



## You're Barking Mad!

Barking is a normal and natural behaviour for a dog. It's one way they communicate. But excessive or continual barking can be an annoyance. You may not even be aware of the extent of the problem, if the dog barks when you are away from home. Or you've become used to the sound, and just tune it out. But the barking may be a real annoyance for your neighbours and other family members. What do we do to keep peace in the family and in the neighbourhood?

The first step towards solving a barking problem is to figure out why your dog is barking. Just as we humans vocalise for a variety of reasons, dogs bark for many different reasons.



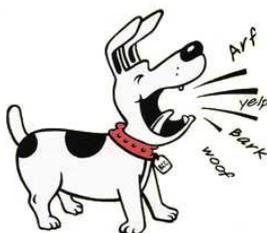
### **Loneliness**

Dogs are not solitary animals, but live in family groups. In our modern world, our family is the dog's pack. Some dogs, if left on their own for long periods, may become very lonely and distressed.

*Solution:* You will need to speak to a trainer or animal behaviourist to explore long-term solutions to your dog's loneliness or separation anxiety. In the meantime, if the dog is kept in the house, try leaving a radio on, at low volume, tuned to a talk-radio station. Minimise the length of time that everyone is away from the home, or get a friend or relative to come in and visit during the day.

If your dog is really just lonely, a second dog may help to keep him company. However, don't get a second dog unless you're certain this will make your dog feel better, rather than anxious or jealous. Remember too that dogs mimic the behaviour of other dogs, so unless you've dealt with the first dog's problem, you might end up with two barkers rather than one.

### **Boredom and Frustration**



Dogs are very physical beings, and have lots of energy. If they are confined for long periods of time without exercise, a barking habit can develop as an outlet for their pent-up energy. Dogs may also become barkers if their environment is sterile, and they have no playmates or toys, or if they are an active breed (like Border Collies) who need a 'job' to be happy.

*Solution:* Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise daily, and has lots of interesting toys to play with. Make sure you have the proper dog for your environment and lifestyle.

### **Guarding**



This type of barking may occur when other people or animals come near the dog's territory (your home). Be it the rubbish men or a stray dog, your dog may think its territory is being invaded, and will spring to the defence.

*Solution:* Speak to a behaviourist or trainer for long-term behaviour modification solutions. In the meantime, try to find a place in your yard or home where your dog will not see the 'invaders' approaching.

### **Fear and Phobias**

Some dogs bark out of fear: fear of people, fear of other animals, fear of loud noises, etc.

*Solution:* If your dog wants to hide, make a quiet and secure den for it. If it's scared of noise, for example thunder; see a behaviourist or trainer about a de-sensitisation programme. If it's frightened of people or animals, shut curtains and doors, and seek professional help for long-term solutions.



### **Attention Seeking**

Your dog is barking to get attention. Perhaps she wants to go for a walk. Or perhaps she's learned through experience that you respond (you're a well-trained human) with a pat or a "quiet girl" when she barks.

*Solution:* Do not give your dog attention when it demands it. Rather ignore it. However, do be sure that you spend quality time with your dog every day. Walking or playing with your pet, training or grooming it, should be a pleasure for you too. That's why you got a dog, isn't it?

### **Pain or Medical Problems**

Your dog may be trying to tell you that it is sick or in pain. In this case, the vocalisation may be whining or moaning as much as barking.

*Solution:* Examine your dog thoroughly for obvious health problems – thorns in the paw, infected bite wounds, hyalomma tick bites, etc. Note the dog's behaviour – is it always looking toward its stomach or other parts of its anatomy? Take your dog for a medical check up.

### **Peace in the Neighbourhood**

If your dog's barking has generated complaints, talk to the neighbours. They may be able to provide important information about exactly when your dog is barking, and for how long. Perhaps you will be able to identify a pattern or trigger. Once you've decided how to resolve the problem, keep the neighbours informed of what you are doing, and what progress you are making.

There are also some quick tricks to reduce the severity of the nuisance and keep the peace, while you are re-schooling the dog:

- Make sure your dog gets exercise – a tired dog barks less;
- Get a friend or relative to look after the dog while you are out;
- Don't leave your dog outside if it's barking to get in;
- If your dog barks at things outside in the yard, don't let it go out on its own;
- If your dog barks when it's excited, don't play with it late at night or early in the morning, when others expect peace and quiet.

## Bark Collars

Bark collars are specially designed to deliver an aversive reaction whenever your dog barks.

- *Citronella Collar:* This collar contains a reservoir of citronella solution that sprays up towards your dog's face every time he barks. A citronella collar is considered humane and does work with dogs that find the citronella smell and spray sound aversive.
- *Aversive Sound Collar:* This collar emits a high-frequency sound when your dog barks. Some are activated by the noise of the bark, while others are activated by a handler. The rate of success for this type of collar is reported to be quite low.
- *Electric Shock Collar:* **WE DO NOT RECOMMEND** an electric shock collar to control your dog's barking. The electric shock is painful and many dogs will choose to endure the pain and continue barking. Also, pain-related aggression may be re-directed toward people or pets that are around the dog.



The main drawback of any bark collar is that it does not address the underlying cause of the barking. You may be able to eliminate the barking, but your dog may begin to display other symptoms: digging, escaping, or becoming destructive or even aggressive. Therefore, a bark collar must be used in conjunction with a behaviour modification programme based on the reason for the barking.

## Last Thoughts

- If excessive barking has already become a habit, remember that it may take weeks to replace that old habit with a new one.
- Don't punish your dog for barking. If one of the underlying reasons for the barking is related to fear or stress, punishment may actually make the situation worse. In other cases, your dog may perceive the yelling as attention (which it wants); or your 'barking' may just cause the dog to increase its own vocalisation..
- Start proper training when the puppy is young, and avoid the development of bad habits.

Happy training