

# PROBLEM BARKING

Barking is one form of verbal communication in dogs, along with whining and howling. Barking serves a variety of functions and it is normal for a dog to bark from time to time. It's no fairer to expect a dog to never bark than it is to expect a person to never speak! However, when dogs bark incessantly this can be problematic for both the pet guardian and surrounding neighbors.

## REASONS FOR BARKING & WAYS TO HELP

**Territorial Barking:** The dog barks in response to people or animals approaching his yard or home.

**Alarm Barking:** The dog barks at unfamiliar sights and sounds. He may be warning his family of possible danger or be trying to scare off a perceived threat.

**Compulsive Barking:** The dog barks in a repetitive manner, seemingly for no reason.

If your dog usually barks while outside the home, in the yard or on walks, then he is likely exhibiting territorial, alarm, or compulsive barking. One of the first things to do is make sure that your dog is getting plenty of exercise and mental stimulation. Make sure he's getting lots of social time with his human family. Take a training class and give him a "job" so that he has an appropriate outlet for his energy. Having your dog spayed or neutered may help with territorial barking.

If your dog has been spending most of his time outside, move him into the house where he can be supervised more closely and given appropriate activities. Feed him his food stuffed into frozen Kongs or in puzzle toys. Crate train your dog so that he has a space where he can feel safe when you need to leave him alone. Bored dogs left alone outside often begin to bark compulsively.

If your dog is alarm barking out of fear, pair the scary trigger with a yummy treat until your dog looks to you for good things instead of worrying about his environment. Don't worry that you are rewarding the barking. Once your dog is less frightened he will have fewer reasons to bark.

**Demand Barking:** The dog wants something such as attention, toys, or food.

**Excitement Barking:** The dog barks when excited, especially when greeting people or other dogs.

**Socially Facilitated Barking:** The dog barks when he hears other dogs barking.

If your dog demand barks, it may be you are accidentally encouraging the behavior. Be careful not to give your dog any attention when barking. Playtime and petting only happen when the dog is quiet. A nice trick is to act like your dog wants to go outside every time he barks (even if that's not what he wants). When the dog barks, happily walk him outside. The dog will quickly learn to only bark when he actually wants to go out, not for toys, food, attention, etc. A neutral space such as a bathroom will also work for this trick. Crating in response to barking is not recommended as you don't want your dog to view his crate as a potential punishment.

If your dog barks out of excitement, teach him that he will receive no attention from humans or other dogs until he is quiet. Instruct others in your household only to acknowledge, pet, and play with the dog when he's quiet. Only allow your dog to greet other dogs when he is calm and quiet. Eventually the dog will calm himself more quickly so he can have fun with his friends sooner.

A trick that may help with demand, excitement, and socially facilitated barking is to teach your dog to only bark a specific number of times, and then stop. For example:

- Allow the dog to bark 3 times.
- Then interrupt the barking and say "quiet."
- If the dog quiets, reward with a yummy treat or playtime with his favorite toy.
- If the dog does not quiet, calmly walk him to a neutral space such as the bathroom.
- When he is calm let him out of the bathroom.
- Repeat as necessary until the dog eagerly looks for his reward for only barking 3 times.

**Phobias and Anxieties:** The dog barks and cries when alone or during a frightening event such as a thunderstorm.

Dogs with phobias and anxieties may need more intensive help from a trainer or behaviorist. For mild cases things that may help include:

- Playing a TV or radio station with calm music or humans speaking.
- Crate training the dog so he has a space where he feels safe.
- Leaving the dog in a room without windows, or inversely in a room with windows. Some dogs do better when they can see out and some prefer not to have visual stimuli.
- Giving the dog chews and stuffed Kongs to keep him busy, as this often has a calming effect.
- Calming products such as D.A.P. dispensers and collars or Thundershirts.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

**Citronella Collars:** For barking indoors these collars may be of use. Sound triggers the collar to spray a solution of citronella into the air. While not painful, many dogs find the strong smell unpleasant. Only use this collar under close supervision, until you're sure it's working, as any loud noise may set off the spray.

**Aversive Sound Collars and Electric Shock Collars:** These collars deliver a high-frequency sound that is uncomfortable to dogs, or an electric shock that is painful. These collars are **not** recommended as they may have unintended side effects. The dog may not understand the connection between the punishment and his barking and may begin to associate humans or other animals with pain and discomfort.

**Tricks & Training:** Remember, your dog is likely to become confused if you encourage him to bark in some situations but discourage it in others. You can teach your dog not to demand bark while allowing him to bark when someone comes to the door. Or you can teach your dog the trick "speak" while also teaching a "quiet" command. Just be sure you are very clear and 100% consistent when training your dog and have realistic expectations.

**For more help and information, please contact our behavior helpline at 804-643-SPCA.**