

Search Plan for Lost Indoor-Only Cats

How to Use This Guide: Searching for an escaped indoor-only cat can feel overwhelming. Don't give up hope! Start with Sections A and B. Then focus on the most important search actions listed. Sections D and H are also important to review. If you need more help, see Section J.

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Be sure to start here! When lost, your cat is unlikely to behave the way you expect, and you could easily miss finding them.

B. Effect of Cat Personality and Outdoor Experience – 3

Learn what search strategies work best and how far your cat is likely to travel based on their personality and outdoor experience.

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You may feel like you have searched already, but most people don't conduct an effective physical search. Make sure you learn how.

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A. What You Need to Know About Lost Indoor Cat Behavior

Your cat will probably NOT respond to you or come out of hiding when you search

When escaped outdoors or lost, most indoor cats will enter Survival Mode. In Survival Mode a lost cat will often hide in fear, remain silent, run from people they know and travel mostly at night. Many cats will not meow or come out of hiding even when they hear or see someone that they have a very strong bond with at home. For this reason, do not expect your cat to come out of hiding or meow when you search and call their name. Some cats will but many cats are too frightened to do so.

Your cat is most likely hiding somewhere nearby

The majority of escaped indoor-only cats will hide within 500 feet from their location lost with an average distance of only 130 feet. Extremely bold cats or those with prior outdoor experience may travel farther, but most are still found within ¼ mile even when lost for several months.

Just because you can't find your cat and nobody has seen them, doesn't mean that they're not around

Even if you do a very thorough search of the area, you may not find your cat even if they are nearby. Most indoor-only cats are incredibly good at hiding and will often only come out at night. Due to these behaviors, it is not unusual to have zero sightings of a lost indoor cat for a week or more. The search methods in this guide will help you find your cat sooner even with zero sightings. If you use the right search methods, between 60-80% of lost indoor cats are found.

Despite what people may tell you, your lost cat was probably NOT eaten by a coyote or other predator

As you speak with friends and neighbors, you may hear that coyotes have been seen or heard in the area. Other people may tell you that they lost their own cat and never found them. The sad fact is that many people that lose a cat, do very little to find their cat and often assume that they were eaten by a predator. Most indoor-only cats are incredibly good at hiding and manage to keep themselves safe even in areas with coyotes or other predators.

B. Effect of Cat Personality and Outdoor Experience on Lost Cat Behavior*

This information will help you determine which search actions are most important

Is your cat skittish, cautious or scares easily?	Is your cat bold, outgoing, or friendly with strangers?
<p>If yes, is your cat strictly indoor-only and never been outside?</p> <p>These cats are most likely to hide close to home or their point of escape. Most are found within 500 feet from home but occasionally as far as ¼ mile. They are very likely to stay in Survival Mode and some will remain in hiding for as long as 4-14 days. They are likely to only travel at night.</p> <p>Surveillance and trapping are the most effective search tactics. Repeated physical searches close to home are also recommended.</p> <p>Talking with your neighbors and local advertising can help, especially if your cat is missing more than one week.</p>	<p>If yes, is your cat strictly indoor-only and never been outside?</p> <p>Many of these cats will initially hide and enter Survival Mode. However, they are more likely to come out sooner and may be seen during the day. Most are found within ¼ mile of the point of escape but up to 1 mile is possible. There is a greater chance of them being rescued by someone or brought to a shelter or rescue group, especially if they are lost for several weeks or longer.</p> <p>Surveillance, trapping, and physical searches are most important. Talking with neighbors and door-to-door flyers are also important.</p> <p>Posters, online advertising, and contacting shelters/rescues should also be done sooner with very bold cats.</p>
<p>If yes, does your cat have prior outdoor experience? Were they adopted as a stray or feral cat?</p> <p>These cats are still likely to hide nearby initially. However, they are more likely to start moving around at night sooner, and some may even be seen during the day. Once moving, they may travel farther from home. Most are still found within ¼ mile, but some may travel up to 2 miles, especially former feral cats.</p> <p>Skittish former feral cats are the most challenging cats to find, but many can be found with persistence. They can often survive for months or even years outside.</p> <p>Surveillance, trapping, and physical searches are still important. Advertising is much more important in this case since the cat may travel farther from home.</p>	<p>If yes, does your cat have prior outdoor experience? Were they adopted as a stray or feral cat?</p> <p>These cats may hide at first and may still enter Survival Mode, especially if they are lost outside overnight. However, they are more likely to come out sooner and be seen during the day. Many are still found within ¼ mile, but former stray or feral cats may travel up to 2 miles. These cats have the greatest chance of being rescued by someone or brought to a shelter or rescue group.</p> <p>With these cats you really need to try everything because there is an equal possibility of them hiding close to home or traveling farther away. Surveillance, trapping, and physical searches are all important.</p> <p>They are also the most likely to be rescued or brought to a shelter/rescue, so increased advertising and contacting these groups is also important.</p>

*Note: These are generalizations and are not true for every cat in that category. Each cat will behave differently based on their personality, outdoor experience, circumstances of disappearance, and environment lost. For a more customized search plan, you may want to consider a consultation with a pet detective.

