

Escape Artists

Do you have a dog you can't seem to keep at home, who scales your fence or takes every opportunity to run off? If you have a canine escape artist, you have a problem you need to fix: there are risks to your dog, to other people, and to your wallet to consider. A dog running loose is likely to be injured or picked up by animal control, and you, as the owner, are liable for any damage your dog might do, to property or to people or other animals.

Why Does Your Dog Want to Escape?

The first step to resolving your dog's Houdini-like behavior is to determine the reason why he is escaping.

Boredom or social isolation can cause your dog to seek entertainment or companionship elsewhere. You can keep your dog entertained when you are gone by providing various toys and different things to do (See "[Dog Toys – Choosing and Using Them.](#)")

Make sure your dog gets plenty of time with family and gets to experience your companionship (See "[Inside or Outside Dog?](#)")

Make sure your dog gets enough exercise. Time that your dog spends alone in the yard doesn't count toward that exercise.

Sexually motivated roaming is mainly an issue for unneutered male dogs, but it's a problem for owners of unspayed females as well. A male dog looking for available females is very hard to keep in, and if your female wanders while she's in heat, she's nearly sure to get pregnant. Pet overpopulation is a serious issue, and accidental breeding is a big part of it.

If you get your dog neutered when they're young, you may avoid this issue entirely. If they've established the pattern of escaping over a long period, it may take longer for them to stop, but getting them neutered will make changing this behavior much easier. See the [SPCA of Texas Web site](#) for low-cost spay and neuter options.



Additional Resources

Please contact our Behavior Team to speak with a skilled behavior specialist.

BehaviorTeam@spca.org

214-461-5169

www.spca.org/petuniversity

Dogs with fears and phobias, such as thunderstorm or noise phobias, often react by escaping. See "[Fear of Thunder and Other Loud Noises](#)." Keep your dog safe by putting them somewhere they can't escape and where they feel safe when you know they may be frightened.

Separation anxiety can cause your dog to try to escape. See "[Separation Anxiety](#)."

Keeping Your Dog Safely at Home

To keep your dog in, you'll need to figure out how they're getting out. While you work to make them want to get out less, you also need to block their escape routes. No matter what method you use, always make sure your dog has access to shelter and fresh water while outdoors.

Fences

If your dog jumps the fence, you can make it higher. The best way to do that is with an extension that slants inward at about a 45-degree angle. A lot of dogs get over fences by climbing, pushing off something on or near the fence, or by hitching themselves over with their paws. Make sure there's nothing your dog can use to get over in these ways. A rolling bar at the top of the fence, sometimes referred to as "coyote rollers", can be helpful.

For a dog who digs under the fence, you can make digging difficult or impossible by securing chicken wire or chain link fencing on the ground or burying it along the base of the fence, or by placing large rocks or bricks there. See "[Digging](#)."

Replace or secure any latches or locks that your dog has figured out how to open. Sometimes the only way to prevent fence escapes is to provide a secure, covered dog run for the times you're not at home.

Tethering, Tying, or Chaining Your Dog

There are a lot of reasons not to use a tether or chain to keep your dog on your property. A tied-out dog can easily get hurt or so frustrated that they act aggressively or destructively. In many cities, including Dallas, it is illegal to tether your dog if you are not immediately present. Some municipalities allow you to tether your dog for up to 3 hours in a 24 hour period but your dog must have access to clean water and shelter.

If you do need to tether your dog for short periods of time, be sure that you have a safe way to do it, with a trolley on a line that runs between two points, such as trees, allowing your dog room to move around. Connect your dog to the trolley with a leash attached to a body harness--never a choke or prong collar. The leash should be short enough that it won't get tangled or wrapped around your dog, but long enough that your dog can comfortably lie down.

Don't Punish Your Dog for Escaping

Punishment for escaping can make things worse because your dog will make your dog scared to come back to you when they get out. See "[Running away and not coming when called](#)")