

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 at home, you may need to ask your neighbors, walk around the block and listen for a while, or record your dog when you are away. If the barking happens when you are home, is the barking directed at you or out the window?

Bored or lonely?

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

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

Recommendations:

- Let your neighbors know that you're actively working on the problem.
- Give your dog more exercise. Go for walks daily. Teach her to play fetch and practice often.
- Take a training class with your dog or teach her a few tricks. Practice daily for five to ten minutes.
- Provide interactive toys to keep your dog busy when you're not home (like kong-type toys filled with treats or busy-buddy toys). Rotate the toys to keep them interesting.
- Take your dog to work or to doggy day care, or ask a friend/neighbor to stop by at lunch to walk and play with her.

Attention-seeking behavior?

The barking begins when you're on the phone, reading, having a conversation during dinner, etc.

Recommendations:

- Ignore your dog if she's barking at you for attention. When the barking stops, reward quiet behavior with a gentle "Good girl."
- Give her something else to focus on. Give her a stuffed Kong or other long-lasting treat *before* you sit down to dinner, make a call or start reading.
- Make sure she's getting enough daily exercise and has opportunities to spend time with you.

Territorial?

Your dog may be barking to guard her 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 they're barking appears threatening - tail held high and ears up and forward.
- They are quiet when no one is around.

Recommendations:

Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach her that good things happen when these stimuli are around. Have a friend walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog isn't barking. Reward quiet behavior using a very special treat such as little pieces of cheese or meat. Then, ask the person to *slightly* decrease the distance. Continue to reward quiet behavior. Stop and increase the distance again if your dog starts barking. This type of training generally requires professional help to be successful, so please contact us for more information.

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

Fear?

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

- The barking occurs when she's exposed to something that frightens her (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 the fear. If she can't get away (like when on leash), she may lunge forward in an attempt to keep the scary thing from coming closer.

Recommendations:

Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize her to it. Contact us or your veterinarian for help.

Seek out a way to distance your dog from the thing that scares her. If it's outside noises, give her a safe place to go in the house. Leave on a television, radio or loud fan to mask the noise. 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 her being left alone more often.
- Another change has occurred – like a move to a new house, the loss of a family member or pet, or a stay at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

Recommendations:

Contact us or 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. 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. We prefer to address the underlying cause of the barking and resolve the issue so that your dog actually feels better, resulting in better behavior. 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. Bark collars 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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