C. How To Conduct A Thorough Physical Search	Important Information	When To Do
<p>1. Search Indoors (if you are not 100% sure your cat is outside)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First check all the places that your cat likes to hide or sleep. These are the most likely places to find your cat if they are sick or injured and hiding. • Do not expect your cat to respond to your voice. Cats that are hiding or trapped often don't meow for as long as 7-10 days. • Search every small space with a good flashlight. A cat may fit into any space that their head will fit into, so don't overlook small hiding spots. A borescope or your phone camera/video can help you see in tight spaces. • In any room not normally used (e.g., garage, attic, basement) consider putting out some cat food and a clean litterbox. A security or wifi camera can also be helpful. • Some places lost cats have been found include inside walls, floors, or ceilings, behind cabinets, inside drawers, couches, chairs, box spring mattresses, attics, basements or crawl spaces. 	<p>If you are unsure that your cat is outside, always conduct a thorough indoor search.</p> <p>This is important if your cat is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very old or a kitten • Possibly sick or injured • Newly adopted • Recently moved to a new home • Very skittish • Has become trapped or hidden before 	<p>Do one very thorough search as soon as possible.</p> <p>Repeat your search at least once after a week. Cats that are hiding or trapped may not meow for as long as 7-10 days.</p> <p>Some cats have been trapped for up to 4-6 weeks and still survived.</p>
<p>2. Search Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search a 3-5 house radius in all directions around your home. Alternatively, search 250 feet (urban), 500 feet (suburban) to ¼ mile (rural) around your home. See this article for information on using online maps in your search. • Talk to your neighbors and get permission to search their yards. See "The Importance of Talking to Your Neighbors" (Section E). • Thoroughly search anyplace that your cat might hide using a bright flashlight. • Use your phone camera or a borescope to help you search inside tight spaces. • If possible, get permission to search in any structures that were left open since your cat went missing such as sheds, garages, or basements. If you cannot get inside, talk outside and listen. • Escaped indoor cats rarely respond to their owner's calls, but it doesn't hurt to try. Don't call loudly for your cat. Speak in a normal voice and talk to them the way you would within your own home. Be sure to stop and spend time listening as well. • When it is quietest (often late night or before dawn), try walking around your neighborhood (up to ¼ mile) and call for your cat. Bring a flashlight and search under cars and in front yards for the eye-shine of any cats. 	<p>Cats with no outside experience and skittish temperaments are most likely to hide nearby.</p> <p>However, many escaped indoor-only cats never travel farther than a few houses from home.</p> <p>Don't search at all hours of the night, every night. Give your cat plenty of quiet time to return home on their own. See Surveillance and Trapping Section F.</p>	<p>Search as soon as possible, but some cats are still found hiding up to two weeks after they escaped.</p> <p>Many cats will return close to home during the night and hide. Repeat your search daily in your own yard for the first week.</p> <p>If possible, search neighbors' yards at least twice in the first two weeks. If trapped or scared your cat may not meow for 7-10 days.</p> <p>Even if you can't get into yards, repeat walking your neighborhood up to ¼ mile and calling for your cat.</p>

