

How to Reduce or Eliminate Excessive Barking

Part of responsible dog ownership is ensuring that your dog is not a nuisance to others. Barking is a natural dog behavior and most people want their dogs to bark to alert them to potential danger. However, owners who permit their dogs to bark excessively are permitting a public nuisance to occur. This information sheet is designed to assist you to correct a barking dog problem.

Why Dogs Bark

Dogs bark for many reasons. Some breeds, such as hounds, huskies, and herding breeds have been bred to be vocal. It can be difficult to eliminate this behavior since it is inherited. Other dogs bark out of fear or defense of their property. Being located near a busy sidewalk or other stimulus will cause many dogs to bark a lot. Many excessively barking dogs do so out of boredom, loneliness, and frustration. Changing their living conditions, finding them a companion, or devising other environmental changes can address this problem.

The first step to addressing a barking dog problem is to identify the reason for the dog's behavior.

Loneliness: In most situations dogs bark because they are lonely. Dogs are pack animals and must have companionship to feel secure. In our society, the dog's pack is his human family. The dog that is kept exclusively outdoors, separated from his family, is frustrated and isolated. He barks to voice his loneliness. The best solution to this situation is to allow the dog to live indoors. If this is not possible due to allergies or other serious obstacles, a second dog can provide companionship to the barking dog. Care should be used in selecting the second dog to ensure it is not predisposed to barking as well. In any event, always make sure you spend time with your dog every day. Your dog relishes your attention and needs it to be happy and well adjusted.

Protectiveness/Fearfulness: Other dogs bark because outside stimulus agitates them. Being located next to a busy sidewalk, stairwell, a playground, or other area of high human activity will cause dogs to bark to protect their territory or out of fear of strangers. Try to find a location on your property where the dog will be the least exposed to these triggers. Provide a crate (if indoors) or doghouse (if outdoors) for the dog to retire to if he chooses. Never leave your dog in an area where he can be teased by passing children. This torment causes heightened aggression in dogs and may result in a bite or attack.

Lack of Socialization: Well-socialized dogs are less likely to bark excessively. They have been exposed to a variety of situations, people, and other animals and are less likely to bark out of fear or protection. Well-socialized dogs live indoors where they are part of the family and learn, on a daily basis, what is acceptable behavior. They are trustworthy around new people and new situations. All dogs should be positively exposed to new situations and rewarded for their good behavior.

Provide Distractions: If your dog barks when left alone, leave him with plenty of toys to occupy his attention. If he is playing or chewing on toys he will be too preoccupied to bark. Good diversions are Kong toys (available at a pet supply retailer) that you can stuff with kibble,

peanut butter, or other treats. Freezing the Kongs first makes the treats last longer and can occupy your dog for hours. Rotate the toys so your dog doesn't become bored with them, and only give them to him when you are gone. This will increase their attraction for your dog and he will be even more inclined to devote his attention to them instead of barking.

Training: Use training to modify your dog's excessive barking.

- Never pet or soothe your dog if he is barking from fear. This reinforces his barking, which you are trying to stop. Do not encourage aggressive barking. Any positive reaction he gets from you will reinforce his behavior and make it more difficult to control.
- If your dog is barking to demand something – a toy, treat, car ride, etc. – do not give into his demands and reward the undesirable behavior. Wait until he is quiet to give him his reward.
- Teach your dog the word "Quiet" so he will know the command and be able to respond to it. To teach "Quiet" you will need either a squirt bottle with water and a little lemon juice or a shake can. When your dog barks when he isn't supposed to, squirt him in the mouth with the water and lemon juice. The taste will be a negative response to his barking and he will learn to cease barking to avoid it. A shake can is a small can with some pennies inside, taped shut so they don't spill out. It makes a loud, distracting noise and can be used instead of a squirt bottle. When your dog barks when he isn't supposed to, shake the can loudly and say, "Quiet!" This distracts your dog from the barking. Praise your dog when he has been quiet for several moments. These methods must be used within 2-3 seconds of the barking, or they will have no effect.
- Praise and reward your dog when he is being quiet. Dogs want to please, and will learn you like it best when it is quiet. When your dog is exposed to a situation where he otherwise would have barked, but chose not to because of the training you have taught him, reward him with petting, treats, and attention.
- Never hit, kick, or hold your dog's mouth shut. This will only teach your dog to fear you and may cause aggression problems. The proper way to curtail barking is to identify the cause and create interventions that both reduce the reason for the barking and train your dog that it is not acceptable behavior. Remember, it is your job as his owner to teach him the rules and provide an environment that doesn't support undesirable behavior.
- Only use an anti-bark collar as a last resort. Since they do not address the underlying cause of the problem they will not be a permanent solution. There are several types of anti-bark collars on the market. Research them carefully to decide what is the most appropriate type that suits your dog. Remember that these collars are not meant to be left on all of the time. If you are home with your dog, it is a better solution to work on his behavioral problem (without the collar) while you are there (as discussed above). You may choose to leave it on when you are not at home to help correct the problem.

Animal Control Services recommends these links for more information on behavior modification:

<http://www.apdt.com>

<http://www.clickertraining.com>

<http://www.ddfl.org/tips.htm>