

BARKING DOGS

Animal Welfare League of SA Inc

Barking is a form of communication used by dogs and most dogs will bark at least some of the time. It can become a problem if the dog barks excessively.



WHY DO DOGS BARK?

The most common causes of excessive barking are:

- * Boredom – inadequate physical and mental activity
- * Alarm barking – letting the household know there is something going on
- * Excitement barking
- * Pain – A dog in pain may vocalise more
- * Changes in the dog's lifestyle
- * Attention seeking barking
- * Fear
- * Separation anxiety – the dog is not coping with being left alone
- * Breeding – certain breeds are bred to be more vocal than others
- * Teasing from neighbourhood children

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT YOUR DOG'S EXCESSIVE BARKING?

Firstly, try to ascertain why your dog is barking before you implement a training or management plan to modify the behaviour.

Secondly, understand that dogs need to bark and that you will not completely quieten your dog but you can work on limiting the barking to an acceptable level.

HOW CAN I TELL WHY MY DOG IS BARKING AND WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

BOREDOM BARKING

Dogs that are bored often also engage in other unwanted behaviours such as chewing, digging and running up and down the fence as well as barking excessively. These dogs need more mental and physical stimulation. Recommendations include *regular* walking (a minimum of once daily) and off leash running in a safe area. It is preferable to exercise the dog before he/she will be left alone for any period so the dog is less active during these times. In addition, food releasing devices (eg Buster Cubes, Kongs, etc.) or large marrow bones left with the dog in your absence can also provide some entertainment. Provide plenty of chew toys and swap these toys around regularly to prevent the dog getting bored with them. Training is strongly recommended to give the dog some mental stimulation. When you are home, ensure the dog is getting enough social contact, ie have the dog inside with you whenever possible and interact regularly with him/her. During your training sessions, teach the dog "quiet" – see bottom of sheet for recommendations on how to teach this to your dog.

ALARM BARKING (WATCHDOG BARKING)

Dogs that are watchdog barking tend to race at the fence and give a higher pitched and more urgent bark than the boredom barkers. If there are lots of things going on around them, these dogs can become excessive barkers.

Humans have bred dogs for many years to act as watchdogs. Some dogs take their role a little too seriously. It can be very useful to teach the dog "quiet" (accept that the dog is going to bark, but gain control before it becomes excessive – see the end of the sheet for instructions on teaching "quiet").

Changing the fencing may help – some dogs tend to bark more if they are able to see what is going on around them so a solid fence rather than a wire one may be more suitable for this type of dog.

If you live in a really busy neighbourhood it may be necessary to confine the dog indoors at times when there are lots of things going on causing the dog to bark. Ensure the dog receives enough exercise – a tired dog is less likely to watchdog bark than one who is not getting any physical or mental stimulation and ensure you give the dog plenty of other things to do, eg toys, bones, etc. to occupy his/her day.



EXCITEMENT BARKING

This is often also related to breed – some breeds are more excitable than others and will be more vocal. The only effective way to control this type of barking is to teach the word “quiet” (see the end of this sheet for instructions). If you verbally reprimand the dog during a bout of excitement barking, the dog will often believe you are joining in with the barking also. The excitement barking will then become more intense.

SEPARATION ANXIETY BARKING

These dogs tend to only vocalise when the owners are not home. However, not all barking when the owners are absent is separation anxiety. It is usually accompanied by destructiveness centred around doorways and windows and the dog may urinate or defecate excessively during the owner’s absence. Usually, excessive barking that is done in the owner’s absence is boredom barking rather than true separation anxiety. Treatment for separation anxiety involves behaviour modification and sometimes anti-anxiety medication. You need the services of a dog behaviour professional to assist you to implement a behavioural modification programme if you believe your dog is suffering from separation anxiety.

BREEDING

Certain breeds are more inclined to bark excessively than others, in particular the terrier and working breeds (eg Jack Russell Terriers, Kelpies, German Shepherds).

These breeds need a lot of mental and physical stimulation so ensure the barking is not related to boredom. The working breeds, in particular, need mental stimulation and regular training.

Teach the dog the word “quiet” – see end of this sheet for instructions.