C. How To Conduct A Thorough Physical Search	Important Information	When To Do
<p>Where Cats Hide Outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common hiding spots include under sheds, decks, porches, and inside garages, sheds, barns, and culverts. When they first escape, your cat may hide in some less secure spots such as under a canoe, tarp, grill cover, or inside a window well or bush. If it is cold out, check the engine and wheel wells of any cars in your driveway. Cats may hide in engines to keep warm. Check up in trees. This is sometimes easier to do with a flashlight at dusk. Watch for reflection of any eye-shine. <i>Be VERY careful about searching in dense brush/woods. You may accidentally scare your cat out of the area often without ever seeing them.</i> 	<p>Focus your search around buildings and the edges of woods. Most cats do not go deep into the woods and if the vegetation is thick, you are more likely to accidentally scare your cat away rather than find them.</p> <p>NEVER organize search parties in the woods unless your cat is potentially in danger such as dragging a leash.</p>	<p>The longer your cat is lost outside, the more likely they will be moving around and be seen. It is not unusual to find a lost indoor cat within ¼ mile of home months after they got outside.</p>
<p>3. Use a Search Dog</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be aware that there are different types of search dogs including: tracking or trailing dogs, cat detection dogs, and remains detection dogs. Escaped indoor cats are often the easiest type of search for a search dog. However, your chances of success without a search dog are also high. Few searches end with the search dog finding the lost cat. In most cases, the search dog can help you determine where to focus your search such as where to distribute flyers or set up a humane trap and surveillance camera. To use a trailing dog, you need a scent article that smells only like your missing cat. This is most important if any of your other cats or dogs have been outside in the search area. Place this in an unscented plastic bag to prevent further scent contamination. Expect a search to cost somewhere between \$500-\$2,000 or more. There are very few volunteer or low-cost search dog teams available. For more detailed information on search dogs, visit Lost Pet Research & Recovery. 	<p>Very few searches end with the lost cat being immediately found. Walk-up find rates are typically between 5-30%.</p> <p>A search dog is most likely to find your cat if they are hiding, trapped, or deceased.</p> <p>Using a search dog is more important if your cat is elderly, sick or injured and finding them quickly is a priority.</p> <p><i>Do not spread your cat's litter around the yard. This will confuse the search dog.</i></p>	<p>Start trying to locate a search dog team ASAP. They are few and far between and they may not be immediately available.</p> <p>Search dogs are most useful when used in the first week, but some search dogs are capable of following a scent trail several weeks old.</p> <p>Search dogs can also be used to check potential sightings.</p>

D. Know What to Do If You See Your Cat

Use calming signals and don't chase your cat

- If you see your cat, do not immediately attempt to approach them, and do NOT chase them if they run. An escaped indoor cat is often in Survival Mode and may not recognize you even if they see you and you call to them.
- You will have a much better chance of catching your cat if you lure them to you rather than attempt to approach them. If possible, sit or lie down to appear less threatening. Slow eye blinks and yawns are calming signals for cats. You can try these too.
- If your cat is meowing at you, this means that they recognize you, but they may still run if scared. In this case, you could try slowly moving closer, but either scooch along the ground or sit down again every few steps. Don't approach them directly or you may look like you are stalking them.
- If your cat runs off or disappears, don't panic, and don't chase them! There is a very good chance that they will return. Most indoor cats don't run far as long as they are not chased.

If you see your cat outside your house or on surveillance camera

- Try to resist rushing outside and calling your cat's name. There's a good chance your cat is still in Survival Mode and will run when the door opens, especially if you move quickly or approach them.
- Open the door gently and step away from the doorway. If your cat runs away, just leave the door open. Stay inside and sit down off to the side of the door. Talk or call to your cat quietly. Place some food at least 10-20 feet inside the door. Wait until your cat is eating the food or has approached you and allows you to pet them before trying to close the door.
- If your cat is meowing, but not coming closer, you could try slowly moving outside. Sit on the steps and continue to talk to them.
- It may be safer to lure them into the house rather than trying to pick them up and carry them inside.
- If your cat runs away, leave the door open for an hour or two if you can safely do so. Your cat is likely to return though it may take a night or two.

If you see your cat while outside searching

- Do not loudly call their name or try to approach them directly. Never chase your cat!
- Try to lure them towards you. Preferably sit down and don't face your cat directly. Talk calmly and quietly using any pet names or familiar phrases that might help your cat recognize you. Slow eye blinks and yawns are calming signals for cats. You can try these too.
- You can attempt to lure your cat with food or treats. If they won't approach you, put down a few treats and then slowly move 10-20 feet away.
- Don't try to pick up your cat until they allow you to pet them. If possible, make sure that you have a towel or pillowcase to wrap your cat after you pick them up in case they panic. This often works better than trying to stuff them in a cat carrier.
- If you find your cat hiding, don't scare them out of their hiding spot. Try and be patient. It can take an hour or more to coax a cat out of hiding.
- If your cat still won't approach you or runs away, see Surveillance and Trapping (Section F) for more options.

