats such as Spam or Vienna sausages closer and closer towards the dog.

--You can look at the dog using your camera/phone over your shoulder, but you should not look the dog in the eye.

--Do not use your hand above a dog’s head to pat. If it eats from your hand, you can gradually get the dog used to the idea of a slip lead. No sudden movements.

--Let the owner know as soon as possible but make sure not to have a bunch of people come and disturb you if you are close to getting him.

--Be very very patient.

--If the dog has found a safe area and is staying around there, see if you can get someone with a trap or Animal Control

IF YOU FIND A DOG THAT IS NOT YOURS

1. Read calming signals above
2. Do not assume it is a “stray”. Sometimes dogs have medical issues or age that may make them seem abused, even if they are not. If you find but can’t contain the dog, get help from others or call Animal Control. The best thing is to get it to the shelter generally. The shelters in this area do not euthanize for breed or overcrowding (only for very serious aggression or medical issues). If you are unsure about the shelters in the area, you can call them. They work with fosters and rescues. Do not listen to people who bash shelters, especially in this area. Usually that is neither true nor helpful.
3. If they are in front of a house, make sure to talk to the people at that house or their neighbors (there have been quite a few instances where the dog turns out to be right in front of their own house). Walk dog through nearby area and look for signage about a lost dog or listen for people calling for the dog or driving through looking. The dog may lead you to his home.
4. Post on social media with pictures. Some people, even some veterinarians will tell you not to post a picture. This is bad advice. Without a picture heartbroken owners will be asking you if it is their dog and the real owner or friends of owners may miss your post, because they are looking on so many sites., You can hold back some detail to make sure you have the right owners. You can also ask for proof such as pictures of the dog on their phone, vet records, adoption papers etc. Get the contact information of anyone who says they are the owners. It is not legal to keep a dog from its owners so if you have any concerns about his welfare, please take to the shelter where they are equipped to investigate and take action.
5. Put some signage in the area where the dog was found.
6. Have it scanned for a chip. If it has a tag, that tag may lead you directly to the owner or to a vet office that knows the dog. Check with local shelters and pet related businesses.
7. The best thing is to bring the dog to the shelter, where the owner is most likely to look. If you have concerns about your local shelter, get advice from experienced local searchers. If you take it to the shelter you can ask to foster the dog or be at the top of the adopt list. Do not give the dog to someone else to keep unless you cannot hold the dog or get them to the shelter. If you do have someone hold them overnight or over a weekend, make sure they are close neighbors and make sure they take the dog to the shelter as soon as possible. Alternatively, many vet offices will take care of a dog and get it to the shelter. On local dog sites people can advise which ones, or you can just call around. There are some 24-hour vet offices.
8. It is not legal to rehome a dog without a 30-day active search. Even if you do a search, the owner may still have legal rights to the dog. It is always better to have the shelter rehome as they are equipped to vet possible owners and to make it a legal adoption. A 30-day active search means taking all the steps above. If you are not able to do this, please take the dog to the shelter. Also, the shelter can provide medical care.
9. An active search means all of these steps.

WHEN IT’S OVER

When you are done with the search for a dog or it’s owner, you should remove all signs. Often others will help but it is important to remove old signage so that the next person looking for their dog does not need to compete with other signage and so people see and pay attention to the current search, not one that is already over. Also make sure your social media posts are updated so people know you were reunited and don’t keep looking. I personally try to give as much of a story as possible as it helps to encourage people to search in the future. If you are an owner who lost and then recovered your dog, please look into loss prevention techniques. These include GPS tracking collars, making sure you have a chip with current info and check that chip once a year (they move sometimes), adding something to the top of your fence or digging it down deeper, using a baby gate in the house, using a martingale collar or collar and harness. If you have been through it once you don’t want to ever have it happen again.