

Lost Dog

Search & Rescue Plan



TheDogWoman

"Well after just over 4 days we are so happy to say Alfie has been found! After amazing work by Christina Cass and her search dogs"

Alfie, Spaniel, 7 months, 4 days lost - Cumbria

"Junior is snuggled up in bed with us and it is thanks to you and sky!! U will never know how thankful we really are. You were so supportive and optimistic with us."

*Junior, Staffy X, 3 years, 3 days lost,
East Kilbride, Glasgow*

Introduction

This guide has been created for the dog owner who will stop at nothing to retrieve their lost family member. The people who are prepared to do whatever it takes to bring their little one home – If you are this dog owner, and you are in the desperate situation of searching for your dog, you have found your answers.

What stops dogs being found

One in three pet dogs will go missing in their lifetime. If you are reading this, chances are you are in the horrible situation of living this very real nightmare. In Scotland, 181 dogs are reported missing every year (far more go unreported), 138 of them will be found successfully. But what of the 43 who are never found, could anything more have been done? There are two elements which I believe to be instrumental in finding your dog:

- ⇒ **Effort in the wrong area:** Most people are drawn to be physically walking the streets and shouting of their dog, as it feels most productive. Unfortunately, this is actually the least productive method for finding a lost dog, and there are many more things you can do to dramatically increase your chances of finding your dog safe and well, and this guide is exactly what you need.
- ⇒ **Misguided belief:** Some owners have a 'wait and see' approach, believing that their dog, like Lassie, will naturally know what to do. Others develop grief avoidance, bowing out of search efforts having, become fixated on the idea that their dog has been stolen or hit by a car. The chance of either of these being true is of course a possibility, but only accounts for a very small number of cases. Assume you are the rule, not the exception and do not give up.

A Formula for success

As a Canine Behavioural Practitioner with 15 years active experience in rehabilitation, Dog Psychology and Search & Rescue work, I have created this guide designed to be used as a comprehensive Search and Rescue plan to give the best possible chance of finding your dog.

There is no one size fits all Search and Rescue blueprint for every missing dog, instead, each search plan is uniquely created depending upon the following three core elements noted below.

Remember – these are just pointers base on experience of past cases, and scientific study. If you have good reason (such as a confirmed sighting) but it breaks all of the usually behavioural patterns, you must check it out.

1. The Dogs Basic Temperament

There are, widely speaking, three kind of lost dogs, and which category your dog belongs in will depend on how to construct your search efforts.

- ⇒ Gregarious dogs: friendly very social confident dog – This dog is usually picked up by helpful passers-by, so make sure your admin and social campaign is strong so people know they know they belong to you!
- ⇒ Aloof dogs: Sociable with friends and family members suspicious of strangers. This dog can be tricky to catch, and is usually caught by rescue workers, and those with a deeper knowledge of lost dog psychology – read this guide thoroughly to acquire this vital knowledge to trigger this dogs curiosity and encourage them to trust you.
- ⇒ Fearful dogs: Can be very difficult to catch – even for the owners, so read our guide carefully to ensure you are able to make yourself completely non-threatening, and allow this dog to feel safe enough to come out of hiding. Fearful dogs tend to hide from human intervention seeking out woodland, cemeteries, railway lines, often doing their traveling at night and hiding through the day.

2. The separation circumstances

Along with your dog type, we also have to consider the circumstances surrounding their disappearance.