E. The Importance of Talking to Your Neighbors

- If possible, go door-to door and talk to all neighbors within a 3 to 5 house radius around where your cat went missing. People will often tell you things in person that they won't bother to call about. They will also be more invested in helping you if they interact with you face to face.
- At the same time, try and get permission to search hiding spots on their property. Don't trust them to do a thorough search on their own.
- Most people are sympathetic about a lost cat, but they also can't seem to help being pessimistic. Be aware that people are very likely to mention that there are coyotes, bobcats, fishers, etc. around. Try not to let this get your hopes down.
- If you can't go door-to-door, make sure that you are using other methods to get the word out to every neighbor.

How to get permission to search yards and important questions to ask:

- Explain that your cat is an escaped indoor cat and is probably hiding in fear.
- Ask if you can do a quick search of any hiding spots on their property.
- Ask if any sheds, barns, or garages were left open overnight since your cat went missing. If yes, can you search these also?
- Ask if they have security cameras on their property. If they do, would they mind checking for video of your cat?
- Be sure to give them a flyer or have them take a photo of a poster so they can easily get in touch with you if they see your cat.

F. Surveillance and Trapping Techniques	Important Information	When To Do
1. Leave a Way for Your Cat to Return Home <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If possible, leave a way for your cat to get back into the house, onto a porch or into the garage or basement. Your cat may return and hide, so search thoroughly before closing up a basement, shed or garage.• Use security or wildlife cameras to monitor around your home or any entrances left open.• I generally don't recommend putting a litterbox outside. Learn more here.• Don't put out food (unless in a trap) for the first 3-4 nights. Give your cat a chance to return home without the risk of attracting other animals.• Place clothing or bedding that smells like someone that your cat has a strong bond near the entrance to your home. Make sure that it does not blow in the wind. Every time you leave your home and search, you are also leaving scent trails.	<p>Between 30-50% of escaped indoor cats will attempt to return home.</p> <p>Indoor cats are most likely to return home between 12am-4am during the first week.</p> <p>However, most cats will NOT let you know they are there, so surveillance and trapping are very important!</p>	<p>Returning home is most common during nights 4-7 after they get outside.</p> <p>However, some cats will return several weeks to months after they escaped.</p> <p>I recommend leaving a way for their return for at least two weeks and up to six weeks.</p>

F. Surveillance and Trapping Techniques	Important Information	When To Do
<p>2. Create a “House Trap”</p> <p>This method involves monitoring an entrance into your home and devising a way to close the door after your cat enters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is most effective if you can leave open the door where your cat escaped, AND it is open all night or between midnight and 4am. • Don’t put any food outside, but place some at least 10 feet inside or where your cat is used to eating. • Monitor the entrance with a wifi security camera, cellular wildlife camera, baby monitor or motion alarm. • You can also monitor in person, but don’t sit outside or close to the entrance. Your presence may scare your cat away if they are in Survival Mode. • Make sure that your cat is far inside the house before closing the door. If using a camera, test for video delay. Cats are extremely fast and you don’t want to risk injuring your cat or having them escape again. • Turn off all outside lights including motion detection lights around your home. • If your cat is showing up but not climbing stairs, try creating a trail of treats up the stairs and onto the deck or porch. • I generally do NOT recommend using a garage door as a House Trap. The chances of your cat escaping or being injured are high. 	<p>Only use this method IF it is safe to do so for yourself, family and other pets.</p> <p>Many cats are more interested in getting inside the house than in eating. This is why a House Trap is often more effective than a humane trap.</p> <p>If using a House Trap, then do NOT leave any food outside except maybe a few treats.</p> <p>Some cats will enter the house and leave again, especially if something spooks them.</p>	<p>Most escaped indoor cats return home during nights 4-7 after they get outside.</p> <p>If you can’t leave the door open all night, then do it for an hour or two just after dark or between 12am to 4am.</p> <p>You can start with a surveillance camera to verify that your cat is around and then try the House Trap.</p>
<p>3. Use a Humane Cat Trap</p> <p>If you can’t do a House Trap, this is the most effective way to catch an indoor cat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be able to borrow one from Animal Control or a rescue group. Learn more about selecting and buying a trap here. • Line the floor of the trap with cardboard, carpet fragments or a towel. • Cover the trap with a towel or blanket, preferably one that smells like home. Only cover the top and sides so it looks like a tunnel. • Place your trap near the point of escape and near some cover such as alongside a building, near a deck or under some bushes. • Place some smelly food that your cat likes in the back of the trap and create a trail of food leading into the back of the trap. • Check the trap at least every 4 hours in good weather. Better yet, set up a surveillance camera or driveway alarm to monitor the trap. • If your cat won’t enter a humane cat trap, you may need a larger trap or a drop trap. 	<p>Live monitoring of the trap with a surveillance camera or driveway alarm is safer, leads to quicker captures and is more successful.</p> <p>Make sure that you have a plan for releasing wildlife before you start trapping. Never transport wildlife!</p> <p>Always test your trap and make sure nothing prevents proper closing of the door.</p>	<p>If you can’t do a House Trap, then get a humane trap or two ASAP.</p> <p>If you start catching other cats or wildlife, you may want to start with a surveillance camera and only trap once you verify your cat is around. Alternatively, place the trap inside a garage or porch.</p> <p>If you get potential sightings of your cat away from home, you can verify sightings with a surveillance camera before trapping.</p>

