

HOW TO PREVENT ESCAPES...AND WHAT TO DO IF YOUR DOG GETS AWAY

"HELP! MY DOG'S GONE!" ALL TOO OFTEN, RESCUE AND SHELTER VOLUNTEERS RECEIVE FRANTIC CALLS FROM PEOPLE WHEN THEIR BELOVED DOG ESCAPES. EVEN IF IT HASN'T HAPPENED TO YOU, IT COULD -- SO BE PREPARED.

Despite their love for their families, most dogs, given the right opportunity can't wait to escape. Why not? There are all kinds of exciting things that induce a dog to bolt, if only for an adventure or the thought of a good chase of the deliveryman, the neighbor's cat or a passing squirrel. An open door is an invitation throughout the life of the dog. For a Romanian rescue dog, it is a natural instinct to run free so the flight risk is even greater.

THE MOST COMMON WAYS A DOG CAN ESCAPE A HOME INCLUDE:

- * Through an improperly latched door that blew open with a gust of wind or didn't close properly (so be sure to close doors all the way and repair doors and locks as needed).
- * Through an open window or flimsy door or window screen on any floor of the house;
- * Through a fence gate left open by children or visitors.
- * Over or under a fence when the right stimulus presents itself (typically something to chase or a neighbor's dog or cat).
- *Latch Lifting - Some dogs have learned to open gates and door handles or knobs and let themselves out. Most gates have a latch that can be secured by placing a clip through a hole when the latch is closed, and doors can be locked or blocked. The clip can be a clip from an old leash, a lock, or a carabiner. If you need a reminder to use the clip and to get others to use it, put a sign on the gate that says, "Please clip the gate."
- *.Dashing out the door. Some dogs escape by dashing out of the house the moment the door opens. For door-dashers, the best strategy is to train the dog to expect a treat whenever the door is opened. Start by placing a baby gate or exercise pen at the doorway. If you have a big dog, you might want to use one that is tall and extra sturdy. Practice opening the door, stepping over the gate (or walking through it, depending on the style of the gate), and then giving the dog a treat. Soon, your dog will be waiting for a treat rather than dashing out the door.

Next, you can add the cue "sit." Luring your dog into a sit is done by holding a treat up, giving the cue, waiting until he sits, and then offering the treat. Only give the treat when his rear is on the floor, not before he sits or after he pops up. Practice walking into the house and closing the door behind you, offering the treat only after your dog gives you a sit. When teaching your dog to sit, remember that you don't need to use a harsh tone. Once he is trained, you can have fun with your happy, well-behaved dog.

Another method for preventing door dashing, if treats are not available or practical for your situation, is to teach "wait at the door." Put your dog on a leash as a safety net while he is learning, but never use it to pull or yank him backward. Stand next to the door so your body

isn't blocking it, tell your dog "wait," and then open it just a couple of inches. As long as your dog is waiting politely, continue to slowly open the door. If at any point your dog tries to rush through the door, quickly but carefully close it (avoiding slamming your dog's head or feet in the door, of course). Say "wait" again, then begin to slowly open the door again. When your dog waits long enough for you to open the door wide enough for him to get through, say "free," and then allow him to go through the door. When you are consistent about doing this, your dog will learn to wait politely at the door until you release him.

Although the risk of flight is high at the time of adoption, adopters should not relax as time goes on! Examples of when a potential escape moments throughout the life of the dog include children's/adult parties or visits, holidays, and construction, repair or delivery to the home. In short, an escape can happen on a normal day or special occasion when an adopter's attention is diverted for a second.

Safety first

First, make sure your dog is always wearing an ID with your up-to-date phone numbers and address. It is the law that people are using microchips to ID their dogs. However, it is still wise to keep a collar ID on dogs as well.

What can you do if you're expecting visitors? The easiest thing is to safely contain the dog in his dog crate or in a separate room.

People presume that older dogs will not escape. In many respects, senior animals are just as much at risk, due to diminished senses. Older dogs have been known to wander off. Often they are so quiet that they are not missed right away.

Many people feel a dog will understand the home's or neighborhood's boundaries or the risk of a car in its path. However, most dogs run with wild abandon, and will travel farther and more quickly than you'd imagine. Dogs do not differentiate between a dirt path, driveway and a multi-lane highway, and they have no concept of danger. We hear of fortunate few returned dogs who wandered miles within a few hours. Most likely, dogs who escape and have time to travel will not be found or returned. The longer the absence is not noted, the less likely the dog will be found.

One of the worst times for escape are during vacations. Your pet is at risk whether you take him along on the trip, or if you leave him behind with a pet sitter or at a relative's home.

If you travel with your pet, "pit stops" are risky. So are campgrounds or vacation homes. If you're not sure about the use of training collars, double-leash your dog using a halter with an ID tag with your numbers on it. (It really helps to have a mobile phone, and to list that number on the ID tag.) Please be aware that dogs can back out of a cloth collar even if snug against the neck!

If you leave your dog with a pet sitter or relative, please review your routines and safety practices.

There is no safe time for off-leash walking, but that's particularly true when in a strange place. Many dogs are lost each year when people let their dogs off-leash while hiking or at the beach. The dog does not know where he is and has less or no familiarity with the site. Don't fall for the concept that dogs seek freedom to explore. Sure, the dog may enjoy the freedom -- but he could get hurt, get in a fight with another animal, jump on or injure a passerby who may even decide to sue you. And you may never see your dog again.

What should you do when your dog escapes? The best thing is to be prepared NOW. If your dog is lost, have the name of local animal control and humane society phone numbers handy to give a family member, friend or neighbor to call while you search.

TAKE THESE STEPS WITHOUT DELAY:

- * Check the immediate surroundings first, such as your yard and neighboring yards.
- * Enlist your neighbors in the search.
- * POST on Facebook and boost the post for your immediate area! You would be surprised how many people will respond!
- * Contact your rescue admin immediately. Rescue volunteers will help you search and provide needed assistance.
- * If your dog likes car rides, drive around your neighborhood calling the dog's name, hoping that he will run from where he is and jump into the car. Just be sure that you don't call your dog into incoming traffic.
- * Tell everyone you see you are looking for your dog and make sure they know to call you if they have a sighting, they must not chase! Give everyone your dog's poster.
- * Sometimes it's best to pursue the dog by foot because you can go between homes and take unpredictable routes...just as your dog is likely to have done. Again, alert people as you go.
- * If you spot your dog, DO NOT CHASE HIM! If your dog is enjoying his adventure, he will think you are playing and will run from you. The best chance for you to safely get his attention is to stop running, drop to the ground and call your dog. If you and your dog took obedience classes and he responds to "sit/stay!", you have the added advantage of potentially stopping his escape because he remembers his training.
- * Remember, cars are as likely to be escaped as a home. A car ride can end in disaster, because a dog will jump from a window (often dogs can slip through a narrow opening). Or an excited dog will bolt from a car when the door opens. And dogs can easily jump out of pick-up trucks. Lastly, if you own a convertible, keep the top up or leave your dog at home!