

No More 'Door Dashing' Dogs – 9 Ways to Stop Your Escape Artist from Bolting

Does your dog bolt out the door every time you crack it open? If so, you probably have a dog with one of two issues. But that doesn't negate the very real dangers and possible heartbreak of allowing this to go on. So teach your dog 2 commands, using these 9 training tips.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many dogs are “door dashers” — they bolt out the door as soon as it’s opened
- Some door dashers are simply under-exercised or undertrained, while others are breeds with inherited traits that give them an independent or adventurous nature
- There are many ways to train a dog not to bolt out an open door. The best approaches involve positive reinforcement behavior training and laying the groundwork for your dog to succeed
- If your dog is microchipped, make sure to keep his registration current in the microchip company's database
- All dogs should wear an ID tag, but it’s especially important to ensure escape artist dogs always wear an up-to-date ID tag or collar

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There is one particularly undesirable behavior many dogs engage in that their owners desperately wish they wouldn't: dashing out the door. This behavior is not only annoying and often embarrassing — it's also dangerous.

Why Door Dashers Are a Hazard to Themselves and Others

The dangers for a dog running free through the neighborhood are countless. They include being hit by a moving vehicle, encountering an aggressive dog or wild animal, or getting lost, stolen, or picked up by animal control.

There's also the possibility a dog running wild could knock over a small child or an elderly person, or run through a neighbor's open door or backyard gate and cause a problem.

Unfortunately, most door dashers, even after being scared or hurt during an escape, aren't able to associate the act of running loose with the consequence of fear or pain. As soon as there's another opportunity to bolt through an open door, these dogs are in the wind once again.

The thrill the dog gets by running loose and having the opportunity to chase other animals (or people) provides instant reinforcement and self-reward for the behavior.

Why Some Dogs Are Door Dashers

Many canine escape artists are first and foremost in dire need of more physical exercise and mental stimulation. Often they are high-energy breeds, or dogs who spend all day inside by themselves.

Generally speaking, dogs that aren't given sufficient opportunities to exercise and explore are much more likely to seek out those opportunities for themselves.

A dog who is well-exercised through structured activities (walking, running, hiking, playing fetch, trips to the dog park, etc.) is typically more relaxed and compliant than an under-exercised dog.

Another consideration is your dog's breed and temperament. Some breeds naturally prefer to stick close to home and their humans, while others are more inclined to be adventurers.

For example, certain dogs, including some terriers, were bred to work independently and at a distance from humans. Those dogs are more likely to feel the urge to dash out the door than dogs bred for companionship.

Breeds whose nature is to track and hunt wildlife (e.g., scenthounds and sighthounds) are also more likely to run out an open door to pursue an enticing smell or a small animal.

9 Tips for Curbing Door Dashing

There are many different ways to train dogs to perform desirable behaviors. The steps listed below are among several that can be used to successfully teach your dog not to dash out open doors.

The most effective and humane training method, and the one that's recommended, involves setting your dog up for success, using positive reinforcement to train the behaviors you want to see more of, and ignoring (not punishing) undesirable behaviors.

With a dog who dashes, the first order of business is to put an immediate and permanent stop to your pet's ability to scoot out the door. This means gaining the cooperation of everyone in the household, and all visitors to your home.

1. **Doorknob rule** — A technique many people use is the dog-doorknob rule. Everyone living in and visiting your home should be trained not to turn the doorknob until they know where the dog is, and insure she can't get loose and get to the door.

The door should never be opened until the dog is secure, which means confined in another room, on a leash someone is holding, or reliably following a verbal command to "stay" or "wait."

2. **Secure the yard** — If you have a fence around your yard or a driveway gate, make sure to close and even lock any access points so that in the event someone breaks the doorknob rule, you've got a second opportunity to corral your escapee before he disappears down the street.
3. **Leash rule** — Until your dog is trained not to run out the door, keep a leash on him at all times throughout the day when someone is due to enter or leave your home. If there tends to be constant activity at your door, it means your dog will be on leash most of the time in the beginning.

Yes, this is a pain, but remember the goal is to put an immediate and permanent stop to your dog's ability to bolt out the door.

4. **Before training sessions, take your dog out to relieve himself** — Before attempting any at-the-door training, make sure your dog has an opportunity to relieve himself.

If he really needs to go, he might wind up confused about what you want from him, since he's accustomed to charging out the door to go pee or poop — an activity you normally encourage.

5. **Teach a "back" command at the door** — While inside your home, grab some training treats and go to the door with your dog. As you open the door, tell him "back." As you give the command, shuffle your feet forward toward him, which should cause him to back up to avoid being crowded.

When he backs up, immediately give him a treat. Repeat this exercise as often as necessary until your dog automatically backs up whenever the door starts to open.

6. **Teach a "wait" command at the door** — Again, grab some treats, go to the door with your dog, and tell her to sit. Hold a treat close to her nose with one hand, tell her to "wait," and open the door with the other hand. If she stays still, give her the treat and lots of praise.

If she dives for the door, close it, tell her to sit again, and repeat the exercise. Continue training the "wait" command until she sits and waits at the door reliably.

7. **Teach "back" and "wait" at every door** — Don't assume once your dog is consistently following "back" and "wait" commands at one door that he'll do the same at another door. Habituate him to the behavior at all entrances to your home by practicing at each door a couple of times a day.
8. **Introduce distractions** — Once your dog is reliably obeying your commands at each door, clip on her leash, grab some treats, and begin introducing distractions so that you can teach her to pay attention to you in a distracting environment.

For example, have people arrive at the door to greet you while she waits beside you. Bring her to the door for package or mail deliveries. Ask a neighbor or friend with a dog to stand on the sidewalk or curbside in front of your house, and open the door so your dog can see them.

9. **Never let your guard down** — Preventing escapes and training your dog to behave properly at the door should extinguish most door-dashing behavior. However, it's impossible to extinguish your pet's natural curiosity, nor would you want to. So it's important to never let your guard down when it comes to your adventurous canine companion and open doors.

Very Important — Ensure Your Dog Is Wearing ID at All Times

All dogs, and especially escape artists, should wear an up-to-date ID collar or tag at all times.

If your dog is microchipped, make sure to keep his registration current in the microchip company's database. Other methods for identifying pets include GPS tracking devices, radio frequency identification devices, and permanent tattoos.

If you have a dog that is a genuine Houdini, safeguard your beloved with a multitude of restraints.



Pets should also have a standard up-to-date ID collar or tag in addition to whatever other ID method you choose, since the easiest, fastest way for someone who has found your pet to find you, is to take a quick look at the contact info contained on his tag or collar.

Sources and References

[Partnership for Animal Welfare \(Archived\)](#)
[Karen Pryor Clicker Training](#)
[The Nest](#)