F. Surveillance and Trapping Techniques	Important Information	When To Do
<p>4. Use Surveillance Cameras</p> <p>These are an invaluable tool for locating and catching an escaped indoor cat.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Types of cameras available include wifi security cameras, cellular wildlife cameras, baby monitors and SD card wildlife cameras. Select a camera that is motion activated and is infrared so it will work at night without a flash. Cellular or wifi cameras work with an app and will send photos to your phone along with a motion alert. SD card cameras store the images to an SD card, which must be checked manually. These are still good for checking sightings. For best results, cameras should be placed covering entrances around your home. At least two cameras are recommended. They can also be used to monitor a humane trap or a feeding station. Wildlife cameras should be set 4-8 inches off the ground in a relatively flat area. Place the food or trap 5-15 feet from the camera. 	<p>Make sure sensitivity on security cameras is set high enough to detect cats.</p> <p>Place security cameras up high and angle them downward for best results.</p> <p>Set wildlife cameras less than one foot off the ground in a flat area or they may miss detecting your cat.</p>	<p>Get cameras to monitor around your home ASAP. Wireless wifi security cameras work best.</p> <p>Keep cameras up around your home for at least 2-4 weeks and possibly 2-4 months.</p> <p>When checking sightings, keep the cameras in each location at least 3-5 days to give your cat time to find the food.</p>
<p>5. Use a Feeding Station and/or Scent Lures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most important: use food or treats that your cat really enjoys. If your cat likes wet food, the odor will travel farther. Fishy odors are strongest. Be sure to replace daily if not eaten. Start with a small bowl of food. If the food is being eaten by other animals, then make sure that you put out enough food that it lasts all night. You want to make sure that there is still food available even if your cat doesn't show up until 3am. You can supplement with cheap dry cat food if needed. Alternately, you may place food out first thing in the morning and not leave any food out at night if you want to avoid attracting wildlife. However, most escaped indoor cats mostly come out at night. Scent lures can be used in addition to or instead of using food, but there is less evidence on how well these work. Place out scent items such as blankets or clothing that smell like someone that your cat has a strong bond. Make sure that these don't blow in the wind, or they may scare your cat. Other scent lures to try include cat nip, Feliway, tuna water or clam juice. I generally don't recommend putting a litterbox outside. Learn more here. 	<p>You should always use a surveillance camera with a feeding station. Otherwise, you will have no idea what is eating the food.</p> <p>Anytime that you use a feeding station, you may attract other cats or wildlife. But if your cat is out for any length of time, they need to eat.</p> <p>If you attract coyotes or other predators, you should either remove your feeding station, switch to scent lures, or only place the food in a trap.</p>	<p>If doing a House Trap or using a Humane Trap do NOT put food outside (except perhaps a trail of treats to lead your cat inside the house or trap).</p> <p>Don't put out a feeding station right away. Give your cat at least 2 days and up to a week to come home on their own without the risk of attracting other animals.</p> <p>If you get potential sightings of your cat away from home, you can verify sightings with a surveillance camera and feeding station before trapping.</p>

F. Surveillance and Trapping Techniques	Important Information	When To Do
<p>6. Try “Simply Sitting”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a technique where you sit in an area where your cat went missing or has been seen with the goal of luring them out of hiding. This may be more effective than actively searching because most cats will not respond to their owner if they are walking around. While sitting, talk on the phone, sing or read out loud. Occasionally talk to your cat or call them in a way that you usually use indoors. Bring a plate of smelly food that your cat enjoys and some treats. Use familiar noises. Open a can of wet cat food. Crinkle or shake a treat bag. If you play with your cat with something like DaBird or a laser pointer, bring it with you and use occasionally. 	<p>Less likely to work with extremely skittish cats.</p> <p>Works best at quiet times of the day like dawn, dusk or even dark.</p> <p>Be sure to also read “If You See Your Cat” Section D.</p>	<p>Easiest to do in your own yard, but you can also try this at the location of a potential sighting.</p> <p>Try once or twice a week for at least two weeks.</p> <p>Don’t overdo it! This could prevent your cat from coming home if you are out at all hours of the night.</p>