- ⇒ The Frightened away dog: Something happened which triggered a ‘flight’ response, and the dog ran away. This dog tends to be a bit skittish in normal life, and can travel a long way to evade a perceived threatening environment. Once the ‘flight’ response has dissipated somewhat, they will often gravitate towards familiar areas, or hide, and will remain difficult to catch even for the owners. Catching protocol and bases are vital for catching this dog.
- ⇒ The Opportunistic escaper: This dog bolts out of the house, or through an open gate. Former street dog rescues often head for railway lines
- ⇒ The Wanderer: Is usually a dog who has become distracted by an exterior motivator such as an entire male or bitch on heat, looking for a mate, a dog enticed into a game by passers-by.
- ⇒ The Chaser: This dog chases something away from you, a fox, squirrel, car, other dog, cat etc, and has become separated from his pack. The dog who has chased a rabbit or fox is at risk of ending up on a railway line, as these act as handy escape routes for wild animals, as they are quiet, easy underfoot

3. Environment

- ▷ **Weather:** The worse the weather, in general, the less far a dog will travel.
- ▷ **Wind direction:** Dogs will tend to travel upwind, in an anti-clockwise triangular direction.
- ▷ **Terrain:** Natural (rivers) and artificial (roads/railway) barriers allow us to plan a likely direction of travel.
- ▷ **Rural:** Dogs lost in a rural environment tend to travel further as they are less restricted by artificial boundaries.
- ▷ **Urban & City:** Dogs lost in the city are at greater risk of being hit by vehicles. Always check local railway lines, and if you see your dog call Network Rails Emergency Line on **03457 11 41 41** immediately and report an animal on the track at your location.
- ▷ **Familiarity:** Dogs may gravitate to familiar territory (regular walks/parks/houses/businesses) so be mindful of these locations when planning your search.

The secrets you need to know about lost dog behaviour

What I would like you to do here, is stop thinking of your dog as themselves for a moment - all of their quirks and personality traits - and think of them as the species *Canis Lupus Familiaris*, first and foremost.



Survival Mode

Stress changes the dog you know and love. Your dog's conditioning to 'normal' life becomes less important as the instinctive primal state takes over. For some dogs this will happen immediately, and for others may take a little longer. Personality traits are lost, as the dog reverts back to a feral state of mind trying to survive. This is a perfectly natural state to revert to, but can become confusing and frustrating to owners who expect a certain level of

behaviour or decision making from their dog. Decisions dogs make whilst in this state are not rational or logical, they are rash and instinctive. Predicting this behaviour is a science and the more knowledge you have, the better your predictions will be.

In addition to this 'normal' lost dog state of mind, in the aftermath of extremely stressful situations, or with very skittish/nervy dogs, Post Traumatic Stress may develop. An example of this would be the after effects of fireworks night, on an environmentally sensitive collie. The fear induced by the initial event can become pathological, meaning the feeling of terror becomes generalised to not only fireworks, but to any loud noise at all. The dog exists in a constant state of terror and overstimulation, acutely attuned to any sounds around them. They may shake, pant excessively, hide, try to escape, refuse to walk, refuse to eat, drink or toilet, and can become fear aggressive if cornered by people, dogs and even their owners. When lost, this dog may remain in this 'shut down' mode, and will take longer to respond to your tactical plan.

It's all in the nose

Dogs experience the world through their nose then their eyes then their ears – in that order. The 'safety' of a new situation is decided through their sense of smell, before being passed on to the vision and audio for confirmation. This process happens all day long, with all dogs as they go about their daily lives. The problem is, that when cortisol - the stress hormone, reaches a certain level, it shuts down the dogs olfactory system, which means no sense of smell at all.



This is a survival reflex, and is designed to aid the 'fight or flight' response by abandoning all unnecessary bodily functions (smell, digestion, bladder and bowel function) in order to use all precious resources to get out of the impending danger they feel they are in. Understandably with a lost dog, frightened, lonely, cold, cortisol levels are very high, which presents the problem that 'nothing is safe'.



This biological function, is the reason why the dog CAN'T respond to the calls of its owner, even when they have known you their whole life, and can clearly hear and maybe even see you searching for them, but this familiar family bond is suppressed and the memory of you is not accessible to them at that time.

