

Putting a Stop to Running

Teaching an adopted dog to stay put can save his life.

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Q. I have adopted a puppy that I had fostered from the local high kill dog pound. The problem I have with him is that he is a runner. Once he smells freedom, we no longer exist, if you know what I mean. Any chance he gets—an unlatched gate, unaware visitor, UPS man, you name it—he's gone. This has happened five times. Each time we were able to retrieve him, the last two times by enticing him into the car.

I would love to be able to break him of this or at least be able to get his attention once he's on the run. The pound says this is common among shelter dogs. I have two Labradors and have never had to deal with this behavior. I think it's just the breed of dog. If there is any training that we can do to curb this behavior, please let me know.

A. There are many reasons why a dog may have the desire to run. If your dog is not yet spayed or neutered, please consider having this done as soon as possible. This will help to reduce the urge to wander. Here are some additional training tips for you and your dog.

1. Your dog should always be on a leash when not in a confined area. When dogs are frightened or new in the home they often have a strong drive to "flee" in a new environment.
2. As the "pack leader" you should always go through the door first. If the dog goes through first without your permission he is claiming the territory he is entering as his own. If you do not have control over the dog before leaving the house you will not have control when you are out of the house.
3. Teach a few simple commands to get this problem under control. A dog can learn to "wait" at the door. Wait is different from stay. Stay means to stay in one spot in one position, wait simply means "don't follow." In order for a dog to understand what a word means you need to connect the word to the dog's action.

When you go to open a door the dog is typically there waiting for you to open it. Have a soft or small treat available. You should be closer to the door than the dog is. Say, "wait" and give the dog a treat as you slowly start to open the door. If the dog goes to run out the door make a sharp noise like "eh" and close the door in his face. Wait a second and the dog will be waiting again. Repeat the above. You want to be able to open the door wide enough for the dog to get through while he continues to wait for the command to "go through." If you are going out with him go through the door first and then tell the dog to "go through". If you are just letting him out into the yard and not going with him, still make him wait and then say, "Go through."

This exercise requires no obedience training, just persistence. You are using the door as a training tool. This exercise teaches the dog to wait at doors and to only go out when given the command to "go through."

Once the dog understands he only goes through the door when given the command to do so, you can justifiably bait him for running out the door.

Baiting for running out the door: Make sure you initially practice this at a door leading to an enclosed area or have a long line on the dog for safety.

Set up the situation that would typically cause the dog to run out (such as when someone comes or goes or if the door is left ajar). Hide on the outside of the door against the house with pot lids. The second the dogs' nose comes through that door bang the pot lids in his face or throw them down in front of him without saying anything. The dog will quickly learn that when he goes out the door without permission a thunderous noise comes out of nowhere.

Teach the dog that coming to you is not negotiable by teaching the dog "here."

"Here" is a word dogs immediately associate with being given something and can be used before the dog has learned "come." It is especially useful for dogs that have learned to ignore "come." "Here" means to come to you so you can hold his collar. Start directly in front of the dog using an extra special treat. Simply say the dogs name and "here" giving him the treat and holding his collar. Pair a sound such as two clicks of the tongue with the treat and it will eventually take the place of the treat. Then release the dog and say "free." Gradually build the distance between you and the dog until he immediately comes from all over the house, and then start from the beginning in the yard. Nothing negative should ever



happen to him when he hears "here."