G. Effective Advertising	Important Information	When To Do
<p>A. Posters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-designed posters are one of the most important tools to find your cat, especially if they’ve been missing more than one week. Use as few words as possible. Most important are: LOST CAT, a clear full-body photo, your phone number, and a 2–3-word description of your cat. If space permits, add “Call or Text If Seen” and “Got Outside on [date]”. The picture and phone number must be large enough so that they can be seen and read from inside a car. Try 110pt (or larger) Arial Narrow Font plus bold. If possible, remove the background from your cat’s photo. Small posters can be effective, but 11”x17” or larger are best. Either laminate or place in page protectors to keep them from getting wet. Posters are easiest to read when placed at intersections where cars stop or slow down. Face posters toward oncoming traffic and not across the street. Posters with bright colors or that are attached to florescent poster board are more likely to get noticed. Rewards are not recommended unless your cat is extremely friendly or valuable. Include the text “Reward for information leading to return.” 	<p>The most common mistake people make is using flyers as posters. Learn the difference.</p> <p>See example poster in Section K.</p> <p>You may want to check the local by-laws for your town/city. In some places, posting on public property is illegal or restricted.</p> <p>If your cat was newly adopted and used to be an outdoor cat, they may attempt to travel back to their previous home. Learn more about homing behavior.</p>	<p>As a general rule, you should expand your posters at least every week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with the immediate neighborhood and up to 1/4 mile Expand up 1/2 to 1 mile. <p>Replace posters that come down or look ratty.</p> <p>After 2-4 weeks, consider changing your posters somewhat so people still notice them.</p> <p>If possible, keep posters up at least two months.</p>

G. Effective Advertising	Important Information	When To Do
<p>B. Flyers, Postcards, or Phone Calls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flyers are meant to be handed out to people, delivered to homes, or posted in locations where people walk. See example flyer in Section K. Important information to include: LOST CAT, very brief description, date lost, location lost, and phone number. Consider adding: “Call or Text If Seen” or “Shy – Please Do Not Chase!” Explain that your cat is indoor only and probably hiding nearby. Ask them to check their sheds, garages, or basements. It is most effective to deliver flyers door-to-door and speak with your neighbors. See “The Importance of Talking to Your Neighbors” (Section E). If time rather than money is a bigger concern, you can use a service that will mail lost cat postcards or call your neighbors with a brief message. See Amber Alerts for more info. Also post flyers in public areas where people walk or visit such as the post office, library, nearby gas stations, grocery stores, pet stores, parks, coffee shops, or fast-food restaurants. 	<p>Don’t post flyers where people are driving. Use posters instead.</p> <p>Be aware that placing flyers in mailboxes without postage is against federal law.</p> <p>As a safety precaution, do not include your address. Instead use just a street name or intersection.</p> <p>Design your own flyer. Most free flyer templates are poorly designed and lack important information.</p>	<p>Start by distributing flyers in your immediate neighborhood up to 500 feet or ¼ mile (rural areas).</p> <p>Expand flyer distribution to ¼ mile or ½ mile (rural areas). If you can’t distribute flyers, consider postcards or Amber Alerts.</p> <p>If no sign of your cat, redistribute flyers after 2-4 weeks.</p> <p>In areas of potential sightings, distribute flyers and find out if someone else in the area has a cat that looks like yours.</p>
<p>C. Online Posting, Advertising, and Searching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post lost cat ads on local online sites such as craigslist and NextDoor.com. Post on your Facebook page and share with any local or regional pages or groups for lost or stray pets. Post to Facebook on any local Community pages or groups in your town. Also check these pages regularly for any found cat postings. Consider advertising to neighbors with a boosted Facebook post. You can create your own or use a company like CatFinder.org. Download the Neighbors App by Ring. Post your lost cat and search for Animal Sightings on the map. You do not need a Ring camera to use. Post your cat to online databases. Some sites will email/fax your listing to local vets and shelters and/or post to Facebook groups. See here for a list of recommended online posting sites. Check online for found and adoptable cats that could be your cat. Check Petfinder, Adopt-a-Pet, and Facebook pages for shelters/rescues. 	<p>Local online posting is much more effective than regional or national sites.</p> <p>Online posting does NOT replace the need for posters and flyers!</p> <p>If you post online expect to get some spam and potential scam contacts. Learn more on how to avoid scams here.</p> <p>Most online posting sites are a waste of time and money. See my list of recommended sites.</p>	<p>Post on local sites as soon as you have the chance. Keep reposting weekly or commenting on old posts until you find your cat.</p> <p>A lost indoor-only cat may not be rescued by someone for weeks or months after they get outside. Continue to check local online postings for at least several months.</p>

