

Help! My Dog Won't Stop Barking!

Is your dog creating a ruckus? Excessive barking can disturb you and create strained relationships with your friends and neighbors. There's good news about barking: it's a normal canine behavior that can be modified with a little bit of effort on your part.

Why Dogs Bark

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons. Dogs can bark from boredom, as a reaction to noises, when they see a running squirrel, when people or animals are in their "territory" or because another dog in the neighborhood is barking. To correct the problem you'll need to isolate the cause.

Some Detective Work

The first thing you need to do is a little detective work. Stop, look, and listen to what your dog and your neighbors are telling you about his behavior. The problem may be very different than what you think it is. Find out:

- What time of day your dog is barking?
- How long after you have left the house does he begin barking?
- How many hours a day does he bark?
- What place in the house or yard is he most likely to bark?
- What environmental factors are most likely to trigger barking (squirrels, mail delivery, doorbell)?

Then Just a Little More

Find out more about YOUR dog:

- What breed or mix of breeds is your dog? (some breeds of dogs tend to bark more than others)
- What does your dog like to do when he's alone?

- Do you have other dogs or animals to keep him company?
- Can your dog see activity on a busy street?
- How old is your dog?
- How long have you lived with your dog?
- How long has your dog lived in this home?
- Are all of his physical needs met? Is he hot, cold, hungry, or thirsty?
- Does your dog get enough physical and mental exercise?
*Remember, a happy, healthy, well-behaved dog is exercised daily.

Straightforward Solutions

The first solutions are something that ALL dogs will benefit from, whether they have barking problems or not.

- Leave your dog indoors in a safe environment when you are not at home – a crate or small room will serve best.
- Leave the radio or TV on to mask the sounds of the outdoors.
- Take your dog to a training class – this will help you develop better control and communication with your dog.
- Make sure your dog has had sufficient exercise – most dogs need a half hour daily of trotting and running.
- Work on teaching new tricks or commands for a few minutes every day. The mental stimulation will help!
- Provide your dog with interesting, stimulating toys that will keep him busy for a sustained length of time. Examples of these are Kongs, Goodie Ships or marrowbones stuffed with food. Other good toys are Buster Cubes and Tricky Treat Balls. Rotate the toys so that your dog has something new to look forward to every day.

Takes a Little More Work

You dog may be guarding his perceived territory. If that’s the case, he will bark whenever he sees an "intruder" and his body posture will be threatening (head, ears and tail held high). You may have taught your dog that you appreciate his protective behavior. To correct his you will need to do the following:

- Teach

your dog that he has a three bark limit – he can bark no more than three times at anything and then he needs to stop. To teach this, you will need to arm yourself with treats or toys that your dog likes. When your dog barks three times, quietly say the word ‘quiet’. Put a treat under his nose like a magnet and turn him towards you with it. Give him the treat. Repeat this several times. After three to five days of doing this, say ‘quiet’ when your dog barks without using the treat to move him. If he turns toward you on his own, give him lots of treats.

- What do you do if your dog doesn’t turn towards you this training period? To correct a dog you do not yell or use brute strength - just simple psychology. The correction you will use is a squirt bottle of plain water. Make sure the bottle squirts rather than mists. Do not add anything to the water! If you’ve already said the word ‘quiet’ and your dog has not stopped his barking, do not repeat yourself or try to get your dog’s attention. Simply squirt him in the back of the head once and stop. Your dog will probably look towards you with some confusion. Pat and praise him at this point but don’t deliver a treat. Give him a chance to earn the treat on his own by doing it right.

- Once your dog is responding well to the word ‘quiet’ or is limiting his barking on his own, make sure you let him know that you appreciate him. Tell him ‘thank you’ and pet and praise him for getting it right.

- Next you need to desensitize your dog to what is making him bark. If he barks at people passing by his property, he needs to learn that they are not intruders and pose no threat. Recruit a few friends to help you teach this lesson. Get your friends to come over one at a time and walk near the yard. Ask them to stand far enough away that the dog isn’t barking, and you throw treats to him and tell him how much you appreciate that behavior. Have your friend gradually decrease his distance until he can walk back and forth in front of your yard without your dog barking. Once your dog stops barking at your friend, have your friend deliver yummy treats to the dog. Then have someone else work on this with him. It may take several days or weeks to get this behavior under control. If your dog acts aggressively (barking, growling, baring teeth, hackles up) please consult our Animal Behavior Department for more information.

- Don’t accidentally reinforce this behavior by encouraging your dog to bark at noises or by petting and praising him when he barks.

- Have your dog neutered to reduce the hormonal component of territorial behavior.

Your

dog may be afraid of noises or events. If that’s the case, the solution is different from territorial barking. If your dog is barking out of fear, you will notice it occurring most frequently when he hears loud noises such as thunder and fireworks. His body posture will be very low, with his ears down and tail tucked.

To correct this problem:

- Keep

your dog safely indoors, especially during the time of year when fireworks and thunderstorms are most common. While he's learning to be less afraid, keep him in a quiet room, such as a bathroom or basement, with a fan and/or radio on to help muffle the noises from outside.

- Desensitize your dog to the noises or events that are frightening him. This may require professional help. Please consult our Animal Behavior department for more information.

Your Dog May Have Separation Anxiety

Your dog may have separation anxiety if it barks, howls, or makes noise after you leave for work, and shows a strong attachment to you. He will follow you from room to room, pant or act stressed as you get ready for work every morning, and may scratch or claw at the doors. Separation anxiety is not very common in dogs, and is generally modified through a combination of behavioral therapy and medications. Separation anxiety frequently occurs suddenly, after a change in the family's schedule or living structure.

If your dog has separation anxiety, it is best to seek professional help in modifying his behavior.

When the Going is Rough

In some situations you may need to use "stronger medicine" – such as when you have a deadline for curbing the problem. In that case, there are some specialty collars available.

- Citronella Collar: This collar sprays citronella oil up towards your dog's face whenever his barking triggers it. This type of collar is considered humane and has an 88% success rate (far higher than the other collars). This type of collar can be purchased or rented. Please ask about our citronella collar rental program.

- Sound Collar: This type of collar emits a high frequency sound that is intended to disrupt the dogs barking whenever it is triggered. Some are activated by the dog's bark and others are hands held and activated by the person. The success rate for this type of collar is relatively low.

The main drawback to any type of bark collar is that it doesn't address the underlying reasons for the dog's barking. You may be able to eliminate the barking, but the problem will still be there under the surface and may "ooze" out into other unwanted behaviors. If you decide to use a bark collar, you must use it in conjunction with behavior modification. Never use a bark collar of any kind on a dog with separation anxiety or fearful behavior.

Don't be afraid to talk with your neighbors about this! If your dog does bark a lot they will be thrilled to know that you are working on solving the problem. Once they're involved they will generally be very helpful, supportive and less likely to complain

If you have questions about barking ordinances, please call Animal Control at (970) 226-3647 ext. 500 or visit our [Local Ordinances](#) page.