

## Escape Artists

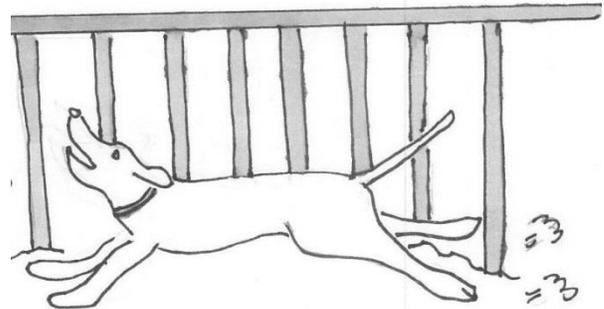
### What does the behavior look like?

Sometimes it looks like a prison break! Torn drapes, broken windows and utterly destroyed landscaping. Other times it might look like a Houdini act.

Do you have a canine escape artist? Some dogs escape because of boredom or loneliness. Some breeds of dogs have a tendency to wander; while others are strictly opportunists who will take advantage of an open door or unlatched gate. Dogs don't understand the perils of the outside world so their guardians need to ensure their safety.

### Why would a dog want to leave home?

**Yawn!** Boredom, under-stimulation and/or lack of sufficient exercise are the most common reasons for dogs to leave their yard. Most dogs need two brisk walks, runs or play sessions daily. Younger dogs need more exercise than older dogs. Increase your dog's physical and mental stimulation to see if this improves the situation. (Please review our **Enrichment Toys** and **Play: Tug & Retrieving Games** handouts.)



**Breed "Feature":** Some independent breeds have a tendency to wander. Northern breeds (Huskies or Malamutes) and flock guarders (Great Pyrenees) are examples of breeds with possible wandering tendencies. These dogs tend to require top tier containment systems. This type of dog will generally test the system at several points, but if his attempts are effectively rebuffed, he settles down. However, once this dog has success, he will redouble his efforts system-wide. (Please review our **Dog Breed Characteristics & Behavior** handout.)

**Separation Anxiety:** Separation anxiety (loneliness) can also be a cause of escapism. Even though dogs are pack animals, our lifestyles demand that dogs must learn to be alone for a large part of the day. Some dogs have a more difficult time adjusting to this. Separation anxiety is a complex behavior issue which likely will require the assistance of a Behavior Consultant or experienced Dog Training Instructor. (Please review our **Separation Anxiety** handout.)

**Opportunity Knocks!** If someone leaves the gate or door open, it's *obviously* an invitation to go walkabout. Intact male dogs are particularly interested in this singular good fortune. A wandering dog becomes more problematic when his inner pirate takes control and goes on a pillaging and sacking spree terrorizing the neighborhood.

**SCARY MONSTER!** Some dogs are noise sensitive and there may be something in the yard or nearby that scares your dog into escaping from the scary noise or thing. For example, loud noises such as thunderstorms or new construction in the neighborhood can panic sensitive dogs. If thunderstorms are predicted, keep your dog inside. Make sure your yard is safe and that you consider the environment from your dog's perspective.



### How do you troubleshoot the escape route?

If your dog is getting out, then the first step is to find out how he is doing it! Is he digging under the fence, jumping over it, or unlocking the gate?

**Escape Route Test:** Go outside the fenced area and call your dog. It might also help if someone can spy on your dog from inside the house to help figure out what is happening. Be really excited and happy when calling your dog so he will really want to get out there with you. Then see what happens. NOTE: If your dog does escape and comes to you, don't punish him! He helped you figure out the problem, and he was just doing what you asked. You can also utilize your outside security system or ask a neighbor to assist with the sleuthing process.

### How do you modify the behavior?

The best solution for an escape artist is to leave him inside the house with the doors securely closed. Confining your dog to a dog-proofed room or section of the house with a baby gate or x-pen is the best way to control the situation and minimize the chance for damage. A crate can also be used, but not for more than 4 hours at a time.

**But he needs exercise!** Most dogs will not exercise themselves in a yard, no matter how big it is! Instead they tend to alert bark at unexpected sights or sounds and can become nuisance barkers. Keeping your dog inside can eliminate or lessen any nuisance barking issues and adding a dog walker is a good option if your dog will be inside 8-10 hours.

