



Escape Behaviors

What to do if your dog regularly escapes

Register your microchip!

If you have a dog that is currently struggling with some escape behaviors, this document will help you find solutions. First and foremost, if you have not yet registered your dog's microchip, please take the time to do it now. Many dogs enter the shelter system because their owners did not update their contact information with the microchip company. This is one of the most reliable ways we can utilize to identify pets and reunite them with their family.

Although this list is not comprehensive, you can apply these same concepts to fit your situation. We suggest that you plan at least 2 barriers between your dog and the outside world if this is something that you are continuing to struggle with.

Select an appropriate collar and/or harness!

Martingale collars are helpful to prevent a dog from pulling backwards out of their collar. To prevent your dog from escaping, this might be an option to consider. If your dog regularly slips out of his harness, consider using a carabiner clip and attach the collar to the harness. This provides insurance that if they can get out of one, they will still have the other attached.

What if my dog bolts out the door?

Bolting out of the front door is a common problem for dogs. If you think about it, the outside world has so many fun and exciting new smells! It is a very reinforcing environment for dogs, so it can be a hard habit to break. There are lots of options and it will all depend on your specific situation. Always make sure when opening the door to grab your delivery, you have a plan in place to ensure your dog cannot escape! For example, have a plan before you open your door to grab a delivery. Ideally, as stated before, you want to work on preparing 2 barriers to keep them inside in case one of them fails. Please also make sure that you have a plan for unannounced visitors. Don't allow them to enter without your knowledge and ability to secure your dog(s). Place signs on the door that tell people your protocol. If you know someone is coming over, tell them your new entrance protocols. It is for the safety of your guests and your dog(s). Ideas to add to your home or routine to keep your dog secure: add a secure storm door, place a baby gate in the entrance of your front door, train your dog to wait for a release cue at all doors, put your dog in a crate before opening the door, put your dog on a leash before opening the door, put your dog in the backyard before opening the door, put your dog in a different room behind a baby gate or behind a closed door, get someone to hold onto the dog's collar at a distance from the door, etc.

What if my dog gets out of our fence and/or gate?

If your dog is consistently trying to escape the yard by jumping over the fence, digging under the fence, or breaking through the fence, it is highly advised that you do not allow your dog to be outside unsupervised. If they continue to try to escape even when someone is outside supervising them, you may want to consider putting them on a long-line leash or a tether.

A long-line leash will require someone to hold the end but can allow the dog the freedom to move around the yard as they desire. A plastic coated, wire tether may be another option. There are posts that can be secured in the ground to provide them with an anchor. When placed in the center of the yard, the dog should be able to move around without getting tangled on any item. When dogs are on tethers, they should always be monitored due to their potential for injury. Never place 2 dogs on tethers in the same yard. There is a high risk of injury or becoming tangled in the tethers.

Another option may be to train dogs so that they cannot pass through the gate without a release cue. This is something that requires lots of diligent training, but it can be achieved with great success. Always use positive reinforcement training methods and make sure to proof the behavior by introducing distractions that might cause your dog to disregard the training and revert back to their original escape tendencies. Another option is to consider adding extensions to the top or bottom of the fence. These can be effective, but also expensive.

What if my dog pulls away from me on leash?

One very common problem behavior with dogs is pulling on leash. This can often become a problem for owners if they are unable to hold onto the leash tight enough to prevent escape. Dogs have what is known as an opposition reflex. When choosing their walking equipment, consider this concept. When a dog is pulled backward using leash pressure, they will pull in the opposite direction. This can be made worse by a back clip harness or a collar. One easy way to work on this skill is to attach their leash to a front-clip harness. The position of the clip in the front will allow the pulling to direct the dog to one side instead of pulling forward.

Another way to work on this is to train loose leash walking skills using positive reinforcement training. This is a super common problem for dog owners, so if you are struggling with this, consider reaching out to a local positive reinforcement trainer to learn effective ways to train this behavior.

Consider walking your dog in specific, controlled environments. For dogs that struggle with big feelings of reactivity while walking through a busy neighborhood, maybe you try walking them in a large open field away from the normal distractions. You could very easily load up into the car, drive to a nearby park and use an open field as your walking location instead of the busy neighborhood. As a bonus, taking your dog to a new environment will also stimulate their need to sniff which is a calming behavior and can help tire them out a little quicker. It is a very enriching experience for dogs to get to explore the world with their noses.

Get creative, be flexible, and make a plan!