PAIN

Some dogs will vocalise if in pain. If you find your dog is becoming more vocal as he/she ages there may be age related diseases present contributing to the problem. Ensure regular veterinary checkups (at least once yearly but more regularly as the dog reaches senior years).

TEASING

Neighbourhood children may tease the dog at times. Generally, the excessive barking will be limited to certain times, eg before and after school. The best management option for this problem is to keep the dog confined during these times. Another option is to educate the children involved and request them to not approach the fence.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Sometimes major changes in a dog’s lifestyle or environment may trigger excessive barking. Events such as moving to a new home, a new addition to the family, owner changing working hours, etc. can cause anxiety in the dog and sometimes may trigger the dog to become an excessive barker. Should any major events occur, try to keep the dog’s routine the same and ensure that the dog is not ignored during and after this time. Seek advice from a veterinarian or dog behavioural trainer should the dog’s anxiety not reduce.

ATTENTION SEEKING BARKING

Some dogs will bark to get your attention. These dogs are generally not fussy as to what sort of attention they get so reprimanding the dog is likely to make the problem worse. The best way to manage the problem is to turn your back on the dog every time he/she engages in this behaviour. If necessary, you may have to leave the room or yard should the barking become more insistent. When the dog is quiet, give the dog attention. The owners must be extremely consistent when dealing with attention seeking barking. The dog must also be rewarded should he/she not bark to get your attention. It is important to regularly give your dog attention before he/she barks. During the training stage you may notice the barking get worse for a short time. This is called an “extinction burst” and means that soon the technique will work – just continue to be consistent.

FEAR INDUCED BARKING

These dogs can be identified by their body language. Generally, the body is low, ears back and tail low and usually they will back away from what they are barking at. If a dog is punished when fear barking, the barking will become worse as they will become more fearful. Dogs exhibiting this problem need desensitisation to the things he/she is fearful of. These dogs respond best under the supervision of an experienced dog behavioural trainer.





WHAT ARE THE BEST METHODS TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM?

Ensure your dog is getting the required amount of physical and mental stimulation (for some breeds this means a lot of exercise and regular training).

Ensure your dog is in optimum health. Make sure worming and flea control are up to date. If you believe there may be a health component to the barking problem, get veterinary advice.

Ensure your dog has adequate food, water, bedding and protection from the elements and is living in a clean environment (ie free from faeces and old dog food, which will encourage flies and other insects into your dog's living area).

Feed your dog twice a day rather than once a day (don't overfeed, just divide the usual amount of food into two meals). A dog that has a full stomach is more likely to relax and sleep than a dog that has not been fed.

Ensure your dog is getting enough exercise. This will mean at least one walk off the property per day. Off leash exercise as regularly as possible is also recommended if you have access to a safe off leash area. Exercise will not stop a dog barking but will burn off excess energy. It is preferable to exercise the dog in the morning if he/she is to be left home alone all day.

Take your dog to training classes. Here you will be taught how to teach your dog appropriate behaviour in and around the home. Your dog will then become easier to handle when you do walk him/her and easier to manage around the house.

Ensure your dog has things to do in your absence to keep him/herself occupied. These should include toys, food releasing devices (eg Kongs, Buster Cubes, etc.), bones, etc.

THINGS THAT WILL NOT WORK, ARE INHUMANE AND/OR MAKE THE PROBLEM WORSE

ANTI BARKING COLLARS

There are a few different types of anti barking collars that emit a spray, noise or shock when the dog barks. They are a very short term solution to a barking problem and do not work with every dog. The dog needs to make an association between the barking and the noise, smell or shock. They do not address the reason the dog is barking and, as some work on air flow, may go off when the dog is running or playing. Some dogs will bark more when the collar is on as they bark *at* the spray, noise or shock. In addition, it is necessary for dogs to communicate by barking (just like we need to talk) and taking away that ability altogether is tantamount to cruelty.

