

WAYS TO DISCOURAGE YOUR DOG FROM RUNNING AWAY

One of the most surprising things about working at a veterinary office is the number of dogs who drop by—without their owners.

Almost every week a good samaritan will stop in the office asking if we know who this dog is. Sometimes it's a dog we've never met; other times, it's a repeat offender. Occasionally, we'll even wind up hosting several dogs from different homes on the same day.

Sometimes the canine escape artist has a microchip so we can try & contact their families. The owners are typically grateful to know their dog is safe and come get them, apologizing with, "My son must have left the door open," or "Ugh, I guess Jake is digging under the fence again."

What makes dogs roam, and is there anything owners can do to prevent it? We love meeting new dogs, but clearly the safest place for them is at home instead of wandering nearby (or far away) streets and properties, where they might be hit by a car, chase after a frightened child, or simply become lost.

While no dog obeys 100 percent of the time, there are steps we can take to help keep dogs from roaming. Whether it's a dog distracted by a squirrel racing by or a tantalizing far-off scent, here are some suggestions:

Spay or neuter. Dogs' drive to breed is very strong, so intact male dogs are hard to keep at home when there is a female in heat in the neighborhood. Intact females can also be driven to seek out males. We believe that spaying or neutering your dog is a key component in keeping them from running away to mate.

Invest in traditional fencing. We prefer traditional fences to electronic ones because they are appropriate for most dogs, and help them see clear boundaries. It also keeps other dogs out of your yard too. Obviously, it's important to install a tall fence that your dog can't jump over. We also suggests talking a walk with your dog along the fence line each day to look for breaches in the fence, holes, or other potential exit aids. Meanwhile, throw a ball for your dog to provide them with an enriching activity that reinforces the idea that the yard is a fun place to be. Finally, self-closing gates can be helpful, particularly in homes with children.



SunShine Animal Hospital Client Education Series

Provide interactive exercise. We tell our clients we recommend half an hour of aerobic exercise twice a day. We also tell them that exercise is not restricted to walks or runs and can include interactive activities, such as training games. For instance, rather than sitting on a park bench reading a book or talking on the phone on an outing, play fetch or other games with your dog. You can also provide enrichment activities to keep them busy at home, such as putting out dog puzzles, stuffing a food toy with peanut butter (freeze it for a longer activity), hiding treats or toys around the house or a building a sandbox for digging.

Use positive training methods. You never want to punish a dog when he comes back to you—that's certainly not going to make the dog want to come back. Instead of calling your dog when he is running circles around you, try teaching him to lie down quickly to earn a treat. It can be a game you play whenever the dog is running. Another trick is to train your dog not to go through a door or gate until invited. Use reward-based training (like giving a treat for correct behavior) instead of correction-based training (like using shock collars) to avoid creating fear and aggression in your pooch.

Evaluate the particular needs of your dog. Some breeds, like huskies, have a reputation for independence and roaming, but each dog's temperament and drive is different. For best results, work with a trainer or animal behaviorist to create a tailored approach for keeping your dog happy at home. Any breed can be trained, but the more independent the dog, the harder you have to work at it.

Call us if you suspect separation anxiety. It's one thing if your dog mopes when you leave, but if he shows signs of extreme distress about being alone, such as leaving scratch marks on the door or jumping through a screen or window, contact us immediately. The sooner those dogs get help, the better.