



First Five Things To Do When Your Pet is Lost

It's hard to imagine just how distraught we would be if our pet ever wandered away. Even when they're by our side, just the thought of it, can scramble one's brain! So it's an important thing to think about ahead of time. If it does happen, clear thinking surely won't be easy! Here are five important things to do right away, if your pet is ever lost.

#1 Start Searching ASAP –

This can't be stressed enough. As soon as you find out your pet is missing, start searching. First search your immediate surroundings (inside home, yard, adjacent lot) thoroughly. Scared or ill pets are great at hiding. Then expand your search a bit farther in each direction. Keep in mind these tips:

- Make a lot of noise (pets have great hearing and it'll attract others to help).
- Bring a leash, a photograph of your pet and a powerful flashlight (even during the day for checking hiding spots).
- Take some really stinky (but loved by your pet), food with you. All pets know the sound of their food being opened, so bring a half full bag of food and jiggle it a bit.
- Bring your pet's favorite toy. It's best if it's one that makes noise.
- Shout out the pet's name in a "happy" voice.
- If you have another pet in the house, or a neighbor's dog who your pet likes, bring it along!
- Stop regularly and quietly listen.
- Look for clues, such as pet hair, paw prints or poop which may belong to your pet.
- Talk to everyone you meet and show them the photograph. Give them your phone number, in case they see something which would be helpful.
- Keep in mind that dogs tend to travel farther, looking for sheds or similar spots to hide. Cats stay closer to home, but can hide virtually anywhere.
- If the search extends to days, keep in mind that dogs are the most active at dawn and dusk. Cats tend to forage for food between 1am and 5am.

#2 Outside Stash –

There are a handful of items you can put outside of your home to attract your pet, or help them be comfortable if they return while you're away.

- Your dirty clothes (socks, gym clothes) since they smell like you.
- Litterbox (the dirtier the better)
- Their bedding or blankets
- Pet carrier (IF they associate it with "happy" trips)
- Favorite toys
- Smelly food such as sardines or tuna. Yummy dog delights like cooked chicken or liver. Be warned that other night creatures might help themselves!

#3 Call the Authorities –

There's a long list of people who can help. Do this after you've searched as much as possible and stashed a few things outside.

- File a lost pet report with your local animal control.
- Contact all nearby animal shelters. You'll need to check back every 2-3 days and visit to personally see any new arrivals. Don't rely on simply describing them over the phone, as perceptions of color, breed, etc. can vary greatly. Also ask if the shelter has photographs of "found" pets. These are pets which were found by someone, but they are keeping them at their home, waiting to see if someone claims them.

#4 Promote -

Make up fliers which have a very clear and large photo of your missing pet. Include "LOST CAT" or "LOST DOG" at the top in large letters. These signs should be easy to read from a distance. Follow these additional guidelines:

- Include your pet's key information, including size, coloring, sex, breed, hair length distinctive markings, place last seen.
- Include your phone number (with a note to call 24/7)
- Offer a reward (but don't say how much). It's best to not mention one obvious characteristic about your pet on the poster. Then as people call for the reward, you can ask them about the trait to see if they really do have your pet.
- Include a reference to your pet "needing medication". This gives people a sense of urgency and discourages people who may want to simply "keep" your pet.
- Do not include your name or address, for safety reasons.

Post these fliers around your neighborhood, but also wherever pet lovers will be (veterinary offices, pet stores, grocery stores, dog parks, pet-related businesses, etc.).

Print up additional fliers to hand out to people who are around your neighborhood on a regular basis. They include mail carriers, neighborhood children, regular walkers and joggers, meter readers, police officers, newspaper carriers and other delivery people.

#5 Go Viral –

There are many online services which cater to people who have lost pets. Find one that covers your immediate area and give it a try. You can also google "found pets" to see what directories turn up. You may also use Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and any other social media accounts to help spread the word. Be sure to include a great photograph of your pet and details on how to reach you. Use the same guidelines suggested for the fliers, when posting to social media.

In the end, one of the best ways to increase the odds that you'll be reunited with a lost pet is to make sure all your pets have identification tags on their collars. The tag should include your pet's name and your cellphone number, at the very least. For a more high-tech solution you can have a microchip (the size of a grain of rice) implanted under your pet's skin. The microchip transmits an identification code and the phone number of the appropriate registry to a scanner (used by vets and some shelters). There is typically a fee for this service with whatever registry you use. The service needs to be maintained, or just having the chip will be useless.

Hopefully you will never, ever need to use these tips. However, why not print this out now and tuck it away, just in case. It's always better to prepare now, and be ready later!