

DOG BARKING – MANAGEMENT TIPS

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION

When a complaint about a barking dog is logged with Animal Services, it begins an investigation. The process includes:

- Documenting the complaint
- Ascertaining if the dog is a nuisance
- Approaching the dog owner
- Collecting evidence
- Resolving the problem
- Possible court action
- Treatment of barking

The type of action taken by Animal Services will often depend on the attitude of the dog owner, the nature and urgency of the problem. The role of Animal Services is to impartially investigate the allegation and in doing so, offer a few simple suggestions to the dog owner. If these fail to rectify the problem then professional assistance should be sought. If the problem continues, Animal Services may take court action.

If there are early signs of barking in younger dogs, training and management techniques can be used to prevent the problem from becoming worse.

TYPES OF BARKS

Dogs have a number of different types of barks, which are often used for different purposes. Some may need to be encouraged and others ignored.

CAUSES OF BARKING

Excessive barking is only the symptom of an underlying problem. To solve the problem, find the cause and treat the problem or remove the dog from the situation. Possible causes include:

- Breeding
- Inappropriate confinement
- External distractions
- Isolation
- Anxiety
- Excitement
- Discomfort
- Dog learning to bark

Breeding

Excessive barking is more common in some breeds than others. However, although there is a genetic predisposition towards barking, it is often an acquired behavior that can occur in any breed or sex of dog. Owners need to carefully select a dog suitable for their lifestyle and home environment.

External Distractions

Once excessive barking starts it is a resistant behavior to eliminate. It is sometimes best to forget about eliminating barking, but deal with it by altering the situation leading to it. For example, too often the dog's kennel or run may need to be changed if it is too close to a neighbor, where children are or other distractions. Any movement or noise along a fence line such as pedestrians, children playing or other animals can cause barking.

Confinement/Restraint

Dogs often bark when caged, placed in a shed or restrained if they are not used to it. This commonly occurs in dogs chained up because of another problem such as attacking people or wandering. To overcome this the dog should be put in the area, where it is to be confined, for varying periods of time while the owner is at home. The owner can then correct the dog if it barks or attempts to get out.

Anxiety

Anxiety-related barking usually starts just after the owner has left home, or before they return. This type of barking can only be stopped by giving the dog the attention it wants, or by making the dog confident and independent so it is able to stay on its own. This can be achieved by changing the type and intensity of the owner's relationship with the dog, and the amount of attention they give when leaving or returning home. Anxiety during an owner's absence from the home can be a cause of constant barking or howling.

Discomfort

Before leaving home, the dog owner must ensure their dog has access to bedding, food, water and familiar toys throughout the day.

Visitors/Watchdog

Many owners praise their dog when it barks at strangers in the belief that this will make the dog a better watchdog. Problems arise when the dog's barking or growling is no longer effective and it bites instead. When this does occur, the dog sometimes does not differentiate between friends and strangers. If the dog barks to alert its owner, this is commendable, but when it keeps barking longer than necessary and cannot be stopped by the owner, he/she has lost control over the dog.

Boredom

Barking can be an outlet for a dog that is bored. These dogs have not lost the ability to relax, but don't do so because their owner has not provided an environment for them to relax in, or a routine to occupy the dog when the owner is home.

Isolation

Dogs are social animals and are not suited to a life on their own for long periods. Taking the dog to a friend, neighbor or getting another dog can overcome this. However, a second dog does not always rectify the problem.

Attention Seeking

Attention-seeking barking can be self-perpetuating. Owners don't want to ignore the barking, yet to pay attention teaches the dog barking can be rewarding. Owners with dogs that bark for attention must ignore the barking, despite its persistency, and praise the dog for being quiet. People must be consistent with their training and teach the dog a new set of rules.

Excitability

Some dogs are more excitable than others and will bark when over stimulated. Rewarding the dog when it is quiet, and minimizing and controlling activities where the dog becomes excited such as during play may reduce barking in this type of dog.

Other Behavioral Problems

Other behavioral problems are often found in dogs that bark excessively. These usually have to be corrected in order to reduce the barking. In addition the dog may not listen to its owner's commands and require training before the treatment needed to correct the barking can be applied.

Lack of Control

Obedience training on its own does not usually stop barking, but it can bring the dog under better control and reinforce the handler's position.

Lack of Exercise

Exercise on its own will not stop a dog from barking, but it may provide an active release for its energy. Exercise should be varied, with 15-20 minutes daily spent walking, training, and playing with the dog.

