



BARK!!! BARK!!! BARK!!!

Some canine behavior problems, such as chewing, affect only a dog's owner. However, problems such as escaping and excessive barking can result in neighborhood disputes and violations of animal control ordinances. Therefore, since barking can result in neighborhood tension; it might be a good idea to discuss the problem with your neighbors. It's perfectly normal and reasonable for dogs to bark from time to time, just as children make noises when they play outside. However, continual barking for long periods of time is a sign that your dog has a problem that needs to be addressed.

The first thing you need to do is to determine when and for how long does your dog bark, and what causes him to bark. You may need to do some detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not at home. Ask your neighbors to 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'll be able to discover which of the common problems discussed below cause your dog's barking.

Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention-Seeking

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

- He's left alone for a long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.
- His environment is relative barren, without playmates 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 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, both mental and physical.
- 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 a tricks and practice them every day for five or ten minutes.
- Take an obedience or agility 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 (petting, grooming, playing, 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.
- Let your neighbors know that you're actively working on the problem.
- Take your dog to work every now and then, if possible.
- When you have to leave your dog for extended period of time, 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, cats, 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 passer-by, allow two or three barks, then say "quiet" and interrupt his barking by shoving a tasty treat under his nose. Once he's quiet say "good quiet" and continue to pop tasty treats into his mouth. If the treat is not enough of a distraction, try using a ball or motivational squeak toy to distract him from the barking. Again once the dog is quiet, reward him with the treats.
- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach him that the people that 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 away enough so that your dog isn't barking, then reward him for quiet behavior as he obeys a "sit" or "down" command. Use a very special food rewards such as little cubes of cheese to his quiet behavior. It may take several sessions before the person can come very close without your dog barking, have them feed him a treat or throw a toy for him.
- Don't inadvertently encourage this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he hears or sees outside.
- Have your dog neutered (or spayed if your dog is a female) to decrease territorial behavior.

The Consequences of Barking

When your dog stays quiet for the required period of time after you've asked to "quiet", she is rewarded. When she makes a mistake, you must immediately reprimand the dog with a loud "QUIET". Most dogs are so totally shocked and amazed by this outburst from you that they will stare at you in disbelief (and silence). As soon as your dog stops barking, even for just a moment, you must instantly reward her for her silence. After enough repetitions your dog will learn the meaning of the command "quiet" and you will no longer need treats.

Substituting the Barking Habit

If your dog's excessive barking has already become a habit, don't expect the barking to get under control overnight. It takes weeks of repetition to replace an old habit with a new one. If you keep up with these procedures, you will see a new pattern of barking develop. Instead of barking relentlessly at the insignificant, your dog will be barking appropriately and for a reasonable length of time. It's important that you maintain this new good habit through practice and praise or your dog may revive his old annoying barking habits again.