

BARKING DOGS

woof!
woof!
woof!

Barking Up The Wrong Tree

Most dogs bark, it's just a fact of life. Dogs bark for a number of reasons, some good, some not so good. Some dogs bark briefly and others bark incessantly. If your dog's barking for all the wrong reasons, it may just be time to do something about it.

First, you must keep in mind that there are some breeds that are simply more prone to barking - beagles and collies for instance. Other dogs will bark as a warning signal, when a stranger approaches or when someone rings the doorbell. This is usually seen as an acceptable form of barking. The key, however, is to be able to turn that barking off. If your dog is barking for other, unacceptable reasons, he may just be a nuisance barker. The first step in dealing with nuisance barking is to determine why your dog is barking.



The Territorial Barker - For many dogs, territorial barking is instinctual. This is barking to warn of the approach of strangers or even to ward off strangers. Most owners find this form of barking acceptable and even appreciate it. However, the problem arises when the dog continues to bark longer than necessary. To deal with this type of barking, you must train your dog to stop barking once the warning has been acknowledged. This can be a simple "good dog" command combined with a pat on the head. If, however, this does not work to stop the barking, some sort of cease command, such as "enough", must be taught using positive reinforcement using praise, a treat or game, when he stops barking.

You can also use counter conditioning with this type of barking. Again, you must train your dog to do something incompatible with the barking. Once he's barked at the door, for instance, train him to go lie down or go to another room in the house by putting on his lead and leading him away from the door. Be sure to reward him as you lead him away and get him to lie down, and praise when he starts walking away by himself. The key to either of these approaches is to practice them. Have someone come to the door and ring the bell and practice several times.

This method of leading him away can also be used for stopping territorial barking as pedestrians walk past your property. Now, this is the biggie - refrain from yelling at him to be quiet as he thinks you're just joining in. Instead, calmly and quietly walk up to the dog, attach the lead and walk him away from the fence to another part of the yard. Get him to sit and then praise or treat or have a game with him. This calm reaction from you will tell the dog that there is nothing to get worked up about whenever someone walks past on the footpath.

Some territorial barkers bark as a result of fear or anxiety caused by strangers. This can require additional work. The above techniques can be applied, but these dogs must also be desensitized to strangers and socialized well, both off their property and on.

If your dog barks at other dogs or people while being walked outside on a lead, do an about turn calmly giving the command "this way", and walk away from the approaching dog or person. Get your dog to sit then reward him with a treat and praise. This may need repeating several times depending on the severity of the problem. Have a friend with another dog help you practice this by walking towards you. Start off by being a fair distance away and parallel to your helper. Reward the dog each time he walks past with no reaction. Gradually decrease the distance until they can walk past you only a couple of feet away, but be prepared to move out further if required. This again takes practice, with you remaining calm at all times. Your dog can easily read your tense body language and will respond by barking or lunging. The trick is to remain calm, unconcerned and not show any emotion.

The Attention Getter - Many dogs bark to get attention. This type of dog has usually learned, whether you're aware of it or not, that barking will get him attention. He may have learned that he can get whatever he wants by barking. This is usually a dog that is insistent upon getting his own way, a dog that must be the centre of attention, and a dog who can be very demanding, particularly of your attention. A lot of owners, too fed up with the barking, simply give in to their dog's whims. And for many of these dogs, any attention, even scolding, is better than no attention. Here are a few tips to help you put a stop to this kind of barking:

- Withdraw your attention. When your dog is displaying his bad barking behaviour, ignore him. Do not make direct eye contact, do not touch him or speak to him. Only respond with attention once he is quiet and no longer barking.
- Create a bridging stimulus. This can help along the attention withdrawal technique. You want to create a neutral sound to act as a stimulus, something like a click, that you produce as soon as the barking begins. This acts to signal your dog that your attention is about to be withheld. The stimulus provides a concrete consequence to your dog's actions.
- Counter-condition. To counter-condition your dog's nuisance barking, you want to train him to do something that is incompatible with his barking. You can train him to go to his bed by attaching the lead and walking him to it and giving the command "bed". Once there, praise him and/or give him a treat. You may have to repeat this several times.
- Punishment. When your dog barks, say "No Bark" or use a shake can. However, this technique rarely works with sensitive dogs and, though negative, may still be seen as attention. Use this method with care as it may have little effect on some dogs.

The Reactive Barker - If your dog barks at just about anything, the wind perhaps or a falling leaf, he's likely a reactive barker. Trying to train these dogs not to bark can be much harder. First, consult with your veterinarian to determine and address any medical contributions to this hyper-reactivity. This may include hypothyroidism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Also make sure that your dog is getting an appropriate diet and adequate exercise. Otherwise, you can follow the same basic approach as you would for the territorial barker, though you may need to contribute a bit more time and effort.



Training your dog not to bark unnecessarily is part and parcel of training him to be a good and obedient companion. In this regard, obedience training and socialization from an early age is all that more important, providing a foundation to head off and/or deal with any potential problems that may arise in the future. Proper socialization will help to prevent your dog from having inappropriate reactions, in this case barking, to people, other dogs, different situations and the like. Obedience training will teach your dog basic commands like 'No' and 'Sit/Stay' that can later help you to deal with any behaviour issues, in this case nuisance barking.

Barking while travelling in vehicles – Results of a recent study on dogs that bark while travelling in vehicles showed that lavender oil had a calming effect on a significant number of dogs in the test group of 100. Sprinkle a couple of drops of lavender oil where the dog sits in the car (don't use more than this as it is very strong smelling) before travelling. You could also try a couple of drops on their beds if they tend to bark at night and see if this makes a difference.

Separation Anxiety Barking - Some dogs bark as a result of separation anxiety, the barking occurring as you're about to leave or after you've left. Dogs will do this to get their owner's attention or even as a release of anxious energy. This is often what owners hear their neighbours complaining about. However, it's important to keep in mind that not only are your neighbours being annoyed, but your dog is suffering. Punishment will not work to correct this behaviour. In fact, attempts to correct the barking rarely work. What needs to be paid attention to is the separation anxiety itself. For information on dealing with separation anxiety, check out the handout Dealing with Separation Anxiety.

Bark Control Collars – These collars are available that can help you stop barking problems whether you are home or not. However, it is recommended that you try the above suggestions first. For more information visit your local pet shop or the internet.