SOME SOLUTIONS

Barking Correction Collar:

This is a device which can be attached to the dog's collar and emits a noise, shock, or a dose of citronella to the dog when it barks. They are effective in dogs that cannot make the association between the barking and the punishment. However, not all dogs make this association, and the noise or shock itself may stimulate further barking in dogs. Electronic dog training collars are however not generally recommended for correcting excessive barking.

De-barking:

The surgical removal of the vocal cords or larynx is an expensive and often unnecessary operation. It is no substitute for removing the cause of the problem.

Muzzling:

Muzzling does not prevent a dog from barking excessively.



Hormone Therapy:

Hormone therapy may be used short term to allow behavioral work to proceed, or long term when continuous medication is required. Tranquilizers and anti-psychotic agents may be used in conjunction with other methods to modify the dog's behavior. Steroidal hormones such as progestin are not usually effective for a barking problem.

Time Out:

The dog may be taken away from its home and boarded with a professional trainer for a few days. Sometimes, if the trainer can correct the dog for barking in the presence of other dogs, this may be transferred to when the dog is in its own environment.

Spay/Neuter:

Talk to your veterinarian about spaying or neutering your dog.

Enrichment for Your Dog

With our busy lifestyles, many dogs can spend hours each day left to their own devices, sometimes leading to problem behaviors. Dogs are social animals, and it is important that when you are home, your dog gets to be indoors and part of the family! But when your pup is alone, here are some suggestions to keep him entertained.

Toys & More Toys!

There are many great toys on the market, and many you can make for free at home! Your dog will quickly get bored with the same old toy, so put out a few at a time and **ROTATE** them daily.

Food Dispensing Toys

All dogs have to eat - why not put your dog's meals into toys and make this enjoyable activity last longer? There are a wide variety of commercially available and homemade toys that will make mealtime more fun for your dog.



Kongs

Kongs are very durable, hollow rubber dog toys which can be stuffed with food and goodies and left for your dog to work on during the day. As your dog gets better at extracting food from Kongs, you can increase the difficulty - even freezing it full of wet food to make a "Kong-sicle"! For recipe suggestions, see <http://www.kongcompany.com/recipes/>.



Hard plastic food-dispensing toys & games

Buster Cubes and other similar toys can be filled with your dog's kibble. Then your dog has to roll the toy around to get the food out. Some dogs need help learning how to use these toys, so a smear of peanut butter or cheese near the opening will help get them going.

Homemade Food-Dispensing Toys

Recycled plastic bottles

Empty half-gallon or full gallon milk jugs, soda bottles, salad dressing bottles... your recycling bin is full of potential FREE dog toys! Put your dog's kibble in the plastic jug, and let them work at it. Many of the "toys" become more challenging with time, as your dog crunches up the sides of the container. If the bottle opening is too large for the "toy" to be challenging, leave the cap on (as long as it is sturdy and not likely to become a choking hazard), and punch or drill some kibble-sized holes in the sides of the bottle. Be sure to remove any small plastic rings from the containers for your dog's safety.



Ice blocks

During the hot central valley summers, frozen treats can be especially nice for dogs kept outdoors. Place some treats or kibble into a plastic container, fill with water and freeze. You could even freeze a knotted rope into it so it could be hung somewhere or maybe bury it – as the ice melts the interest is renewed as treats come to the surface. Try making ice blocks with chicken stock - a cool idea for the hot weather!

More Fun Activities

Create an “approved” digging spot

Many dogs love to dig, but few dog owners appreciate the results! If your dog loves digging, provide a designated area where he can dig and reinforce this natural behavior by burying treats, bones, or favorite toys there. Choose an area that is hidden by shrubs if you like so he can dig to his heart’s content while leaving your landscaping intact.

Wading pool

If your dog loves water, purchase an inexpensive plastic children’s pool, or a sturdier version if you want it to withstand multiple summers of sun exposure. Make sure the lip of the pool isn’t too high for your dog to easily step over. If your dog is unsure about the pool at first, you can drop some toys or treats into the water which will float and encourage him to play. This is another good activity for the hot central valley summers!



Treasure hunt!

Instead of giving your dog his meal in a bowl, measure out his kibble and toss it all over the grass in the backyard. Dogs are natural scavengers and searching out food like this is a happy occupation. You can also try hiding his stuffed Kongs around the house so when you go off to work he is busy hunting for his food.

Dog walker

If you are having a hard time giving your dog as much exercise as he needs with your busy schedule, consider paying a dog walker to come by a few times a week. Be sure to thoroughly check references, insurance and get details of how many dogs are walked at once. Ask the walker to vary the route to make for more interesting walks!

Remember, these are all things to help entertain your dog when you can’t be home- but the best enrichment is

TIME WITH YOU!



