

It's A Dog's World™

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BARKING

Dogs will be dogs, and most dogs will bark, whine and howl at times - it's only natural. Dogs vocalize to communicate with humans and to express themselves. Sometimes we want our dogs to bark in order to warn us about potential danger or protect us from harm.

However, excessive dog barking can be considered a behavior problem. As our population increases, especially in urban environments, more and more communities are instituting "Dog Barking Laws" that not only impose fines on owners of dogs who exhibit nuisance barking, but may also involve confiscation and forced euthanasia of barking dogs.



What is the solution? Well, your dog needs to understand when to bark and when to be quiet, and it's your job to teach this. Start working on problem barking as soon as you can. The longer you wait, the harder it gets to curb the behavior.

The first step in resolving any barking problem is to determine why your dog is barking. 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.

Loneliness/Boredom/Lack of Exercise

In most situations, dogs bark because they are lonely, bored or when they have no other outlets for their pent up energy. 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.

Make sure that your dog is getting enough structured exercise (walking, jogging, swimming, games of "fetch", etc.) to alleviate pent up energy. A tired, relaxed dog is much less likely to bark.

Similarly, be sure to provide your dog with plenty of interactive enrichment toys like food-stuffable Kongs®. Interactive and "enrichment" types of toys will help to relieve your dog's boredom by keeping him focused on something other than the fact that you aren't there.

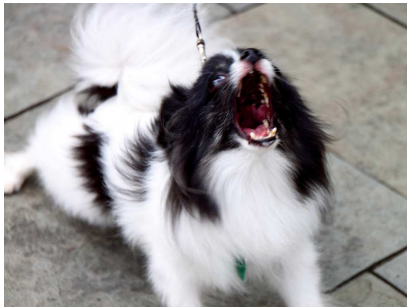
Protectiveness

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.

Seeking Attention

Many dogs, especially puppies learn to get attention from their owners or other dogs by barking at them. Owners will unwittingly reinforce this behavior by immediately looking at their dogs and telling them to be quiet or they will give in to the barking and play with the puppy. Guess what? They just gave the dog the very thing it was seeking – ATTENTION!! Soon the dog learns to get what it wants by barking. 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.

Fearfulness



Keep in mind that barking is usually the first line of defense for a fearful dog. It is a warning to anyone approaching that the dog is uncomfortable and he is trying to keep others at a distance. Many times this behavior works, either because passersby had no intention of interacting with the dog or because they are fearful of a dog attack. In any event, the dog has learned that barking successfully removes the cause of his fear, thus reinforces the behavior.

When to Correct Barking Behavior

In some cases, owners may want their dogs to bark. Alerting the family that someone is at the door or has entered the property is a good example of this. However, once the owner has acknowledged the dog, the barking should cease.

Care should also be taken when correcting a dog's barking behavior. Overly correcting a fearful dog who is barking, especially if the dog is on leash, may not only increase the dog's fear (every time someone approaches, the dog gets punished, therefore people and/or other animals are bad), it may also result in the dog learning to suppress the barking and lead to the dog biting without warning.

There are a variety of ways to curb your dog's barking, depending on your dog's reasons for barking in the first place. It goes without saying that you should never physically punish 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.

Barking at passersby

If your dog barks at people or animals passing by the living room window, manage his behavior by closing the curtains or putting your dog in another room. If he barks at passersby when he's in the yard, bring him into the house to manage the situation or prevent the dog's ability to see out to the street by installing landscape screening on the gates. Never leave your dog outside unsupervised all day and night.

You can also teach your dog to automatically come to you after one or two alert barks. When you hear your dog barking, get his attention by making a distracting noise (whistle, hand clapping, clicker, etc.). When your dog looks at you, call your dog to you using a happy voice. Be sure to praise your dog for coming to you and ceasing the barking. When practiced consistently, this will teach your dog that it's okay to let you know someone is there, but it's more rewarding to come to you for attention.

Ignore the barking

Ignore your dog's barking for as long as it takes him to stop. That means don't give him any attention at all while he's barking. Your attention only rewards him for being noisy, and in some cases, he may actually believe that you are joining in to help him.

Don't talk to him, don't touch him, and don't even look at him. When he finally quiets, even to take a breath, reward him with a treat.

To be successful with this method:

- You must wait as long as it takes for him to stop barking. If he barks for an hour and you finally get so frustrated that you yell at him to be quiet, the next time he'll probably bark for an hour and a half. He learns that if he just barks long enough you'll give him attention.
- Be consistent. You must ignore the barking EVERY time.

Barking when confined

If your dog is in his crate or confined to a room behind a baby gate or other barrier, he may bark because he wants to be with you.

