

Dogs That Door-Dash
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Recently, we saw a lady who had a dog that was escaping through open doors and gates at every opportunity. This young male would run out into the street, chase people and dogs, visit with dogs behind fences and sometimes be gone for hours at a time. Arnie wouldn't come when called and seemed to be deaf to the words of his owner. He was causing all kinds of anguish for his owner.

How can owners deal with such canine escape artists? As with any behavior problem, the first step is to identify the cause of the problem. Dogs may escape for any number of reasons, including to escape people, noises, or places they are afraid of, to play with other people or animals, to attack other people or animals or because they are bored. Finding out what the dog does when she is out loose can help owners identify why the dog is escaping.

Removing the source of the fears or desensitizing the dog to the fearful things can reduce one motivation for escaping. Working to reduce the dog's aggressive behavior can reduce another motivation as well. Working with fears and aggression may require the help of a behavioral professional. Giving a dog things to do when you are gone such as toys to play with or objects to chew may stop some boredom and play motivated escapes. Spaying and neutering intact animals can often reduce the desire to roam as well.

Arnie's motivation was primarily play although he had some aggressive tendencies as well. His owner, Mary, was doing a good job in keeping him away from open doors and in providing him with things to do around the house. We suggested that she also begin to work to reduce his aggressiveness to other people and animals, using specific procedures we recommended.

Second we told her to work with him on coming when called. She began by calling him when they both were in the house and using a very tasty treat to reward his coming. Next, she worked with him in the fenced back yard and later when he was on a long leash in the front yard, in order to get him to want to come no matter where he was.

Third, we suggested she work with Arnie on sitting and staying when he was around doors and gates and people were coming and going. The idea was to teach him to only go out or come in when he was invited to do so. A tasty treat was used to reinforce his behavior. These procedures can take a lot of time and effort but they generally help the dog to be under better control and can reduce escape behavior.

**Edited version first published in the Rocky Mountain News, Denver, CO.
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