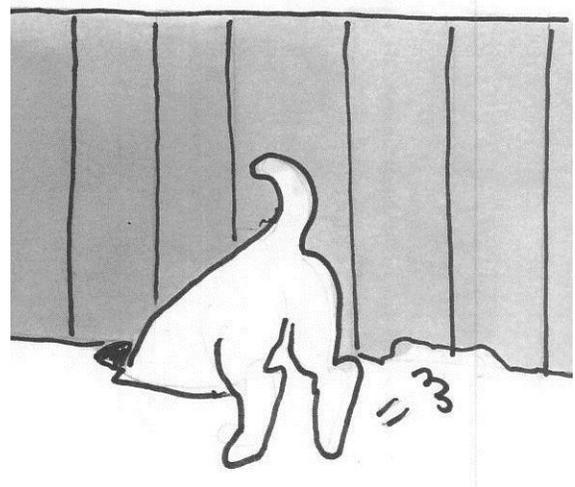
### Escape Route Types & Recommendations:

**Through the Gate:** An open or unlatched gate is an open invitation.

- Make sure gates that are used frequently will close and latch automatically. If you have a gate that opens and stays open, add a spring hinge and auto-latch. If you have a gate that is not used very often, secure it with a padlock so it can't be opened.
- Consider the possibility of blocking your dog's access to the area where the gas and electric meters are located.
- Consider having a double gate system with a small amount of yard space in between.

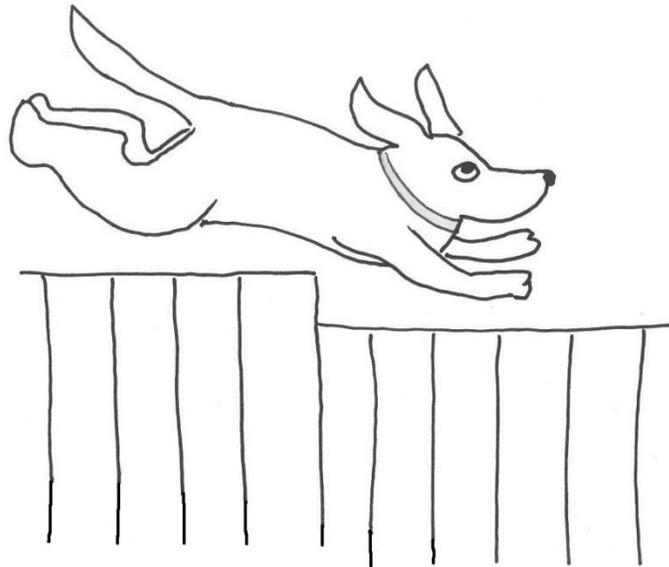
**Diggers:** Some dogs can dig under a fence in a matter of minutes. Possible solutions include:

- Extend the fence 1-2 feet below the ground.
- Partially bury large rocks along the perimeter of the fence.
- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence. The sharp edge is rolled inward.
- Lay chain link fencing on the ground, anchoring one end to the bottom of the fence. This will make it uncomfortable for the dog to walk in the area.



**Jumpers:** Some dogs can jump over or actually climb up and over fences.

- The best solution is to extend the fence. The extra height is not that important. The important feature is that the extension tilts in toward the yard at about a 45 degree angle.
- Make sure that there are no structures or tables or trees near the fence that would aid the dog in getting over it.



**Still escaping, what now?** If your dog is still escaping, consider building an outdoor kennel. Many are completely enclosed and come in various sizes. Be aware that a kennel may create or exacerbate a barking problem in a dog since isolation is distressing to dogs.

**Final word:** However hard it may be for you, when your dog gets out and you find him, don't punish him. He will associate punishment with you, and next time it will be harder to catch him. Think about your situation and try to find out why your dog wants to escape. Make sure your home or yard is a safe, fun place to be!

#### **Training Resources:**

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or [OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org](mailto:OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org).

**Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)!** If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at [MarinHumane.org](http://MarinHumane.org) or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.