



Austin Sheltie Rescue Guidelines for Finders of Lost Dogs

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In an ideal lost and found situation, the dog's home is right there in your neighborhood, the owners are frantically combing the streets, and you are able to initiate the happy reunion immediately. But if more than 24 hours elapse, then we recommend the following:

IF YOU FIND A LOST DOG: Keep the dog in your care; do not turn into a shelter. Put up flyers in the neighborhood, local vet. clinics and pet stores; give only a general description of the dog with your telephone number; watch for the owner's flyers posted as well. If the dog is wearing tags, call the numbers on those tags and report the dog is found.

Check the local newspapers for lost dog ads; call the animal shelters in your area to alert them and give them the description and any tag numbers; take the dog to your vet and have scanned for microchip; most vets are very cooperative about rescue dogs. Keep the dog for 72 hours; then if you cannot foster, call local breed rescuers who will help you--you can find their phone numbers/e-mail addresses through **Austin Sheltie Rescue**, breeders, veterinarians, and the Internet.

DOGGIE VIGILANCE: One thing we've learned in rescue work and helping owners of lost dogs is to be very careful to listen to your own dogs or neighborhood dogs: if they are barking and barking non-stop, something is going on. In a recent case, the finders' dogs were alerting them of a lost dog exhausted down in a utility easement behind their house; he had wandered four miles from home. Approach such a dog cautiously, and if he's friendly, bring him home, give him water, feed him lightly; and call the area vets. If he is scared or bolts, ease back, call rescue groups who will work with the dog, possibly with a capture cage if necessary.

IF THE OWNER OF A LOST DOG IS LOCATED: If an owner sees your flyer and calls (or you see a promising owner flyer/ad and call the number), have the alleged owner describe this dog. First, how, when, and where did this person lose the dog? Don't worry if there seems to be some distance involved; many lost dogs are picked up, transported, and dropped off; you just want to get an idea if the dog is from your neighborhood which will help the identification. Second, without offering any help, ask the person to give details: what breed, color, distinguishing marks; how tall, weight, age, sex, whether neutered. What is the dog's name (see if the dog answers to it); did the dog have a collar and tags? If it doesn't sound like this dog, tell the owner the description doesn't match, and that's the end of it. If it sounds to you this is the owner's dog--the description is a match, and you feel sure--do not let the person come to your home no matter how nice he or she sounds.

Agree to meet them with the dog in a public place, the mall or a McDonald's, etc.; have someone else go with you, and perhaps another person watching from a little distance, but do not go alone. Watch the dog's reaction to the owner, and keep her on leash. If the dog does not seem to recognize the person, or shrinks from this person, you and your friend leave with the dog, telling the person you do not think this is their dog. Do not return her to someone who may be an abuser or to a scam artist--someone who saw your flyers and tries to claim a dog not theirs--for

either personal reasons or to sell to laboratories. Protect the dog first; then call rescue or the SPCA.

If this is a joyous reunion, you gladly return the dog. But take the opportunity to gently educate the owner: the dog should have collar and tags (they may have slipped off); the dog should be tattooed or microchipped immediately, or they could lose her permanently if she's an escape artist. They should never leave their dog alone in the backyard while they are out of town: this is how many dogs get lost; it would be better to board her (being sure she has the bordetella shot for kennel cough in addition to required vaccinations) or hire a pet sitter.

Also tell them that if rescue had taken in the dog, they would have been out a lot of money to reimburse vet. expenses; rescue organizations do not have to return a dog until those fees are paid. Also tell them if you had not been so kind, the dog might have ended up in a shelter with dire results. They need to understand that if a dog has been lost for over 72 hours, shelters have no obligation to the owner and can adopt the dog or worse.

Finally, don't ask for a reward, which could be construed as 'ransom,' but the owner should offer to reimburse you for the care you've been giving the lost dog. The impulse will be to say 'no,' that you'd want someone to do that for your dog. However, they need to offer, and you can give the donation to rescue or a local shelter. Try to get them involved in the recovery of their dog and assume responsibility for taking better care of her. You may have just saved a life.