

# Search Plan for Lost Dogs

## I. Checking Sightings

- When you receive a call about a potential sighting, try and get as much detail as possible:
  - Exact location including nearby landmarks.
  - How did your dog look (e.g. skinny, healthy, injured)?
  - How was your dog behaving (e.g. walking, running, exploring) and how did they respond to the person reporting the sighting (e.g. approached, accepted food, ran off quickly)?
  - Caller's name and phone number in case you need to call back for additional information.
- Do not provide too much detail about your dog's appearance, and don't use leading questions. This can rule out more false sightings.
  - Do not ask "Was the dog you saw wearing a red collar?"
  - Instead ask "Was the dog you saw wearing a collar? If yes, "What color was it?"
- If possible, withhold at least one indentifying characteristic of your dog's appearance. This can help you rule out any potential scammers.
- The best tool in this case is a photo line-up.
  - Copy a series of pictures of your dog and other dogs that look somewhat like her. You can get these other pictures off the internet (just do a search of Google Images for a dog like your own such as "small white dog"). See if the potential witness can correctly pick your dog out of the line-up of pictures. Don't make them too similar, and don't use the same picture that is on the posters or flyers. You just want to rule out sightings that are clearly not your dog.
  - As you check more sightings, try and get photos of dogs from false sightings, and add these to your photo line-up.
  - Some people prefer to also bring along a collection of additional pictures of their dog to further confirm identity.
- If possible, meet the potential witness where they saw the dog.
  - Show them pictures of your dog to help confirm identity or use a photo line-up.
  - Make sure to leave them with a flyer or business card.
  - Ask them to contact you immediately if they have another sighting and not to try and catch your dog themselves.
  - You might ask them to try and get a picture of your dog if they can't get in touch with you. Many people have cameras on their phones or you could give them a disposable camera. However, if your dog is extremely skittish, tell them not to attempt to approach him/her.
- Actions to take at the location of a potential sighting:
  - Distribute flyers in the area to see if anyone else has a dog that looks like yours and runs loose. However, also keep in mind that this does not rule out that your dog may also be in the area.
  - Put up a few large posters in the area and up to several miles out from the sighting.
- If you get more than one sighting in the same location
  - Put up a surveillance camera and some food to try and get confirmation that it is your dog. This can then be followed up with a humane trap.
- Sometimes you may receive numerous sightings and it is hard to know where to focus. One option here is to hire a search dog team to check and verify several sightings.
- Make sure that you always keep supplies in your car when checking sightings in case you see your dog!

## II. If You See Your Dog

- Do not loudly call his name or try to approach him directly. Never try to chase your dog!
- Preferably sit down and don't face him directly. Some people have had better luck by lying down on the ground though this can confuse some dogs.
- Talk in your "indoor voice" using any pet names or familiar phrases that might help him recognize you.
- Try to remain calm and remember to breathe! Turning your head away and yawning are calming signals for dogs. You can try to use these too.
- Set out some smelly food nearby and then sit down about 10-20 feet away (again not facing him directly). Pretending or actually eating some food or crinkling a treat bag may also help draw your dog closer. Have additional bits of food ready to toss on the ground and get him even closer.
- If your dog will get close to you, but still seems skittish, it is best to use a slip lead or create a loop using the handle end of a regular leash. This can be slipped over your dog's head rather than attempting to grab his collar, which may scare him further and cause him to potentially bite you in fear or slip out of his collar.
- Try and be patient. It can take an hour or more to coax a dog close enough to you.
- If your dog still will not approach, some other tricks can be used to try and change his fearful mindset. If you have another dog or he has a dog friend, have someone bring them to the location. Call this dog's name instead and walk away like you are going on a walk. Alternatively, try playing with this dog where your dog can see you. Even if you don't have another dog; you can still try playing with another person with one of your dog's favorite toys if he cares for any type of fetch games. Some dogs can also be convinced to jump into a car if they enjoy car rides. Again don't call his name, but use a familiar phrase and then get into the car leaving another door open if he doesn't immediately approach.
- If your dog still won't approach you, then you could set out a humane trap. Depending on how frightened your dog appears, you could either sit nearby (at least 10-20 feet away) or sit in your car and watch the trap. In some cases, you may need to trap for several days or more. Additional trapping and surveillance instructions are available on the Lost Pet Research website.

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If you find the search plan overwhelming, consider contacting Lost Pet Research & Recovery (<http://lostpetresearch.com>) for assistance in managing and prioritizing your search actions based on your unique situation. Lost Pet Research & Recovery also offers phone consultations and on-site support such as assistance searching, rental of humane traps and surveillance cameras, assistance trapping skittish lost dogs, and creation of highly effective lost pet posters and flyers.