I cannot tell you how many searches I conduct, in which we find the dog very close to the lost location. In one particular case, the dog was found only 20 meters away from the lost location - where he had hidden for four days. This area had been the hub of the search party, and his owners and three other family dogs (whom the dog absolutely adored under normal circumstances) had visited and called out many many times over to no avail. He could see and hear them all, but that meant nothing until they were trained in the correct protocol and learned how to make him feel safe enough to approach.

How normal human behaviour lessens your chances

Having established the initial problem, there is then something which makes the situation even worse – 'Helpful People Who Know Nothing About Dog Psychology' (most people). When they see your dog out alone, they make eye-contact, lean forward, pat their leg, call out, and walk towards your dog. Your dogs survival reflex kicks in, they can't deem the situation as safe, therefore assume it's dangerous, they have to flee.

This dynamic happens again and again while your dog is lost, each time compounding his fear, and making him flee quicker next time, eventually making them avoid people all together, and pushing them to more and more remote locations, widening the search area, and making them harder to catch for those of us who know what we are doing. There is always a kind heart behind these intentions, no one likes to see a lost dog, but unfortunately it does make things harder to deal with.



Practical training guide

Setting up Bases

Your dog has an amazing ability to find food, shelter, you, if they are given the opportunity. They are much better at finding you than you are at finding them. They are designed to create a beacon of familiarity the panicking state of mind, and when carefully placed, are the most valuable tool for finding lost and frightened dogs. Once in place, bases should remain manned at all times (unless setting a humane trap) and in situ unless compelling evidence that the dog is in another area, in which case move the bases to the new location. You can have many bases, depending upon the number of helpers you have.

Bases should be laid at:

- ▷ The initial lost location - unless you are starting this guide late (2/3 days in) and you are certain your dog has moved on, due to lots of recent sightings.
- ▷ The last known location of your dog – so each time a likely new sighting comes up.
- ▷ Areas up wind from the lost location and in the likely direction of travel, so if your dog was seen heading upwind in a westerly direction – traveling further west (getting ahead of the movement) and laying a base is a good idea.

Bases should be set in reasonably quiet locations, reasonably sheltered with no traffic, and easy access. There needs to be a little wind blowing over the base to allow scent to travel easily. If you know the rough location of your dog, be mindful not to lay bases which encourages your dog to travel across roads or railways.

Bases are all about creating a zone filled with familiar items. A base can be:

- ▷ You sitting in a temporary hide or tent – Only people who the dog is very fond of should do this.
- ▷ You sitting in your car, engine running for 5 mins per hour (as lots of dogs can depict engine tone), boot open to allow scent to dissipate, and some familiar items underneath your vehicle.
- ▷ A crate filled with things – You can leave this open if your dog is crate trained, or closed if you are concerned about wildlife pinching the supplies.
- ▷ A humane trap (a crate with door closing trigger inside)

What to include in a base:

- ▷ Your dogs bed/blanket
- ▷ Your dogs favourite toy
- ▷ Your shoe and sock
- ▷ Your clothing – as worn as possible, PJ's are best.
- ▷ If you have a baby, include a dirty nappy, and a sickie bib.
- ▷ Your dogs usual food
- ▷ Your dogs' favourite treats – the stronger smelling the better.

Extend your reach

When setting a base, throw a few items (that you can do without) up into trees, or on top of walls to increase the distance the scent will travel.

Sit tight

The next job is for the handler to sit tight. You should sit a little away from the base (unless you are the base) so as not to cause a disturbance, but so you can still clearly see it. You can do this by sitting in a hide or tent if the area is safe to do this, or you can sit in your car, with a torch/head lamps pointing towards the den so you can see any movement. You can also set up a camera in the vehicle if you need to leave the base for any length of time, or if you are setting a humane trap, so you can check on any visitors when you are away.

Bases often work best at night when human and vehicle traffic is lighter, so make sure you have plenty of volunteers to man them in ¾ hour stints to ensure they can stay awake and focused.

The longer a base is in place, the further the scent will travel.

