

How to Handle Dog Barking

Barking is a perfectly natural canine behavior. Birds sing; frogs croak; and a dog barks, whines and howls. If you have a dog, you better expect some barking, whining or howling. It is unrealistic and unfair to think you can train your dog to stop barking altogether. However, you, your neighbors and your dog will all be much happier if the barking is under control.

Dogs that are socially isolated or confined for long periods without supervised exercise need some outlet for their pent-up energy. A dog that is left alone all day is likely to take up barking as a hobby because no one is there to control him. In no time at all, barking becomes an enjoyable habit. And for many dogs, once they start barking, they tend to continue barking for the sheer fun of it.

Your dog may be barking excessively because you unintentionally trained her to do so. Your dog speaks and you obey. "Woof" and you open the door to let puppy out. "Woof" and you open it again to let her in. "Woof" and she gets a treat, "woof" for a tummy-rub . . . you get the picture. Your dog has learned to get attention through barking. It is easy to fall into this trap because the very nature of barking gets your attention. For the same reason, it is easy to forget to praise and reward your dog when she is not barking.

Barking and Exercise

The first step in obtaining peace and quiet is to realize that lots of barking is caused by the dog being lonely, bored, frustrated or frightened. These are all situations that you can help to alleviate. A well exercised, happy dog is more likely to sleep all day while you are not home. Spend time playing with, training and exercising your dog.

Obedience training is great mental exercise. Thinking is a tiring activity for dogs, as it is for humans. Most dogs really enjoy a rapid paced, exciting "game" of come here, sit, heel, down, stay ... come here for hugs, a massage, a celebration of praise and treats. Don't allow training to be a boring, tedious routine.

If your dog lives in the back yard most of the time, she probably needs "social exercise". She needs walks around the neighborhood, so she can investigate all the sounds and smells that tantalize her while she is in the yard. Bring her into the house when you are home. She needs to feel that she is part of your family. Having a large yard is not equal to having a well exercised dog. You may see your dog dashing madly around your yard, but he is not exercising. He is doing the doggy equivalent of pacing, fidgeting, or other human forms of nervous activity. Provide your dog with fun things with which to occupy himself, such as a digging pit or special chew toys.

Dogs are social animals. They need friends and companionship. Take your dog to the same dog park daily or weekly and let her make doggy friends. Dogs romping around and playing together tire rapidly and will sleep happily while recovering from the good, hardy play session.

Nuisance Barking

Until you have re-trained your dog about her barking habits, she should be confined to a place where she will cause the least disturbance. Closing the drapes will help muffle the noise for the neighbors. In addition, confining the dog to the back of the house (away from the street) will keep disturbances to a minimum. Leave a radio playing to mask noises from the street. You may also want to disconnect switches on the telephone and doorbell if these set off a barking spree.

Stop Barking

It's no wonder people have barking problems with their dogs. Most dogs have no clue as to whether barking is something good or something bad. Sometimes when the dog barks, he is ignored (owner in a jolly mood). Other times, the dog is encouraged (owner sees suspicious stranger outside the house). And yet other times, the dog is yelled at (owner has a headache). Humans are consistently inconsistent.

In order to help your dog know your rules, teach him what they are. Here is a good rule to start with: Barking is OK until the dog is told to "Stop Barking." Think of "Stop Barking" as an obedience command rather than simply an unpredictable reprimand.

Each time your dog barks, after two or three woofs, praise her for sounding the alarm. Then tell her, "Stop Barking." Simultaneously, waggle an especially tasty food treat in front of her nose. Most dogs instantly stop barking because they can't sniff and lick the treat while barking. During this quiet time praise her continuously - - "Good girl, stop barking, what a good quiet dog you are, good dog . . ." After 3 seconds of no barking, let her have the treat. The next time she barks, require her to stop barking for 5 seconds before she gets the treat.

If she barks even one little woof after you've given the command, scold her immediately. Timing is everything. As training proceeds, the required period of silence is increased gradually; at first "Stop Barking" means: No barking for the next 3 seconds, then 5 seconds, then 10 seconds, etc.

Within a single training session, you can teach your dog to stop barking for up to 1 or 2 minutes. This is major progress, because whatever set off her barking in the first place is history, and she is likely to be quiet until the next disturbance.

The Consequences of Barking

When your dog stays quiet for the required period of time after you've asked her to please, "Stop Barking," she is rewarded. When she makes a mistake, your unsuspecting dog's very next woof should be met with a cataclysmic, earthshaking 120 decibel "STOP BARKING!!!" Most dogs are so totally shocked and amazed by this horrendous outburst that they will stare at you in disbelief (and silence). If this outburst makes your dog more excited, then you might try an ice-cold I-mean-business tone of voice. Sometimes a splash of water in the face will do the trick. You must find something that will instantly make your dog stop barking. As soon as your dog stops barking, even for just a tenth of a second, you must immediately and instantly reward her. After enough repetitions your dog will learn the meaning of the command, "Stop Barking," and you will no longer need your training props: water, treats, etc.

Substituting the Barking Habit

If your dog's excessive barking has already become a habit, don't expect the barking to get under control overnight. It takes weeks of repetition to replace an old habit with a new one. If you keep up with these procedures, you will see a new pattern of barking develop. Instead of barking relentlessly at the insignificant, your dog will be barking appropriately and for a reasonable length of time. It is important that you maintain this new good habit through practice and praise or your dog may revive his old annoying barking habits again.

Complaint on a Barking Dog

If you have a barking canine near by, if you feel comfortable, you could speak with the owner and bring it to their attention. If that does not help, you may contact the city and ask for them to be contacted by animal control, and if it keeps up a complaint may be signed against the owner of the canine. Keep in mind that changing a canine's pattern is not an overnight activity and does take some time.