

Why is My Dog Barking?

The first thing you need to do is determine when and for how long your dog barks, and what is causing him to bark. You may need to do some detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not home. Ask your neighbors, drive or walk around the block and watch and listen for a while, or start a tape recorder or video camera when you leave for work. Hopefully, you will be able to discover which of the common problems discussed below is the cause of your dog's barking.

Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention Seeking

Your dog may be barking because he's bored and lonely if:

He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.

His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.

He's a puppy or adolescent (under 3 years old) and does not have other outlets for his energy.

He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs a "job" to be happy.

Recommendations:

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:

Walk your dog daily – it's good exercise for both of you.

Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with him as often as possible.

Teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks and practice them every day for five to 10 minutes.

Take an obedience class with your dog.

Provide interesting toys to keep your dog busy when you're not home (Kong -type toys filled with treats or busy-box toys). Rotating the toys makes them seem new and interesting.

If your dog is barking to get your attention, make sure he has sufficient time with you on a daily basis (grooming, playing, and exercising), so he doesn't have to resort to misbehaving to get your attention.

Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him.

Take your dog to work with you every now and then, if possible.

If you work very long hours, take him to a doggie day care or have a friend or neighbor walk and/or play with him.

Territorial/Protective Behavior

Your dog may be barking to guard his territory if:

The barking occurs in the presence of “intruders,” which may include the mail carrier, children walking to school and other dogs or neighbors in adjacent yards.

Your dog’s posture while he’s barking appears threatening – tail held high and ears up and forward. You’ve encouraged your dog to be responsive to people and noises outside.

Recommendations:

Teach your dog a “quiet” command. Watch him and just before he barks get his attention and say “Watch me” and give him a treat and say “Good Quiet”. Repeat this until your dog’s natural response to something that would have elicited a bark is to watch you.

Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach him that the people he views as intruders are actually friends and that good things happen to him when these people are around. Ask someone to walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog is not barking, then reward him for quiet behavior as he obeys a “sit” or “down” command. Use a very special food reward such as little pieces of cheese or meat. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward his quiet behavior. It may take several sessions before the person can come close without your dog barking. When the person can come very close without your dog barking, have them feed him a treat or throw a toy for him. In order for this technique to work, you’ll have to make sure your dog doesn’t see people outside between sessions.

If your dog barks while inside the house when you’re home, call him to you, have him obey a command, such as “sit” or “down,” and reward him with praise and a treat.

Don’t inadvertently encourage this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he hears or sees outside so he can run to you and sit quietly for a treat!

Have your dog neutered (or spayed if your dog is a female) to decrease territorial behavior.

Limit the dog’s access to views that might be causing him to bark when you are not home.

Fears and Phobias

Your dog’s barking may be a response to something he is afraid of if:

The barking occurs when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers or construction equipment.

Your dog's posture indicates fear – ears back, tail held low.

Recommendations:

Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize him to it

Mute noise from outside by leaving your dog in a basement or windowless bathroom and leave on a television, radio or loud fan. Block off your dog's access to outdoor views that might be causing a fear response, by closing curtains or doors to certain rooms.

In extreme cases you may want to consult your veterinarian for medication to help your dog through events that you know will be difficult for him.

Separation Anxiety

Your dog may be barking due to separation anxiety if:

The barking occurs only when you're gone and starts as soon as, or shortly after, you leave.

Your dog displays other behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you from room to room, frantic greetings or reacting anxiously to your preparations to leave.

Your dog has recently experienced a change in the family's schedule that results in his being left alone more often; a move to a new house; the death or loss of a family member or another family companion animal; or a period at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

(Click Here for more on separation anxiety)

Recommendations:

Separation anxiety can be difficult to treat and takes time and commitment. Consult a trained professional behaviorist to help you with this.

Bark Collars

Bark collars are specially designed to deliver an aversive whenever your dog barks. There are several different kinds of bark collars:

Citronella Collar: This collar contains a reservoir of citronella solution that sprays every time he barks. A citronella collar is considered humane and does work with many dogs. One possible drawback is that the collar contains a microphone, so the aversive is delivered in response to the sound of the bark. Therefore, other noises may set off the collar, causing your dog to be sprayed even if he did not bark. Also, some dogs can tell when the citronella reservoir is empty and will resume barking. You can also purchase a citronella collar that is activated by a handler.

Aversive Sound Collar : This collar emits a high-frequency sound when your dog barks. Some are activated by the noise of the bark, while others are activated by a handler. The rate of success for this type of collar is reported to be quite low.

Electric Shock Collar : WE DO NOT RECOMMEND an electric shock collar to control your dog's barking. The electric shock is painful to your dog and many dogs will choose to endure the pain and continue barking. These collars are expensive and their success rate is very low. Also, redirected aggression toward people or companion animals that are around the dog may result.

The main drawback of any bark collar is that it does not address the underlying cause of the barking. You may be able to eliminate the barking, but symptom substitution may occur and your dog may begin digging, escaping or become destructive or even aggressive. The use of a bark collar must be in conjunction with behavior modification based on the reason for the barking, as outlined above. You should never use a bark collar on your dog if his barking is due to separation anxiety, fears or phobias, because punishment always makes fear and anxiety behaviors worse.

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