

The first thing to do is determine when and for how long your dog barks, and what causes him to bark. You may need to do some clever detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not home.

Five tips to reduce barking are:

- 1) Understand why your dog barks and address those issues
- 2) Distract your dog from barking – reinforce your dog when he is quiet
- 3) Accommodate your dog into your home instead of leaving it outside in the yard
- 4) Entertain your dog mentally and physically
- 5) Consult a professional dog trainer and veterinarian.

Learn Why Your Dog Barks

Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention-Seeking

Your dog may be barking out of boredom and loneliness if:

- He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities to interact with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without companions or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

Recommendations:

- ❖ Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:
 - Walk your dog at least twice daily—it's good exercise, both mental and physical. Walks should not only be considered "potty breaks."
 - Teach your dog to fetch a ball or flying disc 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 ten minutes.
 - Take a dog training class with your dog. This allows you and your dog to work together toward a common goal.
 - To help fill the hours that you're not home, provide safe, interesting toys to keep your dog busy, such as Kong®-type toys filled with treats or treat ball. Rotating the toys will make them seem new and interesting.
 - Crate train your dog as a safe place to be while you are gone.
 - Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him.
 - Let your neighbors know that you are actively working on the problem.
 - If your dog is well socialized and you have your employer's permission, take your dog to work with you.
 - When you have to leave your dog for extended periods of time, take him to a "doggie day care center," hire a pet sitter or dog walker, or have a trusted friend or neighbor walk and play with him.

Territorial/Protective Behaviour

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. When he begins to bark at a passerby, allow two or three barks, then say "quiet" and interrupt his barking by shaking a can filled with pennies or throwing a toy near him. This surprise should cause him to stop barking momentarily. While he's quiet, say "good quiet" and pop a tasty treat into his mouth. **Remember, the loud noise or squirt isn't meant to punish him; rather it's to distract him into being quiet so you can reward him.**
- 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 isn't barking, then reward quiet behaviour and correct responses to a "sit" or "down" command with special treats such as little pieces of cheese. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward your dog's quiet behaviour. 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 him feed your dog a treat or throw a toy for him.

- 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 encourage this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he hears or sees outside.
- Have your dog spayed or neutered to decrease territorial behaviour.

Fears and Phobias

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

- The barking occurs when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers, or construction noise.
- Your dog's posture indicates fear—ears back, tail held low.

Recommendations:

- Identify what's frightening your dog and desensitize him to it. You may need professional help with the desensitization process. Talk to your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medication while you work on behaviour modification.
- During fireworks, parties or other frightening times, mute noise from outside by leaving your dog in a comfortable area in a basement or windowless bathroom, and leave on a television, radio, or loud fan.

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 behaviours that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you from room to room, greeting you frantically, or reacting anxiously whenever you prepare to leave.
- Your dog has recently experienced a change in the family's schedule that means he's left alone more often; a move to a new house; the death or loss of a family member or another family pet; or a period at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

Recommendations:

Some cases of separation anxiety can be resolved using counter-conditioning and desensitization techniques. Successful treatment for some cases may also require the use of medication prescribed by your veterinarian.

Consult with a professional dog trainer or your veterinarian.

Attention Seeking or Learned Barking

Your dog may be barking due to a learned behaviour or attention seeking if:

- The barking occurs only when you're present and will bark, take a break and bark again. The barking might be accompanied by jumping up or nose nudging.
- You have reinforced your dog's barking, either consciously or unconsciously.

Recommendations: Ensure that after you finish training or playing that you clearly indicate that it is over. You can show both hands or simply turn away. Your dog has learned that barking has worked to get attention so if you do not provide any attention the behaviour will eventually extinguish. Often the barking will increase prior to extinguishing since it has worked in the past to get your attention.

Bark Collars

There are several types of bark collars on the market, and we generally don't recommend them. Bark collars do 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 or escaping, become destructive or even aggressive. A bark collar must be used in conjunction with behaviour modification that addresses the reason for the barking, as outlined above, and is most effective when the owner is present. As soon as the barking ceases, the owner should redirect the dog's behaviour to something fun such as play or a tummy rub. **Most dogs will learn to distinguish when the collar is on and off, so when the dogs are not wearing the collar they will still bark -** thus bark collars only provide a *temporary solution*. You should never use a bark collar on your dog if his barking is due to separation anxiety, or fears or phobias, because punishment always makes fear and anxiety behaviours worse. Do note that a shock may not deter a dog that is highly motivated to bark. With any shock device there is potential for injury and/or animal cruelty. Citronella collars, a humane alternative to a shock collar, have been found to be significantly more effective.