

Nuisance Dog Barking



Barking is an extremely common dog behaviour problem. Having barking dogs in the community significantly reduces the quality of life for those affected by barking.

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons, including to alert their owner of trouble. However, a dog's idea of trouble may differ to the owners. It is the owner's responsibility to train the dog not to bark at normal occurrences which pose no threat, such as possums, cats or birds which are passing by.

ASSESS THE PROBLEM

If your dog is barking, take the time to understand why. Look at the time of day your dog is barking and consider what may be occurring at that time which would cause your dog to bark. Think about how your actions may be causing your dog to bark - are you leaving the dog for too long or rewarding the barking? Pay attention to your dog's behaviour. Is your dog stressed, excited, bored or lonely?

Consider the following:

- What makes your dog bark?
- When does your dog bark?
- Where does your dog bark?
- What happens after your dog barks? Does there appear to be any form of stress release for the dog? Do you reward your dog's behaviour?
- Is the behaviour normal for your dog?
- Is your dog's behaviour learned or conditioned?
- How long has your dog been barking? Is it occasional or progressive?
- How did the behaviour problem start?

Most owners ignore their dogs when they are well behaved. Good behaviour may be taken for granted, for example, resting and playing quietly. When the dog barks, it gets attention and this in turn encourages bad behaviour. It's easy to understand why dogs learn that the only way they can get the owner's attention is by barking.

Why do dogs bark?

- Lack of exercise
- Boredom
- Loneliness
- Inadequate shelter
- Change of territory
- Inadequate yard space
- Hungry or thirsty
- Medical condition
- Provocation
- Disturbances
- Anxiety

Once you have assessed the problem and your dog, try to determine what you can do to prevent your dog from barking. Try keeping a diary to log your activities and your dog's barking. This may help to pinpoint when and why your dog is barking. If this doesn't help, consider seeking professional help.

DETERMINE THE REASONS FOR BARKING

Lack of exercise, inadequate yard space, boredom

Dogs become bored when they are confined in a backyard. This problem can be compounded when the yard is small, the dog is kept on a chain, locked in an enclosure or on a run. Make sure your dog is getting the recommended amount of exercise and stimulation based on its breed.

Loneliness

Dogs that are left for long periods of time without companionship or stimulation can become discontented or lonely. They may become destructive, fearful, or bark excessively as a plea for attention. Look for ways to calm your dog while you are out - leave an old piece of clothing with your scent on it or put the radio on so the dog does not feel alone.

Inadequate shelter

Dogs require shelter from all the weather elements and may cry for attention due to the hot, cold, windy or wet weather conditions. They should always have soft, dry bedding that is protected from the heat in the summer and cold in the winter.

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Hunger or thirst

Dogs require plenty of fresh water and need to be fed a well balanced diet daily to remain healthy and content. A dog will soon let its owner know by barking, howling or whimpering if it has not been fed or has no water to drink.

Medical condition

An obvious or underlying medical condition can be the cause of howling, whimpering and barking. A veterinarian should be consulted to eliminate any medical condition from being the cause of excessive noise.

Provocation

Once you figure out what is provoking your dog, remove the source of the provocation or train your dog not to bark at it. If the source of provocation is a person, discuss and solve the problem with the person.

Training techniques

Owners need to teach their dogs what is or is not acceptable barking. This learning process can be time consuming, and persistence is required to achieve successful results. There are various training techniques and devices which may help assist in disciplining dogs. One simple and inexpensive method involves the use of voice control and a water spray gun. When the dog is barking for an unacceptable reason, the owner should immediately squirt the dog in the face with the water gun and say in a firm but controlled voice 'NO, BAD DOG'. The owner should never call the dog to them to receive the reprimand or else it will believe that it is being reprimanded for coming to the owner when called. A dog should never be reprimanded after the incident as this confuses the dog as to why it is being punished.

HOW TO PREVENT NUISANCE BARKING

- Provide your dog with quality exercise daily. Try a dog off-lead exercise area.
- Provide stimulation for the dog such as bones, smart toys or chew toys.
- Screen the area that may be inciting the dog to bark and remove any stressors.
- Consider blocking the dog's view of passing traffic.
- Contain the dog within the house or garage at times when the dog is most likely to bark.
- Buy an approved barking control collar such as a citronella collar or jet blast. It is illegal to use electrical or shock collars on dogs under the *Animal Welfare Act*.
- Enrol the dog in a behaviour modification course. Check the Yellow Pages under 'dog training'.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR NEIGHBOUR'S DOG IS BARKING EXCESSIVELY

The ACT Government feels the most effective and successful way of managing a nuisance barking dog is for the person affected by the problem (the complainant) to communicate their concerns directly to the dog owner. There is a good chance the dog owner is not aware their dog is excessively barking or causing a problem for neighbours.

If you are not comfortable approaching the dog owner, consider writing to advise them of the problem and how the barking is affecting you. You should include details about when the barking occurs so they can pinpoint the cause and how to fix it.

If, after sufficient time, the dog's owner does not rectify the problem, you can submit an Animal Nuisance Complaint Form to Domestic Animal Services (DAS). DAS will advise the owner of the complaint and provide two weeks for the issue to be addressed. If after two weeks the situation has not improved, you should advise DAS in writing, with a four day bark diary, and they will commence a formal investigation into the matter. On completion of the investigation you will be notified in writing of the outcome.

How to fix the problem:

- Contact the owner and clearly outline the issue.
- Provide sufficient time for the dog owner to rectify the problem.
- If no progress is made, lodge an Animal Nuisance Complaint Form with DAS.