



Search Checklist for Cats Lost Away From Home

Cats may become lost away from home for several reasons: 1) they escape from a distant location such as the vet or while traveling, 2) they recently moved to a new home or were recently adopted, or 3) they are either accidentally or intentionally transported out of the area such as in a car. Whether indoor-only or outdoor-access, a lost cat is likely to be scared, and their natural instinct is to hide and remain silent. Even if you have an inseparable bond with your cat, do not expect them to come out or meow when you search and call their name. Some cats will, but most cats are too frightened to do so. Even if you cannot find your cat with repeated searches, it is very likely that they are still out there somewhere. Do not give up hope!

1. How to Conduct a Thorough Physical Search

A. If Last Seen Indoors, then Start with a Thorough Search Indoors

This applies to cats lost from new homes, other people's homes or other locations, such as the vet's office. A scared cat may hide and not come out for days or even weeks. Do not expect your cat to respond to your voice.

- Search within the first 1-2 days or as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- If there is any chance your cat is trapped or hiding in fear, repeat the search at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond to your voice after being hidden or trapped for this long.

B. Search the Surrounding Area

Search all potential hiding spots on properties 3-5 houses (or 500 feet to ¼ mile) in all directions. Make sure to get the property owners' permission before doing this.

- This is most effective if done within the first 1-3 days, but some skittish cats will remain hidden longer.
- Get permission to search in any structure that has been opened since your cat escaped, such as sheds, garages or basements. Search under porches, sheds and decks with a flashlight. Be careful searching in brushy areas.
- If there was any location you could not thoroughly search, such as a closed or full shed, repeat your search at these locations at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond after being hidden for this long.
- When it is quietest, try walking around the area with a flashlight and look for the eye-shine of any cats.

C. Hire a Search Dog

- If you are potentially interested in hiring a search dog team, then read this article so you know what to expect: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/search-dogs. Very few cats are found using a search dog.

2. How to Conduct EFFECTIVE Advertising

A. Create and Post Well-Designed Posters

This is one of the most important things you can do! Pet detectives report a success of anywhere from 40-90% with well-made posters.

- Check for any town bylaws stating where and how signs may be legally posted.
- Start with posters in the immediate area and up to 1 mile.
- Expand posters 2-3 miles if there are no sightings.
- Some outdoor-access cats will attempt to return home on their own. If your cat was lost within 5 miles of home (or a previous home), then place posters at major intersections between home and the location your cat was lost.
- Posters are easiest to read if placed where cars must slow down or stop.
- Your phone number and cat's picture must be large enough that they can be easily seen and read by someone sitting in a car or driving. Include a brief description of your cat and the date they were last seen.



B. Contact and Visit Shelters and Rescue Groups

- Find a list of all the shelters and rescue groups in the area: lostpetresearch.com/resources/shelters_rescue_groups.
- Visit and provide a copy of your flyer. Ask to see all cats and not just those on the adoption floor. If you cannot visit, at least submit a lost pet report. Don't skip this step even if your cat is microchipped.
- Find out how long they hold new cats before putting them up for adoption, and visit at least this often.

C. Animal Control, Vets and Department of Public Works

- Contact the local Animal Control Officer and find out if they pick up stray cats. Submit a lost pet report.
- Contact all local vets and your closest emergency vets and give them a copy of your flyer.
- Cars rather than predators are often the greatest danger to lost cats. Find out who in your area picks up deceased animals and if they check cats for microchips/ID tags. This may be the Department of Public Works.

D. Distribute Flyers

Flyers should be hand-delivered or placed in locations where people walk. Explain that your cat may be hiding in fear, and ask people to check their property for any sign of your lost cat. **Flyers should not be used in place of posters where people are driving. This is the most frequent mistake that people make!**

- Start by distributing flyers in the immediate area (up to ¼ mile) that your cat escaped or went missing.
- Flyers may also be distributed in areas of potential sightings.
- Post flyers at any local businesses, parks, pet supply stores, gas stations, and the library and post office.
- Give flyers to anyone who regularly works in the area, such as the mailman and newspaper delivery person.

E. Is Your Cat's Microchip Up-to-Date?

- If your cat is microchipped, make sure that the microchip is registered, and your contact information is up-to-date. Contact the microchip company and see if they provide additional lost pet support.

F. Post Lost Pet Ads

Only a small percentage of lost indoor-cats are found through online posting, but it is still an important step.

- Post online ads on local sites such as craigslist, NextDoor.com and any local newspapers.
- Post your cat to online databases. For a list of recommended sites see: lostpetresearch.com/online-posting.
- Post on your Facebook page and share with any local nonprofit and "Community" pages for lost or stray pets.
- Check online (petfinder.com) and in newspapers for any found, adoptable or for sale cats that might be yours.

3. How to Locate and Catch Your Cat Using Trapping & Surveillance Techniques

A. Set Humane Traps

- Borrow or purchase a humane trap or two. **This is often the best way to catch a frightened lost cat.** Place one trap outside near the point where your cat escaped. Some cats will return to these locations (even if it's the vet's office). Traps can also be used in the area of a verified sighting or if you see your cat and can't catch them. See: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/trapping

B. Use Surveillance Equipment

- Trapping or feeding stations (i.e. food placed out for your lost cat) are most effective if used with some form of surveillance such as wildlife cameras, motion alarms, baby monitors or security cameras. See: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/surveillance

C. Leave a Way for your Cat to Return

- Some outdoor-access cats will attempt to return to a previous home if you recently moved. Other cats will attempt to return to their point of escape. If possible, leave a way for your cat to get inside, such as an open porch, garage or window. If someone else lives in your former home, let them know that your cat is missing.
- Place some items from home that smell like your lost cat near where they got out. Do not place litter outside.

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