

SOLVING YOUR BARKING DOG PROBLEM

Most dogs bark. Some bark occasionally, some bark practically all the time. Some dogs yap, others shriek or howl. With some breeds, vocalizing is part of the dog's work – think of hounds on a scent, “reverse herders” chasing farm animals out of the garden, and watchdogs who alert when there is an unfamiliar person entering the property.

Excessive barking causes lots of bad feeling between neighbors. What can pet owners do to prevent this?

Here are several tips that apply to almost any nuisance barking situation:

- **Is your dog bored?** Bored dogs tend to bark. While almost all breeds were bred for specific jobs, such as hunting, herding, guarding, or pulling, most dogs don't have a chance to do their jobs. It's important for dogs to be kept busy. Owners can do this by spending time with their dogs doing “brain and body work” such as obedience, retrieving a ball, agility, and other dog sports. Every dog needs a brief obedience refresher at least 3 times a week. A brief stroll on the exact same route around the neighborhood doesn't really qualify as stimulation for the brain and body.
- **Dogs who are always left outside** tend to be lonely, and this can cause endless barking. Basic obedience courses are fun for both dogs and owners, and can help you to train your dog well enough so that he can be inside. Once your dog is trained to go to his place, lie down and stay there, he will be a pleasure to have in the house.
- **Dogs who spend the night outside** may bark at other dogs, roaming animals, or other sounds. I recommend that all dogs be brought in the house after 9 p.m., and not be left outside before 7 a.m. This ensures that your neighbors can't complain about their sleep being disturbed by your dog's barking. Even dog lovers don't want to be awakened by barking dogs!
- **Intact male dogs** may bark out of frustration because of females in heat. Neutering them is a great idea – it is healthier, prevents accidental breeding as well as decreasing frustration.
- **Don't reward barking** behavior – if you are playing with your dog and he starts to bark, instantly stop the play and leave your dog, ignoring him for at least 5 minutes. Once he learns that barking drives you away, he will bark less. Similarly, if he is barking to come in, wait until he is quiet, ask him to “Sit”, and then let him in. Or, consider installing a dog door so that he can take himself in and out quietly. Don't respond to barking demands for treats, either. Remember, for many dogs, going close to them and yelling “No!” is seen as a reward – they got the attention they were barking for! So, resist the temptation to bark back when your dog barks.
- **Teach and reward quiet behavior.** In situations where your dog might bark, re-direct him by giving him another command, and praise him for doing the command quietly. Always praise him if he is quiet in a situation that frequently causes him to respond by barking.

Sometimes, excessive barking is due to specific issues. It's important to look for and fix these problems.

- **Separation anxiety** -- upset behavior that occurs around the time that you leave. Getting another dog, or coming back and punishing the anxious dog are not good ideas. This is a

serious behavioral problem that needs treatment by a team that includes your veterinarian and a companion animal behavior consultant.

- **Blocking your dog's view** can stop barking that is caused by watching people or dogs go by. Most dogs will be quieter if their view of the action is blocked off.
- **Fence running** and barking is annoying. Blocking off the dog's access to the shared fence works well. Sometimes all you have to do is to prevent the dog from getting within 4 to 6 feet of the fence, to stop the barking.
- **Deaf or senior dogs** sometimes forget to stop barking. They will need to be monitored when outside.

What Can Work

In addition to looking at what may cause your dog to bark (boredom, anxiety, deafness, etc.) the following are aides to helping you stop the barking behavior:

- **Citronella bark collars** are not as stressful for dogs as shock collars. While some dogs will outsmart or ignore the citronella bark collar, it's quite effective with many dogs, including deaf and senior ones. Dogs shouldn't wear them 24/7, just when you can't supervise them and don't want them to bark.
- **Hidden water squirting** can sometimes startle a dog into silence. Can you set a sprinkler to spray where the dog barks? The dog must not see you turn on the water, so you may need to run a hose to an out-of-sight faucet.
- **Devices that release food-baited toys** may help with boredom.

What Doesn't Work

- **Ultrasonic bark collars or devices** are great for a few days – then the dogs ignore them and bark as much as ever.
- **Mouth-closing muzzles** can be cruel, since he cannot pant or drink water. It's dangerous to leave a dog alone who is wearing one. Besides, many dogs can make loud noises even when muzzled.
- **Tying your dog** may make barking worse, and it is against the law in California to tie a dog for more than three hours.
- **Yelling at your dog** to be quiet – you're just part of the problem, not part of the solution!

Deena Case-Pall, Ph.D.
Companion Animal Behavior Consultant
Visit Dr. Deena's Website @ <http://www.k9psych.com/>