



How to Handle Dog Barking

Barking is a perfect natural canine behavior. Birds sing, frogs croak, and a dog barks, whines and howls. If you have a dog, you better expect some barking, whining or howling. It is unrealistic and unfair to think you can train your dog to stop barking altogether. However, you, your neighbors and your dog will all be much happier if the barking is under control.

Dogs who are socially isolated or confined for long periods without supervised exercise need some outlet for their pent-up energy. A dog that is likely to take up barking as a hobby because no one is there to control him. In no time at all, barking becomes an enjoyable habit. And for many dogs, once they start barking, they tend to continue barking for the sheer fun of it.

Your dog may be barking excessively because you unintentionally trained her to do so. The dog speaks and you obey. "woof" and you open the door to let the dog out. "Woof" and you open the door to let the dog in. "Woof" and the dog gets a treat, "woof" and the dog gets a tummy-rub....you get the picture. Your dog has learned to get attention through barking. It is easy to fall into this trap because the very nature of barking gets your attention. For the same reason, it is easy to forget to praise your dog when she is not barking.

Barking and walks

The first step in obtaining peace and quiet is to realize that the dog being lonely, bored, frustrated or frightened can cause a lot of barking. These are all situations that you can help to alleviate. A well-exercised, happy dog is more likely to sleep all day while you are not home. Spend time playing with, training and exercising your dog.

Obedience training is great mental exercise. Thinking is a tiring activity for dogs, as it is for humans. Most dogs really enjoy a rapid paced, exciting a rapid paced, exciting "game" of come, sit, heel, down, stay...come here for hugs, a celebration of treats, and happy praise. Don't allow training to be a boring, tedious routine.

If your dog lives in the backyard most of the time, she probably needs "social exercise." She needs walks around the neighborhood so that she can investigate all the sounds and smells that tantalize her while she is in the yard. Bring her into the house when you are home. She needs to feel that she is part of your family. Having a large yard is not equal to having a well-exercised dog. You may see your dog dashing madly around your yard, but she is not exercising. She is doing the doggy equivalent of pacing, fidgeting, or other human forms of nervous activity. Provide your dog with fun things with which to occupy time, such as a digging pit or special chew toys.

Dogs are social animals. They need friends and companionship. Take your dog to the same dog park daily or weekly and let her make doggy friends. Dogs romping around and playing together tire rapidly and will sleep happily while recovering from the good, hardy play session.

Nuisance Barking

Until you have re-trained your dog about her barking habits, she should be confined to a place where she will cause the least disturbance. Closing the drapes will help muffle the noise for the neighbors. In addition, confining the dog to the back of the house (away from the street) will keep disturbances to a minimum. Leave a radio or television playing to mask noises from the street.

“Quiet”

It is no wonder people have barking problems with their dogs. Most have no clue as to whether barking is something good or something bad. Sometimes when the dog barks, he is ignored (owner in a jolly mood). Other times, the dog is encouraged (owner sees suspicious stranger outside the house). And yet other times, the dog is yelled at (owner has a headache). Humans are consistently inconsistent.

In order to help your dog know your rules, teach him what they are. Here is a good rule to start with: Barking is OK until the dog is told to “quiet.” Think of “quiet” as an obedience command rather than simply an unpredictable reprimand.

Each time your dog barks, after two or three woofs, praise her for sounding the alarm. Then tell her, “quiet.” Simultaneously, wiggle an especially tasty food treat in front of her nose. Most dogs instantly stop barking because they can’t sniff and lick the treat. The next time she barks, require her to stop barking and succeeds, she will be rewarded.

If she barks even one little woof after you’ve given the command, tell her “quiet’ immediately. Timing is everything. As training proceeds, the required period of silence is increased gradually; at first “quiet” means: No barking for the next 3 seconds, then 5 seconds, then 10 seconds and so on.

Within a single training session, you can teach your dog to stop barking for up to 1 or 2 minutes. This major progress, because whatever set off her barking in the first place is long gone, and she is likely to be quiet until the next disturbance.