

HOW TO CONTROL YOUR DOGS BARKING

Working out how to stop your dog from barking can be a difficult and time consuming task. Dogs love to bark, it's a perfectly natural thing for them to do. It's when your dogs bark excessively that it becomes a problem for you and your neighbours. Remember, the goal is not to **stop your dog barking** altogether, but rather to control the excessive barking. Keep in mind that there are circumstances where it is desirable for your dog to bark. The first step in modifying the behavior of an excessive barker is to determine the reason why the dog is barking in the first place. Once you've identified this cause or trigger, you can then plan the correct training solution.

Why do dogs bark?

Always remember that even though it may appear to you that your dog is barking at nothing, this is not necessarily the case. Your dogs hearing, smell and sight are far more acute than yours. Your dog's excessive barking is most probably being triggered by something. Listed below are some of the common reasons why dogs bark:

- To express their needs. (let me out, let me in, feed me, play with me.)
- They are defining their territory.
- To alert other members of the pack (you and your family) to impending danger.
- They are excited. (Someone has come home or they are having fun playing)
- Barking at other animals. Cats, possums, wallabies etc....
- Some dogs bark excessively when separated from their pack. (you and your family).
- To express dominance (This is a common trait among puppies and most people find a defiant yap from a puppy pretty amusing. The reality is, this behaviour if not addressed at this early stage will become a serious problem when the dog is older.)
- Through boredom or a lack of physical and mental stimulation.
- May feel stressed or uncomfortable for some reason. Things like feeling threatened or if they don't have an appropriate place to sleep can cause excessive barking problems.
- Dogs that haven't been **properly socialized** often become nuisance barkers.
- May be looking for a response or some attention from their pack.
- They bark because their owners have inadvertently rewarded excessive barking in the past (this is crucial to understand).

The most important piece of advice to remember when trying to modify any dog behavior problem, is that you must clearly and consistently communicate to your dog what is acceptable behavior and what is not. One of the most common mistakes made by dog owners is to inadvertently reward their dogs excessive barking. Below are three of the most common ways in which people accidentally teach their dogs to bark excessively.

1. Yelling at the dog: Generally speaking this just excites the dog even more, the dog feels like you are joining in with them and so is rewarded for the behaviour.
2. Giving in to the dogs demands. For example if your dog is barking his head off outside, then you let him in, the dog associates the good result of being allowed inside with the rest of the pack as a direct consequence of the barking. This also applies to dogs who bark to be released from a pen or bark to make you get up and prepare their dinner! Remember dogs like humans will repeat a behaviour which brings about a good result for them.
3. Attempting to comfort the dog. If your dog is barking and you react by giving them a comforting cuddle or a treat of some sort, you are definitely encouraging your dog to bark again. By doing this you are communicating to your dog that you are happy with them. You should be making it clear that the excessive barking is inappropriate and won't be tolerated. A simple and highly effective method of calming a dog is to yawn. Dogs use this technique when they are trying to calm themselves and seeing you yawn encourages them to relax.

Next are some common causes and remedies for excessive dog barking:

Dog barks every time the phone rings

- Never yell at the dog.
- Desensitise the dog to the sound of the phone ringing. Ring your home number from your mobile or get a friend to keep calling you. When the phone rings just sit there, don't say or do anything perhaps even try the yawning technique mentioned earlier. Repeat this process over a few days, your dog will probably continue to bark for a while but will give up before long.
- If you give your dog basic obedience training, behavioral problems such as excessive barking are easily controlled. Your dog will look up to you as their firm but fair leader and will be eager to please you in any situation. Teaching the "Quiet!" or "Stop!" obedience training command will soon correct this problem.
- Another method is to teach an alternate and acceptable behavior each time the phone rings. For example teach the dog to lay down on its bed whenever the phone rings.
- You may have some success by changing the style and volume of your ring tone.

Dog barks when you are not home

This is perhaps the most difficult cause of barking to identify and correct. Always remember that dogs are social animals, when they are separated from their pack (you) they can become stressed, vulnerable and frustrated. This type of excessive barking is often caused by **separation anxiety**.

- Firstly ensure you adhere to the following principles of responsible dog ownership:
- Keep your dog well exercised (physically and mentally)
- Provide fresh water and adequate food.
- Provide **chewing toys** or a bone to occupy the dog whilst you are away. Some chew toys for example provide a great deal of mental stimulation to dogs as they work out how to access the tasty treat hidden within.
- **Make sure the dog has adequate shelter** and a nice comfortable place to sleep.
- You can also try to block your dogs view of the street and other stimulus or threats. Basically, make sure your dog is happy.
- If you know your dog has been barking while you have been away, you must ignore the dog for a while when you return home. Dogs memory is short and they typically associate their most recent activity with the most recent outcome. Basically if you pay attention to the dog when you return, the dog that it's barking is the reason you came home to it. It is best to just go about your business for a little while when you arrive home, ignoring your dog. You should only interact with the dog after it has settled down. .
- Leave the house as you normally would, but just hide somewhere nearby. When your dog starts to bark, spray it with water or throw a tin can full of coins or rocks in its direction (this is called a negative association). Try to keep out of your dog's sight while doing this if possible. Go and hide again, if the dog is quiet for a while, go in and reward its good behavior with some praise and maybe a treat. This process may need to be repeated over and over until you have broken the excessive barking habit. **Remember always praise or reward when your dog does something you want to encourage and create a negative association when it does something you don't like.**

Dog barks for attention or to demand something

This is one excessive barking problem that can be corrected very quickly.

- If you **establish yourself as your dog's leader in the owner-dog relationship you share, this type of barking problem won't occur.** In the process of training you'll also form a strong bond together based on trust and mutual respect.

- You can also teach your dog the "Stop" or "Quiet" command to help prevent this annoying type of problem barking. When your dog is barking simply say "**QUIET**" at the same time as you wave a tasty treat in front of your dog's nose. After your dog is quiet for a few seconds you can then give them the treat repeating the word quiet. Eventually you will only need to say "QUIET!", without the need for a treat.
- Another proven method to help stop your dog from barking for attention is to simply ignore your dog. Your dog will no doubt become frustrated and bark a lot more initially, but once they realize that it is not getting them anywhere, they will stop. *Warning* - this training method can be hard on the ears for a while! Remember that a dog's behavior that is not rewarded and reinforced will become less prevalent.

Dog barks at passers by

Workers such as the Postman or a delivery driver are constantly being barked at and harassed throughout their day. Your dog perceives these type of people as intruders or a threat to their territory. When your dog barks in this situation they are rewarded every time, as the intruder goes away. Your dog is then very pleased that they have averted this "threat", which leads them to do it again and again. The behavior is reinforced and therefore can be a difficult problem to address.

- If possible, you could try to block your dog's vision or access to the area where these people pass by.
- Dog obedience training is the best solution to this type of excessive barking. Once you have your dog properly obedience trained, you will be able to communicate to them that this is unacceptable behavior.
- If your dog consistently barks at a particular person, you may need to use this person to help modify your dog's behavior. For example if your dog gets really agitated each time the postman arrives, have a chat to your postman and give him some of your dog's very favorite treats. Each time he delivers mail to your house, he can also deliver a tasty treat to your dog. In your dog's mind the postman goes from being a threat, to a welcome guest.

How to stop your dog from barking

In extreme cases of excessive barking, where all else has failed, some people advocate debarking surgery. If you have come to the end of the line and think you have run out of options, you could discuss debarking surgery with your Veterinarian. Hopefully your Vet will come up with some other options before taking this drastic step.