

Constant Barking & What to Do About It

Dogs barking is a common complaint for dog owners and neighbors of dog owners. Why all the barking? There are many different reasons why your dog could be causing all of the noise complaints including both medical and behavioral reasons. Determining the cause of your dog's barking is the first step in finding out the right course of action. If your dog only barks while you are not home you might employ the use of a video camera to gain more insight to what is going on.

A note about barking – it is a self-rewarding behavior to your dog. The more they practice the barking, the more they get reinforced for it. Limiting the opportunities your dog has to bark can go a long way in reducing nuisance barking. Also, don't yell at your dog to be quiet – often the dog perceives your yelling as barking which can make him bark even more!

Alert Barking & Territorial Barking

Dogs bark to let their family members know when there's something going on – someone passing by outside, a strange noise, or even to warn off "intruders." Start by limiting your dog's access to points where they can see any of the stimuli outside by moving furniture, closing blinds, using baby gates to close off an area, or even by frosting windows. If your dog barks at people, animals, sounds, etc. while they are in the yard, bring them in the house.

Boredom Barking

Dogs whose need for socialization, exercise, or mental activity aren't being met may bark from boredom. Dogs need time with and attention from people they live with every day, including play time and mental exercise. Dogs who are left outside for long periods of time will probably get bored, so you may want to bring your dog inside more, and consider getting a friend or dog walked to come over when you have to be away from more than four hours. Another option is dog daycare which will provide supervision and activity for your dog while you are not home. Also consider other ways to occupy your dog like stuffed chew toys and puzzle toys.

Attention-Seeking or Demand Barking

If your dog barks at you to get your attention or get you to do something they want, and you do it – your dog learns that barking is a way to get things he wants. If you don't want your dog to demand bark, you must not respond to them when they do. Attention-seeking barkers can have their barking reinforced by you talking to them, touching them, or even look at them. This means that if your dog is already in the habit of using barking to get attention, you will have to ignore their barking completely – no talking, no touching, no eye contact.

When you first start, your dog will take some time to figure out the new rule, so be prepared to continue ignoring your dog's barking until they stop. The barking could get worse before it gets better, this is known as an 'extinction burst', so do not give in or you risk making the behavior even worse than it started. Don't forget, if your dog has been using barking to get something they need, like taking walks or being let outside, you'll need to provide these things, as often as they need them, when your dog isn't barking.

Fearful Barking

Barking can be a way for a dog who is afraid to say. "Stay away! Don't come closer!" If your dog barks when people or things in the environment seem scary, the solution is to help your dog become more confident. There are several tips for reducing your dog's fear at spca.org/pettips.

Loneliness

If your dog's barking happens when they are left alone, beginning immediately or very soon after you leave, and there are other signs such as destructive behavior, anxious behavior when you prepare to leave, frantic greetings upon your return, or reluctance to be away from you – even in another room – when you're home, your dog may suffer from separation anxiety.

Most dogs that bark when left alone are often just bored or frustrated and in need of more attention, activity, and/or a job to do. If you are having trouble determining what the cause might be or if you think that your dog is suffering from separation anxiety, contact a behavior specialist for assistance.

Talk to Your Neighbors

If your neighbors have complained of your dog's barking, talk to your neighbors and let them know that you are working on finding a solution. In some cases, if your dog is only barking when you are not home, your neighbors might be able to help you identify the triggers for your dog's barking.