

Approaching a Lost Dog

When you see a dog wandering loose, don't immediately rush over and grab the dog's collar. Although it's important to get the dog to safety, your safety is key as well. Not every dog is friendly, and a lost dog may be frightened, stressed, or injured.

First, pay attention to the dog's body language. If the dog seems relaxed, approach slowly with your body turned to the side, which is less intimidating than a head-on approach. Next, squat down and reach out your hand so the dog may smell you. Keep your body sideways and look away to help the dog feel comfortable with you. Only reach for the collar when the dog seems happy to be at your side. Alternatively, you may clip on a leash or fashion a temporary slip lead from a length of rope. You can also try using treats to coax the dog closer.

If the dog doesn't approach you willingly or seems aggressive, do not try to grab or restrain the dog. Some signs to watch for include stiff body language, bared teeth, and hair standing on end. Remember, a wagging tail only means an emotionally aroused dog, and it's no guarantee of a friendly attitude. If you have any concerns at all about the dog's behavior, call animal control or the police department, so they can safely remove the dog and take it to the proper authorities.

If you can't safely approach the lost dog, take a photo or video if you're able to. This will allow you to provide a better description of the dog than by memory alone, which may be useful in the event the dog leaves before animal control arrives, or if you reach out to the potential owner through flyers or online. You can also post the photo or video on social media with the exact location you saw the dog, to give the owner the best possible chance of finding their pup.

Keeping a Lost Dog Safe

If you can restrain the lost dog, you need to think about a holding area. You might only be keeping the dog until you can get to the local shelter, or you might want to hold the dog until you hear from the owner. Whether temporarily or more long-term, you need to keep your family, other pets, and the lost dog safe. All lost dogs in NJ are legally on a 7-day hold.

Until getting the go-ahead from a doctor, don't let the lost dog mingle with your other pets. Not only could that be stressful for all the animals involved, the newcomer might not be up to date on vaccinations, or might be carrying an illness that could infect your pets. There could even be parasites like fleas or ringworm to contend with. Consider confining the lost dog to a separate room in your house or a fenced backyard until you can get them to a shelter or veterinarian.

Checking for Identification

Ideally, the lost dog will have collar ID tags with contact information for the owner. Call every number listed, and leave a message if nobody answers. If the dog doesn't have ID tags, or the numbers are no longer in service, have the dog scanned for a microchip. Any animal shelter or veterinary clinic will have a scanner. The process is painless and the number on the chip links to a pet registration service. Some services simply provide the owner's details, but some, like AKC Reunite, will contact the owner for you. Another form of ID that can be traced by animal control or a veterinarian is a tattoo, and these are usually located on the inside of the dog's ear, inside of the thigh, or sometimes on the belly.

Alerting the Lost Dog's Owner

If you've called all the numbers associated with the ID tag and microchip, what options are left for contacting the dog's owner? First, take advantage of technology. Look for local websites that feature a lost and found animal section. Browse lost pet listings and post a message of your own. You can also use Facebook and other social media sites to let people know you've found a lost dog.

Next, try going old school. Print flyers with the dog's photo and your contact information and post them around your neighborhood. You might also drop by local vet offices to ask them to post the flyer in their lobby. You can even go door to door in the area in case somebody recognizes the pet. And finally, place a flyer in your front window. If the dog's owner is searching the neighborhood, your flyer will lead them right to your front door.

It's also important to contact nearby vets, animal control, and animal shelters in the area. Leave a description of the dog and your contact details because the owner is likely to call these locations as soon as they notice their dog is missing. Even if you choose to keep the lost dog with you rather than turning the dog over to a shelter, letting the shelter know you have the dog increases the owner's odds of finding you and therefore their lost pet. Once you've reunited the dog with the owner, don't forget to contact all the groups keeping a record of the lost dog so they can take that dog off their list.