Catching protocol

So, we understand your dog's state of mind now, and we also know that any interaction you have with them is likely to make things worse, so what do you do? You may be monitoring a base station when a lost dog appears, or you may stumble across them, either way this section will explain exactly what you are to do.

Dogs have three levels of activity with a new and unfamiliar person or object:

1. Awareness zone: When they are aware of your presence, but you are not a threat (yet)
2. Alert zone: When they are aware of you and focused on you, deciding what to do.
3. Action zone: When the dog is forced to make a decision, i.e. fight or flight.

The aim of the following technique is to stay within the awareness zone, whilst the dog voluntarily closes the proximity between you.

Show you are no threat: Make no sudden movements. Move a little away from the dog, get low to the ground quickly, as low as possible – even lie down if you can do this whilst keeping the dog in your peripheral vision. Avoid eye-contact, round your shoulders and turn slightly away from the dog, yawn without showing your teeth, this tells the dog you are relaxed and not hunting them.

Create an interest around you: Become interested in something near to you, and gently say "what's this, what have we here" pointing and scratching at the ground, taking care not to make any sudden movements and keeping your voice high and gentle. This is a great time to text your alert to the dog's owners if you are not them.

Raise your value: Gently toss small amounts of high value food away from you – but also away from the dog, so they don't get alarmed. They may be hungry enough to eat, in which case great, they will hang around for longer, but what we are mostly trying to do is allow time for stress to lower and the olfactory system to function again so they have a chance to recognise you again.

Create a search area

Print a google map of the area there is a small legend in the bottom right corner which tells you the setting, you want this to be around 200m to 1.5km.

Mark the following on the map:

- ⇒ Initial lost point a)
- ⇒ The wind direction with an arrow.
- ⇒ All sightings b) c) d) e) and so on.
- ⇒ Add any houses/locations which are familiar to your dog with a star
- ⇒ Add any regular walks to this map with a line drawn.

The search plan

What to do first

Enlist help immediately. You have an excellent chance of finding your dog if you attend to each of the following four search sectors. Your dog has an exceptional ability to find your base stations IF they are in range of it, so we NEED public sightings to work with. The more awareness you spread, the more people can report seeing your dog, and more accurate our station placing can be.

All five roles here are vitally important, as a minimum, you need one person on each role – if you have more than that, you can share them, usually more people on local awareness ready to create the next base station are most helpful, so you can work in shifts ensuring each person gets a break/change or role. Each person involved should get a copy of this Search and Rescue plan, so ensure as many people as possible are trained in the skills which make the difference between bringing you loved one home or not.

Sector 1: The Base Station

This person should: know the dog very well, be patient and calm.

- ⊃ Create a base in the immediate lost area, as shown in the 'How to create a base' section.
- ⊃ Keep this area monitored at all times, preferably by someone who knows the dog well. You can either sit in a vehicle if possible, pitch a tent, sit on a blanket or in a bivvy bag, but you are present, quiet and still.
- ⊃ Ensure you follow Catching Protocol to the letter to ensure you do not add to the problem by frightening your dog away.
- ⊃ If your dog has been missing a while before you start with this guide – do this step immediately anyway.
- ⊃ Liaise any relevant information with admin as soon as possible.

Sector 2: Spotters

This person should: be patient and calm. Your job is to be the eyes on the ground to check the high risk areas. Dogs can travel quickly on road and railway lines and may be further away than you think. Spotters should listen out for barking/howling/whimpering at all times.

- ⊃ Sweep any nearby railway lines by looking down them at regular intervals, if you see the dog call Network Rails Emergency Line on **03457 11 41 41** immediately, and report your location.
- ⊃ Drive the local area, looking out for signs of congested traffic and checking the road side for casualties.

