

Solving Barking Problems

First, let's find out when, for how long and why your dog barks. If the barking happens when you aren't home, you may need to ask your neighbors, drive or walk around the block and watch and listen for a while, or record your dog when you aren't home. If the barking is when you are home, is the barking directed at you or out the window, etc.?

Bored and/or Lonely?

Your dog may be barking because he's bored and/or lonely if:

- He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.
- He doesn't have other outlets for his energy.

Recommendations:

- Walk your dog daily – it is good exercise, both mentally and physically.
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few words and/or tricks and practice them every day for five to ten minutes.
- Take a training class with your dog.
- Provide interesting toys to keep your dog busy when you're not home (Kong-type toys filled with treats or Busy-buddy toys). Rotating the toys keeps them interesting.
- If your dog is barking to get *your* attention, ignore him and instead pay attention to your dog when he is quiet. Make sure he has sufficient time with you on a daily basis so he doesn't feel like he has to bark to get your attention.
- Let your neighbors know that you're actively working on the problem.
- If possible, take your dog to work or to doggy day care or have a friend/neighbor walk and play with him.

Territorial?

Your dog may be barking to guard his territory if:

- The barking occurs in the presence of "intruders," which may include the mail carrier, children walking to school, and other dogs or neighbors in adjacent yards and then stops once they have gone.
- Your dog's posture while he's barking appears threatening - tail held high and ears up and forward.
- He is quiet when no one is around.

Recommendations:

- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking and teach him that good things happen to him when these stimuli are around. Have a friend walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog isn't barking, then reward him for quiet behavior. Use a very special food reward such as little pieces of cheese or meat. Then ask the person to slightly decrease the distance. Continue to reward his quiet behavior. It may take many sessions before the person can come close without your dog barking and you might have to go back to the previous distance if he keeps barking. When the person can come closer without your dog barking, have them throw him a treat or a toy. This type of training generally requires professional help to be successful, so please contact us for more information.

- When you leave, or can't practice, have your dog in a part of the house where he cannot see the stimulus. If he is crate trained and you are only gone for a short time, put him in his crate with a long lasting, safe chewy. You can also try leaving on music to help mask outdoor noises that may trigger his barking. Keeping him indoors is often the best strategy.

Fear?

Your dog's barking may be a response to something he's afraid of if:

- The barking occurs when he's exposed to something that frightens him (loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, construction equipment, children, men in hats, strange dogs, etc.)
- Your dog's posture indicates fear - ears back, tail held low.
- Your dog tries to move away from the cause of his fear or if he can't get away (on leash) he may lunge forward in an attempt to keep it from coming closer to him.

Recommendations:

- Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize him to it. Contact us for help with the desensitization process. You should also check with your veterinarian and discuss the issues.
- Seek out a way to distance your dog from the thing that scares him. If it's outside noises, give him a safe place to go. You can leave on a television, radio or loud fan. Block off your dog's access to outdoor views that might be causing a fear response, by closing curtains or doors to certain rooms. If you are outside, move across the street or turn and walk quickly away from the scary thing.

Home alone issues?

Your dog may be barking due to home alone issues if:

- The barking occurs **only** when you're gone and starts as soon as, or shortly after, you leave.
- Your dog displays other behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you from room to room, frantic greetings or whining, drooling, pacing and panting during your preparations to leave.
- Your dog has recently experienced a change in the family's schedule that results in his being left alone more often: a move to a new house, the death or loss of a family member or another family pet, or a stay at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

Recommendations:

- Contact us and your veterinarian for more advice on how to handle this behavior problem.
- For mild cases, you can teach your dog to do a "down stay" on her favorite bed or place. Give her treats, praise and smile at her for "staying". Always walk back to her to give her the treat as we want her to learn how to relax and patiently wait for you to come back to her. Practice this daily and do NOT leave during the practice sessions. Only when she can stay in that spot while you are out of her sight inside the house should you add walking towards the door and then going out the door. Taking baby steps will give you a better result.

Bark Collars

We don't recommend bark collars as we prefer to address the underlying cause of the barking and resolve the issue so that your dog actually feels better and then behaves better. This creates a long term, humane solution. If you choose to use a bark collar, it must be used in conjunction with behavior modification that addresses the reason for the barking. If you feel like a bark collar is your only option, please consult with us first. They are never recommended in cases of fear or anxiety.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.

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