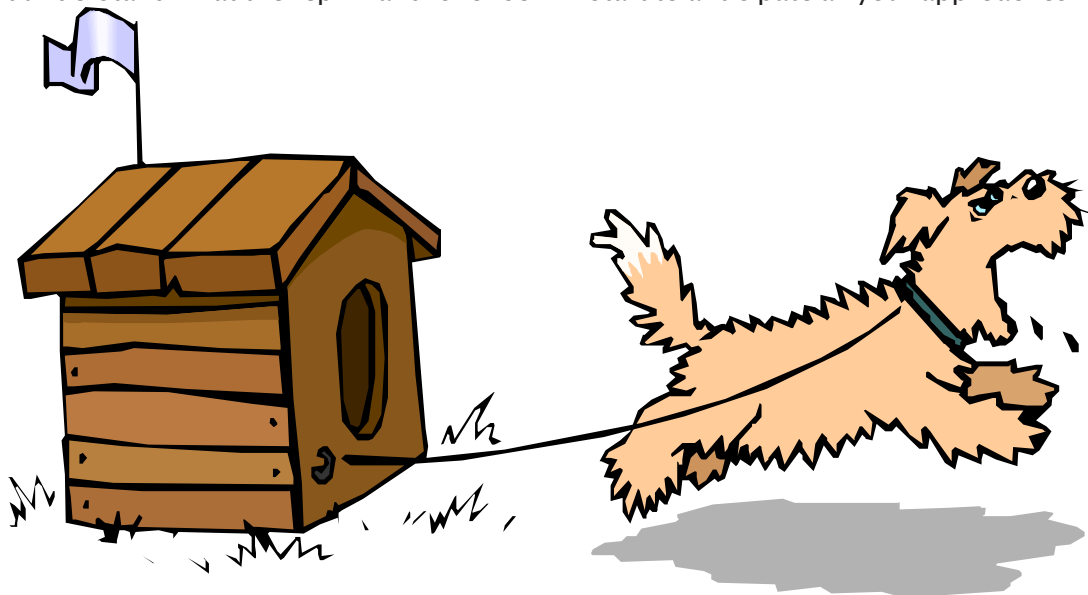
GETTING A SECOND DOG FOR COMPANY

Often, as a result of getting a second dog, you will end up with two barking dogs instead of one. Dogs are great imitators and quickly learn the bad habits of their canine companions.

PUNISHING THE DOG FOR BARKING

Verbally punishing the dog will often make the dog bark more as it is likely they interpret your yelling as barking and think you are barking along with them.

Physically punishing the dog will not cure the problem as it is likely the dog will have stopped barking on your approach and you are effectively telling the dog off for being quiet! In addition, your dog will become frightened of you as he/she will not understand what the reprimand is for so will start to anticipate all your approaches will mean punishment.





EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR QUIETENING THE EXCESSIVE BARKER

TEACHING “QUIET”

Rather than punishing your dog for barking, teach the word “quiet”. Just as you teach your dog the words “sit”, “stay”, etc. you can teach the dog to understand “quiet” to mean stop barking. Rather than just a generic “no” which is not instructional to the dog at all, saying “quiet” gives the dog a definite action to perform. Start the training session with plenty of tasty treats at the ready. With the dog paying attention to you say “quiet” even though the dog is not barking. You may want to raise your finger to your lips to give the dog a physical cue as well. The word should not be shouted but rather said as quietly as possible. Give the dog a treat (unless he/she barks when you say “quiet”!). Repeat this exercise as many times as you like but stop the training session before the dog becomes bored. Ensure you carry treats around regularly for a while because the next step is trying it when the dog is barking. If you need to, set up situations that you think the dog will bark at. After 1 or 2 barks, ask the dog for “quiet”. When you do this, make sure you are close to the dog and have a treat ready. If the dog looks at you and is quiet, praise the dog profusely and give the treat. If he/she ignores you and carries on barking, let the dog know you have a treat by putting it under his/her nose. When the dog stops barking, reward and treat. After a little while you can start to sometimes reward just with voice and sometimes with treat and voice and gradually use the treats less and less. It is a good idea to every now and then reward with treats for responding to “quiet” even after the dog has learned the cue.

DOG TRAINING CLASSES

The Animal Welfare League holds classes regularly for adult dogs and puppies. In addition, the dog behavioural trainers on staff are available to give you advice over the telephone or provide individual training sessions when required.



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