

Barking

- Before attempting to resolve your dog's barking problem, have your veterinarian examine your dog to rule out medical causes.
- Determine why your dog is barking before attempting to address a barking problem.
- It takes time to teach a dog to bark less, so don't expect a quick fix or that your dog will stop barking completely.
- Never use a muzzle to keep your dog quiet for long periods of time or when you're not supervising him or her.

Barking is one of several types of vocal communication by dogs. You may appreciate your dog's barking when it signals that someone is at your door or that your dog needs something. However, dogs sometimes bark excessively or at inappropriate times. Because barking serves many purposes, determine why your dog is doing it before attempting to address a barking problem. Does your dog use barking to get what he or she wants? For example, dogs that get attention for barking often learn to bark for food, play, and walks as well. Therefore, training your dog to be quiet on command is important so that you can teach your dog a different behavior (such as "sit" or "down") for getting what he or she wants. Dogs of certain breeds and dogs that aren't spayed or neutered may bark more than other dogs; therefore, it can be more difficult to reduce barking in these dogs.

Types of Barking

In **territorial barking**, dogs bark excessively at people, dogs, or other animals within or approaching their territory. Your dog's territory includes the area around your home and anywhere your dog has spent time or associates strongly with you, including your car and the places you walk together.

In **alarm barking**, dogs bark at any noise or sight regardless of the context. When barking, these dogs usually have a stiff body and move or pounce forward 1 or 2 inches with each bark. These dogs might bark

at sights or sounds anywhere, not just when defending familiar areas.

In **attention-seeking barking**, dogs bark at people or other animals for attention or rewards, such as food, toys, or play.

In **greeting barking**, dogs bark when they see people or other dogs, but they are excited, have relaxed bodies and wagging tails, and might also whine.

In **compulsive barking**, dogs bark excessively and repetitively. These dogs often move repetitively as well. For example, a compulsive barker might run back and forth along a fence or pace when indoors.

In **socially facilitated barking**, dogs bark excessively only when they hear other dogs barking.

In **frustration-induced barking**, dogs bark excessively only when they're in a frustrating situation, such as when their activity or movement is restricted.

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In **illness or injury barking**, dogs bark in response to pain.

In **separation-anxiety barking**, dogs bark excessively only when left alone or when their caretaker is gone. This barking is usually accompanied by at least one other sign of separation anxiety, such as pacing, destruction, elimination, or depression.

Reducing Your Dog's Barking

It takes time to teach a dog to bark less, so don't expect a quick fix or that your dog will stop barking completely. Before attempting to resolve your dog's barking problem, have your veterinarian examine your dog to rule out medical causes. If you need help with reducing your dog's barking, consider working

Behavior and Training

with a board-certified veterinary behaviorist or a certified applied animal behaviorist or hiring a certified professional dog trainer in your area.

The veterinary behaviorist will help you identify your dog's type of barking. Answering the following questions can help you:

- When and where does your dog bark?
- Who or what triggers your dog's barking?
- Why is your dog barking?

The following suggestions/guidelines may be recommended by the veterinary behaviorist. Please consult with your veterinary professional.

To manage **territorial or alarm barking**, block your dog's view of areas that he or she guards. Block windows that your dog uses, and put a solid barrier or fence around your dog's outdoor area. In addition, don't allow your dog to greet people at the front door, yard gate, or property line. Instead, train your dog to go to another location (e.g., a crate or mat) and remain quiet until you invite him or her to greet someone appropriately.

To manage **attention-seeking barking**, you must consistently not reward your dog for barking. Dog owners often unknowingly reinforce attention-seeking barking by looking at, touching, scolding, or talking to their pets; to dogs, all of these human behaviors are rewards. When your dog starts to bark for attention, stare at the ceiling, turn away from your dog, or leave the room. As soon as your dog stops barking, ask him or her to sit, and then give your dog what he or she wants (e.g., attention, play, treats). To be successful, try to never reward your dog for barking at you.

It might help to teach your dog an alternative behavior. For example, if you don't want your dog to bark when he or she needs to go out or come in, install a doggy door or teach your dog to ring a hanging bell by touching it with his or her nose or paw. If your dog barks when he or she wants to play, teach your dog to bring a toy to you. If your dog barks when you're talking on the telephone or working on the computer, give your dog a tasty chew toy to occupy him or her before the barking starts.

In addition, teaching your dog to be silent on command can help strengthen the connection

between quiet behavior and attention or rewards. Regularly give your dog attention (e.g., praise, petting, a treat) when he or she isn't barking.

To manage **greeting barking**, try to keep greetings low key. Teach your dog to sit and stay when meeting people at the door. First, teach your dog to sit and stay when people aren't at the door; this will help your dog practice the behavior before being asked to perform it when people arrive. Keep a favorite toy near the front door, and encourage your dog to pick it up before greeting you or guests. (Your dog is less likely to bark with a toy in his or her mouth.) On walks, distract your dog with special treats (e.g., bits of chicken, cheese, or hot dogs) before he or she begins to bark at passersby. Some dogs do best if they

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are asked to sit as people or dogs pass. Other dogs prefer to keep moving. Praise and reward your dog with treats anytime he or she chooses not to bark. Putting a head halter on your dog when he or she is likely to bark may decrease the likelihood of barking. For safety, use a head halter only when your dog is supervised. Please seek guidance from your veterinary professional about the use of head halters.

To manage **compulsive barking**, try changing how you confine your dog. If your dog is alone for long periods of time, increase his or her exercise, mental stimulation, and/or social interaction. For managing compulsive barking, it is recommended to seek guidance from a certified applied animal behaviorist or a veterinary behaviorist.

To manage **socially facilitated barking**, keep your dog indoors when other dogs are barking, play music to drown out the sound of other dogs, or distract your dog with treats or play when other dogs are barking.

To manage **frustration-induced barking**, teach your dog to control his or her impulses through obedience training. Teach your dog to wait, sit, and stay, and reward him or her with fun activities

Behavior and Training

such as walks or play with other dogs. This might require the help of a veterinary behaviorist or certified professional dog trainer. You can discourage the presence of animals in your yard by installing motion-activated devices that scare them away.

To manage *separation-anxiety barking*, your dog must be treated for separation anxiety. Please contact your veterinarian.

Anti-bark Collars

Anti-bark collars deliver an unpleasant deterrent (e.g., a loud or ultrasonic noise, a spray of citronella, a brief electric shock) when a dog barks. Anti-bark collars are punishment devices and are not recommended as a first choice for managing a barking problem. This is especially true for barking that is motivated by fear, anxiety, or compulsion. Before using any anti-bark device, please seek the advice and guidance of your veterinarian, a board-certified veterinary behaviorist,

a certified applied animal behaviorist, or a qualified certified professional dog trainer.

What Not to Do

- Don't encourage your dog to bark at sounds, people, or animals outside your home by asking "Who's there?" or looking out the windows.
- Don't punish your dog for barking at certain sounds while encouraging him or her to bark at other sounds, such as people at the door. You must be consistent in training your dog.
- Do not use punishment techniques, which could worsen your dog's barking problem.
- Do not use a muzzle to keep your dog quiet for long periods of time or when you're not supervising him or her. Dogs can't eat, drink, or pant to cool themselves while wearing muzzles, so making your dog wear one for a long period of time is dangerous.