- Turn your back and ignore him.
- Whenever he stops barking, turn, praise him, and give him a treat.
- Make a game of it. As he catches on that being quiet gets him a treat, lengthen the amount of time he must remain quiet before being rewarded.
- Start small. Reward him for being quiet for just a second or two. Work up to longer periods of quiet.
- Keep the game fun by varying the amount of time. Sometimes reward him after 5 seconds, then 12 seconds, then 3 seconds, then 20 seconds, and so on.
- Be sure to not release him from his crate or room until he is quiet.

Desensitization and counter conditioning

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.

This technique works well for dogs who are fearful and are barking to keep others away. Gradually get your dog accustomed to whatever is causing him to bark. Start with the stimulus (the thing that makes him bark) at a distance. It must be far enough away that he doesn't bark when he sees it. Feed him lots of good treats. Move the stimulus a little closer (perhaps as little as a few inches or a few feet to start) and feed treats. If the stimulus moves out of sight, stop giving your dog treats. You want your dog to learn that the appearance of the stimulus leads to good things (treats!).

Similarly, you can teach your dog that barking at others isn't going to get them to leave, but will cause him to be removed. Position your dog, on leash, near the stimulus that causes the barking. As he begins to bark, simply give the dog a calm, verbal correction such as, "No," "Uh-uh", "Wrong" and immediately turn him around and walk him away from the stimulus while giving the command, "Let's Go". Wait until the dog has stopped barking and has calmed down before you turn around and head back in your original direction. Be sure to praise and reward your dog with a tasty treat as soon as he stops barking.

Teach your dog the "Quiet" command

It may sound nonsensical, but to stop your dog from barking, first teach him to bark on command.

Give your dog the command to "speak." Have someone immediately make a noise—such as knocking on the door—that is sure to make your dog bark. Let him bark two or three times, then stick a tasty treat in front of his nose. When he stops barking to sniff the treat, praise him and give him the treat. Repeat until he starts barking as soon as you say "speak."

Once your dog can reliably bark on command, teach the "quiet" command. Start in a calm environment with no distractions. Tell him to "speak." When he starts barking, say "quiet" and stick a treat in front of his nose. Praise him for being quiet and give him the treat.

An alternative to this is to work with your dog while he is already quiet and calm. Stand in front of your dog and, with a treat in your hand, cross and then uncross your hands in front of you while saying, "Quiet." Then give the dog a treat. Repeat this over and over so that the dog makes the association of your hand signals with the command and the treats. Then, have someone either ring the doorbell or knock on the door to get your dog to bark. Allow him to bark once or twice, then step in front of your dog and repeat the verbal and hand signals for "Quiet". Immediately reward your dog when they stop barking.

Ask your dog for an incompatible behavior

When your dog starts barking, ask him to do something that's incompatible with barking.

For instance, teach your dog to react to the doorbell by going to his special place (his bed or perhaps a mat near the door) and lying quietly while the "intruder" comes into the house.



Start by tossing a treat on his mat and telling him to "go to your place." Have him go to his place before you give him the treat. When he's reliably going to his mat to earn a treat, up the ante by opening the door while he's on his mat. If he gets up, close the door immediately.

Repeat until he stays on his mat while the door opens. Then increase the difficulty by having someone ring the doorbell while your dog is on his mat. Reward him if he stays in place.

Bark Collars

There are a variety of training collars on the market that may assist in curbing your dog's barking behavior, especially when you are not around to interrupt your dog's barking behaviors. Care should be taken when using any of these types of collars and they should be used only as a last resort when all other methods of training have proved ineffective! Since they do not address the underlying cause of the problem they will not be a permanent solution.

Avoid using electronic bark collars – they are only about 50% effective and can be painful. Better alternatives are "Ultra Sonic" or citronella spray collars.

Ultra sonic bark devices emit high pitched tones to interrupt your dog's barking. These types of devices typically employ the use of a monitor that picks up the sound of your dog's barking. Other types may include a collar that picks up either the sound of your dog's barking or the vibrations in your dog's throat when he barks. Be advised, though, that dogs will frequently become accustomed to the tone and may learn to ignore it, especially if they are not redirected to a more favorable behavior.

Citronella spray collars contain a reservoir of nontoxic citronella solution that sprays under your dog's face every time he barks. While the scent is pleasant to humans and not harmful to animals, dogs do not like the odor. A citronella collar is considered humane and a recent study reported an 88% rate of success with the use of this collar. One possible drawback is that the collar contains a microphone and the spray is delivered in response to the sound of the bark. Therefore, other noises may set off the collar, causing your dog to be sprayed even if he hasn't barked. Also, some dogs can tell when the citronella reservoir is empty and will resume barking.



Be Patient

Remember that the longer your dog has been "practicing" the barking behavior, the longer it may take to eliminate it. 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.