H. How to Effectively Check Potential Sightings of Your Lost Cat

Most lost cat sightings will be hours or even days after the person saw the cat. And the cat in question will rarely be present by the time that you get to the sighting location. Learn how to effectively verify sightings without seeing the cat.

How to effectively check sightings:

- Make sure that you always keep supplies in your car when checking sightings in case you see your cat! Include treats, a towel, and humane trap.
- Keep a record of all sightings including date, time (or at least time of day), location (in as much detail as possible), and how to reach the person again (e.g. their phone number, Facebook post, email). This is very important in case you need to follow-up for more information.
- Remember that most people want the cat they saw to be your missing cat and you do to. If you're not careful, people will just agree with your description of your cat. Instead, ask them to describe the cat to you. Be aware that people may call about cats that don't look much like your cat.
- To help with identification, consider using a photo line-up or send the caller additional photos of your cat for comparison.
- If it sounds like it might be your cat:
 - Ask the caller to contact you immediately if they see the cat again.
 - Ask them to try and take a photo or video of the cat, but don't search for the cat if it runs away.

Actions to take at the location of a potential sightings:

- If possible, get permission to search the property where the cat was seen. Review "Search Outdoors" (Section C2).
- Walk around the area calling for your cat, but don't call loudly. Speak in a normal voice and talk to them the way you would within your own home. Be sure to stop and spend time listening as well. If your cat is in Survival Mode, they won't respond but may still be present.
- Distribute flyers in the area to see if anyone else has seen the cat or if a similar looking cat lives in the area.
- If anyone has seen a cat that looks like yours recently, ask permission to search their property. Your cat may still be hiding there.

Next steps if the sighting sounds promising but you couldn't find the cat:

- Get permission to put out a surveillance camera and some food to try and get confirmation that it is your cat. This is one of the most effective ways to verify a sighting. This can then be followed up with a humane trap if it looks like your cat.
- Return to the area when it is quieter out, such as dusk, dawn, or night.
 - Try walking around the area (up to ¼ mile) and call for your cat.
 - Spend some time just sitting and talking in the area of the sighting (i.e., "Simply Sitting").
- Put up a few posters in the area. Add text "Recent Sighting in Area" to the poster.

Sometimes you may receive numerous sightings in different locations. If you don't have the time/energy to follow up on them all then:

- One option here is to hire a search dog team to check and verify several sightings.
- Follow-up with posters, flyers and/or online advertising in that area. Then only focus on areas with multiple sightings.
- Ask for callers to try and get photos/videos of the cat and to call you back immediately if they see the cat again.
- Focus on sightings in more likely locations. Most lost outdoor-access cats are found within 1 mile of where they go missing.

