

Search Checklist for Lost Dogs

Lost dogs generally fall into two categories: 1) friendly and/or cute dogs that are picked up by someone (often shortly after they go missing), and 2) less friendly or skittish dogs that remain loose and can roam for a long period of time. Even if your dog appears to have vanished without a trace, 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. Search Inside

- If you are not sure that your dog is lost outside, then search the area they were last seen thoroughly.

B. Search the Surrounding Area

- Do a quick but thorough search of the immediate area (up to 1/4 miles in all directions).
- Get permission to search in any buildings that were open when your dog went missing, such as sheds, garages or basements. Keep in mind that dogs can hide or get trapped in some unusual places.
- If you must leave the area, then leave something that smells like you (e.g. a blanket) for your dog to find.

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/resources/search-dogs. Few dogs are found during the search with a tracking 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 3 miles.
- Expand posters to 5-10 miles if no sightings.
- Do not include a reward or your dog's name unless your dog is very friendly.
- Posters should be large and brightly colored.
- Your phone number and dog's picture must be large enough that they can be easily read by someone sitting in a car or driving. Also include a very brief description of your dog and the date that they went missing or were last seen.
- Get creative and attach posters to your car or use window markers and write a lost dog ad on your car.



B. Distribute Flyers

Flyers should be hand-delivered or placed in locations where people walk. **Flyers should not be used in place of posters where people are driving. This is the most frequent mistake that people make!**

- Hand out flyers in the immediate area and near any potential sightings.
- Post flyers at any local businesses, parks, pet supply stores, gas stations, and the library and post office.
- Visit local events and distribute flyers.
- There are companies that will mail postcards or send an automated phone message to everyone in the area that your dog went missing. See: lostpetresearch.com/resources/amber-alerts

C. 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. If you absolutely cannot visit, at least submit a lost pet report. Do not skip this step even if your dog is microchipped.
- Ask to see all dogs, including those not on the adoption floor. New and sick dogs may be in a separate area.
- Find out how long they hold new dogs before putting them up for adoption, and visit at least this often.
- If you don't find your dog within one week, then expand to all shelters within 50 miles.

D. Is Your Dog's Microchip Up-to-Date?

- If your dog 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.

E. Contact Animal Control, Vets and Department of Public Works

- Contact your local Animal Control Officer or Police Department and submit a lost dog report.
- Depending on your location, you may also want to contact these agencies in surrounding towns as well.
- Contact all local vets within 25 miles and your closest emergency vets and give them a copy of your flyer.
- Cars are a danger to any lost dog. Find out who in your town picks up deceased animals and if they check them for microchips/ID tags. This may be the Department of Public Works or Animal Control.

F. Post Lost Pet Ads

- Post online ads on local sites such as craigslist, NextDoor.com and any local newspapers.
- Post your dog 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 dogs that might be yours.

3. Checking Sightings and Catching Your Dog

These methods may be necessary if your dog is skittish or a newly-adopted rescue dog. However, it is not uncommon for a lost dog (even a normally friendly dog) to become very frightened when lost and run from everyone.

A. Checking Sightings

- Always have some of your dog's favorite treats and a leash on-hand.
- If you get repeated sightings of your dog in an area, try sitting and reading a book for a few hours. Frightened dogs are more likely to approach a stationary person. This can also be done in the area your dog went missing.
- Leave out some items that smell like you or anyone with whom your dog is bonded.

B. If You See Your Dog

- Do not chase your dog! Sometimes even approaching your dog or calling their name can cause them to run.
- Some ways to calm a frightened dog: 1) do not look directly at your dog or walk towards them, 2) kneel down or sit facing away from your dog or even lie down on your back, 3) be quiet or sing quietly, 4) yawn, 5) pretend to eat or crinkle a treat bag.

C. Set Humane Traps

- Some very frightened or skittish dogs are easiest to capture in a humane trap or enclosure trap. You may be able to borrow one from your local shelter or animal control. Never use a trap that you think is too small!
See: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/trapping

D. Use Surveillance Equipment

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

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This is only a very brief list of search actions. There is much more that you could be doing to find your lost dog! Visit Lost Pet Research & Recovery (LostPetResearch.com) for additional lost dog resources and professional search and recovery services. If you received this checklist from anyone other than Lost Pet Research and Recovery, please visit our website to ensure that you have the most up-to-date version. If you would like to distribute this checklist, please submit a Contact Form to request permission.