



When a dog goes missing, one of the most important pieces of advice we give owners is:

👉 **Stay at the place where your dog was last seen — or make sure your presence is still there.**





This may feel simple or even counter-intuitive, especially when your instinct is to search everywhere, call their name, or walk the whole area.

But for a lost dog, this point — the **Last Known Location (LKL)** — becomes an anchor of familiarity and safety.

Here's why it matters so much.

1. Lost Dogs Often Try to Return to the Point They Went Missing

Even frightened, disoriented, or neophobic dogs very often attempt to return to:

-  the place they slipped a lead
-  the point they bolted from
-  the spot where they lost sight of their owner
-  the location where their routine “broke”

The LKL acts like a “home base” in the dog’s brain.

They may circle back hours later — sometimes multiple times — *if the area feels calm and safe.*

But if no familiar person, object, or smell is there, the dog may:





- panic
- feel abandoned
- move on to find a safer place

Once they move on in survival mode, they may **not return again**, making the search area dramatically larger.

♥ 2. Your Presence Provides Stability and Familiar Scent

A dog in flight mode relies heavily on scent.

Your presence in the LKL provides:

-  your **physical scent**
-  your dog's sense of routine and familiarity
-  calm, predictable "safe" signals
-  a central point for the dog to return to

Remaining quiet, seated, and still is far more effective than calling, walking, or shouting.

Your job is to be:

- predictable
- stationary
- calm
- familiar

This gives the dog the confidence to approach when they feel safe enough.

🚗 3. What If You *Can't* Stay at the Last Known Location?

Sometimes staying at the LKL for long periods isn't possible.

In these cases, you can still help your dog by leaving:

- ✓ **Your vehicle**

Dogs recognise their family car instantly — visually and by smell.
Leaving your car in the area can act as a “beacon” that tells the dog:

“My humans have been here.”

This alone can keep them circling and holding the area.

✓ **Your scent**

Leave items with **your unwashed, natural scent**, such as:

- ✓ worn clothing
- ✓ worn socks
- ✓ bedding
- ✓ an unwashed blanket
- ✓ a jacket you’ve spent hours wearing

Omit food items (unless advised by a trained team), because inappropriate food placement can move the dog away from safe locations or into dangerous [positions](#).

These scent items act as a grounding point and may keep the dog nearby until you or a search team return.

! 4. If No Scent or Familiarity Is Present, Dogs Tend to Move On

If the dog returns to the LKL and finds:

- no owner
- no familiar scent
- no vehicle
- no signs of their people

...their fear may escalate.

This can push them into **full survival mode**, causing them to:

- travel further distances

- become increasingly reactive
- avoid humans
- avoid returning to the LKL entirely

Once they decide the area holds no safety anchor, they may move on rapidly.

That's why setting and maintaining a reliable "safe zone" is essential.

5. Experienced Search Teams Use This Behaviour to Recover Dogs Safely

Professionals understand how dogs behave during fear, flight, and survival mode.

They will often ask owners to:

- ✓ sit quietly at the LKL
- ✓ stay in their parked car
- ✓ position themselves downwind
- ✓ avoid calling out
- ✓ avoid moving around
- ✓ avoid unintentionally pushing the dog further away

These steps are designed to:

- ✓ prevent flight responses
- ✓ keep the dog anchored in an area
- ✓ support camera monitoring
- ✓ allow for safe containment setups
- ✓ increase the chance of calm recovery

Following this advice — even when it feels passive — makes a huge difference.

Your stillness is not "doing nothing."

It is one of the most valuable parts of a safe recovery plan.

In Summary

A dog's last known location is **the most important place in the early stages of a search**.

Dogs naturally try to return there — but they need to feel that safety and familiarity is still present.

- ✓ Lost dogs often circle back to the LKL
- ✓ Your presence or scent keeps them anchored
- ✓ Leaving a vehicle or worn clothing can help if you cannot stay
- ✓ Without familiarity, dogs may go into survival mode and move on
- ✓ Experienced search teams rely on this behaviour to recover dogs safely

Staying put (or leaving your presence behind) gives your dog the best possible chance of finding their way back to you.