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ESCAPING PROBLEMS



When your dog leaves home without your permission, a number of potentially dangerous consequences can arise. Wandering on roads, injuring themselves, being “at large”, fighting with other dogs, making babies, soiling public places, and leading to hefty council fines are all good reasons to take this problem seriously.

The first step in solving escape problems is to determine why and how the dog is escaping.

To understand how your dog is escaping, nothing beats a video or a neighbourhood “spy”. Once escape outlets are identified, they should be modified to prevent escape. This is not the solution however.

The other immediate point to remember, no matter how angry you are, is not to punish your dog if you find him out of the yard. This will only make him more difficult to catch, and create more problems such as fear.

Hormones may be playing a part. If your dog has not been castrated or spayed, the problem will likely continue. The desire “to sow seeds” is something a fence will not inhibit. Regardless of your dog’s age, desexing will provide immediate health and behavioural benefits.

As much as tethering might seem to be the ideal immediate solution, it is not a kind answer. Dogs can become frustrated due to deprivation of normal activities (which may show as barking, destruction and aggression) and at the worst, tangled and even strangled. Research also shows that dogs which are tied or chained are much more likely to bite than those which aren’t. It is just not good welfare for the pets we have chosen to live with us.

The main issue is finding out *why* your dog is trying to get out.

A behavioural consultation will take you through the steps of finding out the cause.

Common causes include;

- Separation anxiety
- Fears and phobias
- Sexually motivated roaming
- Territorial behaviour
- Play, investigative or social behaviour
- Predatory behaviour

Treatment of escaping problems is multi-faceted. Not only do we have to modify your dog's behaviour, but also the environment needs altering, such as the fence, where the dog is housed, and enrichment of the environment.



As a behavioural modification plan can only come from a person who can make the appropriate diagnosis, the remainder of this is devoted to fence modification (please remember that this is only part of the approach, because if your dog's motivation for escape isn't addressed, it will continue to attempt to do so, or display other behavioural problems).

DIGGING UNDER THE FENCE

- Use large rocks and partially bury them along the entire fence line
- Chain link can be placed along the fence line and extended 30cm up the fence
- Install an electric wire along the base of the fence. Do not use this option if your dog is fearful or anxious or the problem will worsen.

CLIMBING THE FENCE

- Attach an extension of heavy wire or trellis to the top of the fence, coming in at a 90° angle
- Remove any objects that your dog may be using as a foot-hold or climbing aid
- Install electric wire along the top of the fence or where your dog is pushing off from. Other booby traps include hanging tin cans, mouse traps etc. Do not do this if your dog is fearful or anxious or the problem will worsen.

CHEWING THROUGH THE FENCE

- Apply a foul tasting substance to the fence (e.g. bitter apple) in a thick layer
- Booby trap the fence (balloons which will pop, mouse traps, motion sensors)
- Cover the fence with vinyl carpet runner with the pointy side up

JUMPING THE FENCE

- Make the fence taller
- Add an inner fence, trench or hedge to interrupt his run-up
- Make a visual barrier so your dog can't see the landing point
- Remove anything near the fence that your dog may be using as a launching pad.

ELECTRONIC BOUNDARY SYSTEMS (not recommended)

These consist of a buried wire and a receiver attached to the dog's collar. When your dog approaches the wire, he receives an electric shock or spray of citronella from the collar (depending on which type).

Some dogs want to escape so much, they will tolerate the shock to get out, but will not re-enter the yard.

Training is required to teach the dog how the system works. Boundary flags are needed to provide a visual barrier and rewards need to be given when your dog moves away from the barrier.

Some dogs have been known to redirect aggression towards their owner when receiving the shock.

These cannot be used for dogs displaying protective or territorial aggression. These dogs need confining in a safe enclosure.

The use of these devices cannot be recommended as they inflict pain and reduce the welfare of your dog, physically and mentally

References:

S. Hetts **Pet Behaviour Protocols What to say, what to do, when to refer.** AAHA 1999

G. Landsburg, W. Hunthausen and L. Ackerman **Handbook of Behaviour Problems of the Dog and Cat** 2nd Ed.
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