

Don't Lose the Pooch!

Social media is awash with posts about lost dogs. In most any town, it's not uncommon to see "missing dog" posters, with photos of doe-eyes pups. Loose dogs may easily lose their lives—succumbing to the weather, being hit by a car, eating something dangerous, being preyed upon by an animal, and other potentially deadly outcomes. The world can be an extremely dangerous place for a dog out on its own. This danger is amplified for:

- **A newly adopted dog** who doesn't know his/her owner, probably won't come when called, is likely stressed by recent changes, and won't know how to find the way home
- **A shy, skittish, or fearful dog** (newly rescued or not) that can be extremely difficult to catch. These wary souls will likely run from the people trying to save their lives. Well-intentioned humans may drive the dog farther from home as the dog tries to elude these scary strangers.
- **An aggressive/reactive dog** may pose a threat to other dogs, critters, and people s/he may come across when at large. The possible results—an attack on another dog, a bite to a child, among others—are not good for anyone involved. The aggressive dog may also become a victim—harmed by a person or dog that feels the need to defend himself/herself.

10 Tips: Reduce the Chance of Losing Your Dog

1. Martingale collars (Figure 1) (when fitted properly) fit loosely around the neck and cinch up when the dog pulls. Consider using one when out and about to prevent the dog from slipping out of a collar.



Figure 1. Martingale collar

2. Before opening a door to the outside (car or home, always have leash and collar/harness on your dog.

3. Don't put children in charge of holding the leash. If the child wants to be the leash-holder, use two leashes—one the child can hold, and one for the adult.

4. Use interior doors (e.g., doors that lead to a garage or entryway) to access the outside if you are worried about your dog bolting out the door.

5. Don't let your dog off-leash unless you have an excellent recall response (and even then, know that any dog can bolt out of fear or take off if it wants to chase something).¹

¹ For tips on understanding when your dog may be ready to go off-leash, check out this brief article: *Recall Safety and Going Off Leash (The Myth of the 100% Recall)* at <https://www.goldstardog.com/visit-the-library>

6. Safely confine your dog within your home/yard when you're not home. Periodically check gates, doors, windows, fencing, etc. for opportunities a dog might use to escape. Electric fences can fail, shock collar batteries can die, and some dogs ignore the shock if temptation is high enough or if frightened. Tying your dog up outside can make him/her defenseless against other animals and people and can pose a strangling risk. If you're not home, the safest place for your dog is probably inside the house (in a properly dog-proofed space).

7. Consider a tracking device (such as one that attaches to the collar and uses GPS tracking integrated with a smartphone) or a microchip in case your dog does get lost. Make sure your current contact information is on the collar as well.

8. Sit and wait at all doorways—teach your dog this skill to avoid him/her bolting out an open door (Figure 2).

9. Invest in recall training—take the time to teach your dog to return when called and understand when your dog should NOT BE OFF-LEASH.²

10. Consider a harness if your dog is strong and/or large; harnesses where the leash attaches to a ring on the front of your dog's chest (such as the Easy Walk or Freedom Harness, pictured) are the best for controlling a large dog. For an extra measure of safety and for Houdini dogs (especially on the Easy Walk harness and others of that type), clip the leash to both the ring on the harness and a ring on the collar in case your dog is squirmy or flexible enough to slip out of the harness (Figure 3). Head collars can also equalize the powerful dog-smaller human situation (read the instructions for how to properly fit, acclimate the dog to it, and use it). Avoid prong collars, choke chains, and slip collars/leads as links can pop off, dogs can slip out of slips and choke chains, and these can tighten painfully on a dog's neck.

If your dog does get away from you, try:

- **Running the opposite direction** while making high-pitched noises (unless your dog is frightened by such noises) to encourage your dog to chase you, giving you an opportunity to grab his leash/collar.
- **Dropping and rolling.** Yes, onlookers may think you're nuts, but your dog may be so intrigued by what you are doing, s/he'll come check it out!
- **Carrying a bag of tasty, wonderful treats in a crinkly bag** (or any crinkly snack bag!)—sometimes the noise of the treats and/or the bag will bring a dog running back (or if your dog goes crazy for a favorite toy, bring that with you).



Figure 2. Waiting in the doorway.

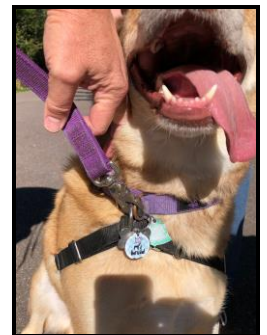


Figure 3. Clipping the leash to both harness and collar.

² Check out the library at goldstardog.com for resources on recall, the find me game for a great recall, and more.