Sector 3: Local Awareness Campaign

This person should: Be confident and energetic, positive and enthusiastic. Distribute posters and leaflets on the ground to/on:

- ⊃ telephone poles, public parks, fence rails in the immediate lost location
- ⊃ veterinary centres, pet shops, community centres, supermarket notice boards.
- ⊃ Houses in the immediate lost area
- ⊃ Dog walkers and members of the public
- ⊃ Local businesses, Postmen, Bus drivers, Taxi drivers
- ⊃ Feedback any sightings or reports to admin so the search can move/widen as needed.

Sector 4: Admin Management

This person should: Should have access to a phone, know the 'lost' area and the dog reasonably well, be confident and calm.

- ⊃ Create a list of helpers and phone numbers so you can be the main point of contact for all.
- ⊃ Man the phone – particularly the one listed on the dogs' collar tag.
- ⊃ Call the following places to report your dog as missing:
 - Your dogs microchip provider – be sure to check and update your contact information with them.
 - Your dogs' veterinary centre and report your dog as missing.
 - The local police station and dog warden
 - Network rail and Scotrail if a railway line passes within 2 miles of your search area.
 - Veterinary centres within a five mile radius of lost area.
 - Rescue and rehoming centres near the lost area.
- ⊃ Liaise with the rescue team to relay new information asap.

Sector 5: Social Media Awareness Campaign

This person should: Be diligent and persistent. Have access to a computer at all times. Be tech savvy and good at gathering and monitoring information.

- ⇒ Create a lost poster and make many copies of it be sure to include a picture and detailed description as well as a contact number. Give it to the local awareness team to distribute.
- ⇒ Post an advert in the local paper.
- ⇒ Create a Facebook page and share on as many lost dog pages as possible (lost dogs Glasgow, lost and found dogs in central Scotland, lost & found pets Renfrewshire to name a few) as well as local dog walkers, and community centres, trainers, appealing to all to share it for you.
- ⇒ Create a search map of the target areas
- ⇒ Keep abreast of all new comments on all of those pages (both on your post and new postings to that page) for possible sightings.

How to respond to a sighting

Each time a new sighting is reported follow this protocol:

- ⇒ Admin takes as much information as possible: Description, location, direction of travel, health status, and liaises with the team. Then they attend to making any relevant new calls if the area is vastly different from before.
- ⇒ Create a new base station in the new area.
- ⇒ Widen the Social media campaign (update 'last seen' location, share with new local groups, businesses, and community centres etc)
- ⇒ Conduct a new Local awareness campaign in the new area as before.

Working with an Organisation

Employing professionals can be a huge asset to a search party, however beware the many charlatans who prey on vulnerable people, requesting fees for a service they are unable to provide. Any reputable company will have reviews and testimonials for you to see, and should be able to add value to your search by providing some of the following skills:

- ⇒ Search and Rescue dogs, specifically trained in tracking or air scenting.
- ⇒ Drone pilots to give an aerial view of your search location and search railway lines.
- ⇒ Specialist equipment such as humane trap cages for base stations
- ⇒ Night vision/thermal detection cameras
- ⇒ Motion activated outdoor cameras
- ⇒ A team of helpers in radio contact.
- ⇒ Orchestration of the search party.

A note on street dog rescues

Please be aware that rescued street dog/meat trade dogs who have been used to a life of freedom are often attracted to railway lines and roads. Railways in places such as Thailand and Romania are open access, and serve as a source of food due to the heavy rubbish left of lines, and are easy underfoot for prolonged ground cover.

These dogs will be attracted to the sound of a train, getting access via a station or gap in the fencing but do not anticipate the speed trains are trapped by the railway fencing. I cannot stress strongly enough - If you lose a street rescue dog, focus your search on roads and railway lines immediately.

Recently Rescued Dogs

These dogs have a much lower HAB (Human Animal Bond) so catching them will always be trickier, as you have no family familiarity to trigger. They may take more time to acclimatise to your bases. Trapping these dogs in a garden or garage often works well, so you can shut down the 'flee' space available to them.

For Mickey & Yogi, may you run free at the Rainbow Bridge little ones, and for your sacrifice to be the saving of many lives x

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