I. Who Else to Contact	Important Information	When To Do
<p>1. Microchip Companies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your cat is microchipped, contact the company, and let them know that your cat is missing. Some companies offer assistance or services. • Make sure that your cat's microchip is registered. If you are unsure, start by entering your cat's microchip number in the AAHA Microchip Registry Lookup. • Confirm that your registered phone number and address are up to date. • If your cat's microchip is not registered, start by registering for free on 24Petwatch or 911PetChip. You will need their microchip number to do this. • Don't assume that you don't need to check shelters or rescues just because your cat has a microchip. • Learn more about how microchips work here. 	<p>In order for a cat to be found by microchip, they must first be scanned (usually by a vet or shelter) to get the chip number.</p> <p>Then the number is entered into a microchip registry database to find out where it is registered.</p> <p>Then someone must contact the registration company. The company will provide the owner's contact info or attempt to reach the owner themselves.</p>	<p>Contact them ASAP in case your cat is found sick or injured.</p> <p>Make sure to keep your contact information updated long-term. Some cats have been found months to years later by their microchip.</p>
<p>2. Contact Animal Control, Shelters & Rescue Groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if your town/city has an animal control officer (ACO) and if they pick-up cats. Search your town website or call the police (non-emergency number). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If they pick up cats, do they have a shelter or do they bring the cats elsewhere? Where do they bring sick/injured cats? ○ If they don't pick up cats, where do they refer people for help? ○ Will they take a lost pet report? • Use PetFinder to search for a list of shelters and rescue groups in your area. • Contact all shelters and rescue groups within 10-25 miles. Give them a copy of your flyer and/or provide a lost pet report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ask if they check incoming cats against lost pet reports. ○ Ask if they check for microchips. Small rescue groups may not. ○ Ask if they post all found cats online anywhere. • If possible, visit the closest shelters and rescues. Ask to see cats that are not yet on the adoption floor. New and sick cats may be held elsewhere. • Find out if your state has a mandatory hold period for cats. This is how long a shelter must wait before adopting or euthanizing new cats. • Try to find out if there are any Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) groups in your town. These groups trap loose cats to get them fixed and feed feral cat colonies. 	<p>Don't assume that you don't need to check these groups just because your cat is microchipped, had a collar with ID tags or you did a pet Amber Alert.</p> <p>Don't assume that all found cats are listed online. Many shelters and rescue groups are understaffed, and some cats may be adopted before ever being posted.</p> <p>People are more likely to rescue stray/lost cats when it is cold or snowy outside.</p>	<p>Contact your Animal Control Officer ASAP in case your cat has been found sick or injured.</p> <p>Visit the closest shelters/rescues ASAP to give them a copy of your flyer. If you can't visit, then call/email and leave a lost pet report.</p> <p>Contact all shelters/rescues within 10-25 miles by one week.</p> <p>A lost indoor-only cat may not end up in a shelter or rescue until weeks or months after they go missing. Continue to check (at least online) for several months.</p>

I. Who Else to Contact	Important Information	When To Do
<p>3. Where to Check for Injured and Deceased Cats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few escaped indoor cats are hit by cars. However, if you live near a busy street, you may want to find out who (if anyone) in your town picks up deceased animals. This may be the Dept of Public Works (DPW). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask if they check for microchips or ID tags? If your town has an Animal Control Officer (ACO), find out where they bring injured or deceased cats. Contact all local vets and give them a copy of your flyer. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask if they will allow you to post a flyer in their waiting room. If not, will they post it somewhere for staff to see. Contact the closest 2-3 emergency vets as well even if they are far away. If you are concerned about predators, visit the Lost Pet Research blog. 	<p>Few escaped indoor cats are hit by cars.</p> <p>Contact the closest emergency vets even if they are far away. This is especially important if your cat is not microchipped.</p> <p>Don't wait too long to check who picks up deceased cats. They may not keep good records.</p>	<p>Contact your Animal Control Officer ASAP in case your cat has been found sick or injured.</p> <p>Also contact vets right away in case your cat was found injured.</p> <p>If you haven't found your cat within 1 week, then find out who handles deceased cats in your town.</p>

J. If You Need More Help
<p>If you find the search plan overwhelming, consider scheduling a Lost Cat Consultation for assistance in managing and prioritizing your search actions based on your unique situation. You can learn more and schedule a Lost Cat Consultation here. A consultation or on-site assistance may be particularly helpful if you have located your cat but are having trouble catching them.</p> <p>If you are looking for on-site assistance, check out the Guide to Finding a Pet Detective or Search Dog. This includes a lost pet services directory of professional and volunteer pet detectives, Missing Animal Response Technicians, lost pet consultants, lost pet trappers, search dog teams, and lost pet trackers, etc.</p> <p>You can also use the Pet Detective Guide to find free, lower cost or other available lost pet consultations. In general, I recommend using people that are Missing Animal Response trained individuals or groups.</p> <p>You can also find lots more free information in the Lost Pet Resources and Lost Pet Research Blog.</p>

K. Example Poster and Flyer – [see more examples here](#)

Example Small Poster

LOST CAT

Got Outside 6/30



Call or Text If Seen

Long Gray Hair

413-367-7171

Example Flyer

Please Help Us Find “Arlo”



Black with White Chest and Paws

Got outside on 4/19 from Adrian Ave
He is very shy and probably hiding

- Please check your garages, sheds or basements for Arlo if they have been left open since he went missing
- If possible, check under sheds, decks and porches
- Check any security cameras for possible sightings

Take a photo of this flyer with your cell phone so you'll have it on-hand

Call or Text if Seen 413-367-7171

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Search Plan for Lost Indoor-Only Cats

Written and published by Danielle Robertson

[Lost Pet Research & Recovery](https://lostpetresearch.com)
info@lostpetresearch.com