

FACTSHEET

Lost cats

The fear and panic that you feel when you think your cat is lost can be overwhelming. The grief experienced when a cat is lost forever is a burden that never really goes away, and the relief of being reunited with a lost cat is enormous.

We never, ever want our cats to be lost, but it does happen; even sometimes indoors only cats are accidentally let outside, and cats can go missing in times of change such as moving house or when they are being boarded.

Reducing the risks

Make sure your cat is microchipped and registered, and ensure you keep your contact details up to date. As well as registering your cat with the local council, you can also register them on other databases such as the Australasian Animal Registry (AAR) - a non-profit organisation of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (www.aar.org.au).

Your cat should be desexed. One of the benefits of desexing is a cat is less likely to wander.

A collar and identity tag with a mobile phone number can be a lifesaver, even if your cat is microchipped. Make sure the collar is secure but not too tight – if you're not sure about the right sort of collar for your cat talk to your vet or call us. If you go away, make sure you change the contact details on the tag so that the person minding your cat can be contacted in your absence.

Try to keep your cat secure and safe at all times by ensuring they are safely indoors, or if outdoors then in a cat-proof fenced yard. Ensure regular maintenance checks of the fencing. If your cat does go outdoors, try to maintain routine feeding times and always keep them indoors from dusk to dawn.

If you have people staying at your house, they need to know whether your cat is allowed outside. When you have tradesmen or builders on your property it is a good idea to keep your cat confined to one secure room until they have left. If you have an extended period of renovations and your cat is stressed, it could be a good idea to board them. Building works and loud noises can stress cats and they might try to run away. Similarly, be extra cautious at times like New Year's Eve and during bad weather.

When transporting your cat always use a secure cat carrier and make sure it is fastened properly. Cats are very scared when being moved and will often try to run away in panic.

Keep clear and up-to-date photos of your cat: if they go missing, you will need a good picture to help people identify them.

What to do if your cat is missing

The first place to check if your cat goes missing is your own home; make sure they aren't shut in a cupboard or locked in the garage. Check all their usual hiding places and try to stay calm. Speed is of the essence, as the chances of finding your cat will decrease with time (although there are many cases of cats being reunited with their people months, or even years after they went missing, these are not typical).

Unless you have a cat who loves hopping in other people's cars or vans, chances are they are somewhere nearby. If they had been frightened by something, they may have run in the wrong direction but might still be just a few doors down the road. As soon as you can, doorknock immediate neighbours and ask them to help with the search. Ask them to check places in their own garden where the cat might have been trapped (in the garage, under the house). Take a photo with you if you aren't able to make flyers right away. You should try to doorknock your whole block plus the one behind and in front as soon as possible.

Prepare flyers as quickly as you can; include a recent photo as well as comments about any identifying features (to a cat person every tabby is unique, but to other people a cat is black or white!) – include details like eye colour, voice, size, and any unusual features. State when and where the cat went missing and include a phone number that will be answered; it is not advisable to include your address or full name.

Letterbox the flyers in your neighbourhood and put the flyers up in shops and public places. Talk to people in the streets and local places such as schools, libraries, and corner shops to enlist their support. Many people will care and will want to help you find your cat.

Phone vet clinics (including after hours emergency clinics); pet shops; animal welfare shelters (e.g. Cat Protection, Animal Welfare League, RSPCA); and pounds: get your flyers to them as well. Ring your local council's companion animal department to ask them for advice about lost pets in your area, and check that your cat's registration details are current and correct.

Give priority to contacting the closest places first, but don't limit yourself to only the local area; if someone has found your cat injured they might have driven your cat to their local vet which could be further away.

You can advertise in lost and found columns, and you might even have a sympathetic local community radio station to help you in your efforts. Facebook groups such as Lost Pets in NSW (<https://www.facebook.com/lostpetsinnsw/>) and Lost & Found Pets Inner West Sydney (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/LostPetInnerWestSydney/>) allow you to post photos and information about your cat so that other locals can be on the lookout.

Whatever you do, be diligent and organised; don't panic; get friends, neighbours and family to help; don't give up hope – and remember to take down the posters, remove the flyers and let your neighbours know when kitty finds their way home. Cat Protection has been witness to some incredible lost and found stories; the news isn't always bad, but it is certainly better to be safe than sorry, so do take every care to protect your cat.

While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.