

BARKING

PREVENTING & REDUCING EXCESSIVE DOG BARKING

RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

Recognizing a barking problem isn't usually difficult. It either annoys you, your neighbors or both. Dogs bark for many different reasons. Figuring out why your dog is barking is the first and most important step to treating the problem.

Dogs bark for the following reasons:

- Boredom
- Anxiety when alone
- Fear
- Attention-seeking
- Watchdog

TRAINING OPTIONS

Boredom

Smart feeding toys

Keeping your dog occupied by providing toys that make him work for his food will keep him busy for some time. Toys to make him work such as a frozen stuffed Kong or a treat-dispensing toy are the best.

Exercise & mental stimulation

Make sure your dog gets enough daily exercise and mental stimulation. Physical exercise, playing with other dogs and opportunities to do things like sniff are important for a dog. They'll keep him happy and tired. Which means he's more likely to sleep when you're not home rather than bark.

Remember Dogs Are Social Animals

Dogs are social animals and do not do well when they do not have social contact. Backyard dogs can bark out of sheer boredom. Bring your dog indoors and include him as part of the family. This will eliminate the barking caused by social isolation.

Never leave your dog chained in a yard.

It's inhumane for social animals to be kept in isolation. An outdoor dog teased by children or threatened by a dog walking by, will become frustrated which can lead to aggression.

Anxiety When Left Alone

Some dogs bark because they are distressed to be left alone. They have separation anxiety. Separation anxiety is an emotional disorder and must be treated or the barking will not stop even with toys and lots of activity before being left alone.

If you suspect your dog is suffering from separation anxiety, visit your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment plan.

To learn more about “Preventing and Reducing Anxiety When Left Alone”

Fear

Dogs who are afraid of strangers or other things may bark in an attempt to get them to move farther away. Fear is an emotional issue. Your dog will need to be taught that the things that he fears are fantastic as they predict fantastic things. A force-free humane trainer will be able to help with this.

See B.C. SPCA position statement on animal training to help you choose a trainer.

Attention Seeking

Many dogs bark to get attention or to make their guardian "do something" such as take them out or play with them. Dogs do what works and they quickly figure out that barking works to get people to do things.

If you want your dog to stop barking, stop rewarding him for it. Don't throw the ball, open the door, or let him out of his crate if he is barking. Ignore him when he barks put the ball away instead of throwing it, don't let a dog out of his crate unless he is quiet.

Be aware that if you have been rewarding a dog by giving in when he barks the barking will get worse before it goes away. Stand your ground and do not give in, don't let barking work.

Also pay attention and notice when he is quiet. Show him that good things happen when he is quiet. When he sits and is quiet he gets his food bowl put down. If he remains quiet as you take out the ball it gets thrown.

Watchdog

Most dogs bark when a person enters the property or knocks at the door. This is good as he is telling you that someone is arriving.

The way to deal with this type of barking is to teach him to do something that is not compatible with barking. You can teach him to fetch a toy or go to his mat and do a down stay instead. This needs to be trained first without doorbells or visitors. Use tasty rewards and teach him a down stay on a mat and then bring in the doorbell and visitor.

Another way to deal with watchdog barking is to put in place time-outs. This teaches him that any more than a few barks results in time in the “penalty box”.

Time outs

After the dog barks a few times say “quiet”. On the next bark say “too bad” and immediately give him a time out in the bathroom or another room away from the action. Over time he will learn that barking causes him to be removed from the action and the barking will subside.

You could also do both, if he down stays on his mat he gets a reward but if he barks it is off to the penalty box.

Some dogs bark at every sound or slight change in his environment. These dogs benefit from more exposure to the world so that they can get used to things. Take him out as much as possible and expose him to a wide variety of sights and sounds.

VETERINARY HELP

There may be health reasons why your dog may be barking. Excessive barking can be a sign of separation anxiety. Ask your veterinarian about treatments such as Dog Appeasing Pheromones or Anti Anxiety Drugs. Deaf dogs may become excessive barkers. Liver disease may be a cause of intermittent deafness which results in excessive barking. Geriatric dogs may start barking for no apparent reason because they are confused.

Check with your veterinarian to see if there are any health reasons for the excessive barking.

CAUTIONS/REMEMBER

Electric shock collars are marketed as a device for controlling unwanted behaviour such as barking. These devices cause distress. They are inhumane and should never be used. Citronella spray collars or throwing things at the dog are not recommended either.

Barking is natural behaviour for dogs. It is their form of communication. If your dog barks excessively it is important to determine why he is barking. When you know why you can treat the problem correctly and be sure to never reinforce the barking.