

Helping Rescue Stray Dogs

Find out the best way to help stray dogs.

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I was driving down a broad avenue, easing into the left-turn lane, when I saw the dog. Right in the middle of the intersection stood a Pembroke Welsh Corgi barking at the passing cars. As I slowed down to avoid hitting it, I opened my car door and called out. A car whizzed past, and the dog was startled into running toward me. With a short-legged leap, it jumped into my car, landing beneath my legs. I decided not to try to reposition it and carefully drove home.

Now I was morally obligated to make sure it didn't escape before I could contact its owner. I took a lightweight leash from the glove box, slipped it over the dog's head and opened the car door, holding the leash above the dog's head to prevent it from bolting.

I wanted to lift it to the ground short dogs risk injury jumping from heights. As my hand slipped under its tummy, the Corgi snarled and tried to shorten my thumb with its teeth. When I withdrew my hand, it instantly returned to being cute. I changed tactics and let it jump out of the car unassisted.

Once inside the house, I carefully examined the Corgi's tags and learned its name was Buster and that it lived nearby. I phoned the dog's frantic owner who rushed over to reclaim her "Baby Buster." At the end of our conversation, she advised me about one aspect of her dog's temperament: "Buster really doesn't like it when you pick him up. He has chronic back trouble."

If my rescue effort with Buster seemed simple, it is. With more than eight years' experience working with animal welfare and rescue agencies, I've rescued several hundred animals in a variety of situations. However, even with that experience, I made a careless mistake that could have resulted in injury. I tried to lift a strange and possibly and frightened dog.

If you are a dog lover, you have probably had a similar experience. Few people can look at a stray dog and not want to help the animal find its way home. But some rescues end tragically for the animal, the human or both. While we are there to offer help and salvation, the dog is unlikely to understand or react pleasantly. Frightened, injured dogs often bite any target coming toward them including a potential rescuer or run into traffic, causing accidents. When in doubt, call the agency in your area that handles animal control problems. It may take a while for the agency to respond many are overworked and understaffed.

By exercising caution and common sense, you can turn an animal rescue into a safe and positive experience for everyone involved.