

The Barking Dog!

People talk, dogs bark. It is not reasonable to expect your dog to never utter a single bark; however, when barking becomes excessive it can create problems for the owners, the neighbors, and ultimately the dog. Dogs bark for a variety of reasons. The first step in correcting problem barking is to figure out why your dog is barking. If your dog is barking when you are not around, you may have to do some detective work like enlisting the help of the neighbors or even go as far as setting up a video camera to record when your dog is barking.

The Most Likely Reasons Your Dog Barks

- **Territorial Barking** –occurs when ‘intruders’ are present (the mailman, neighbors walking their dogs, etc.). The purpose of this bark is to warn the ‘intruder’ that they have not gone unnoticed, and warn the other pack members of the ‘threat’.
- **Fear Barking** –occurs when your dog is uncomfortable in a given situation (barks at fireworks, thunder, etc.). It’s your dog’s way of warning the impending ‘danger’.
- **Request Barking** – occurs when your dog wants something now! Common examples are barking for a treat, access to outside, walks, etc.
- **Boredom Barking** – occurs when a dog creates his own fun by barking. This usually occurs when a dog is under-stimulated as a result of his daily needs of physical and mental stimulation not being met.

How Can I Control My Dog’s Barking?

- **Territorial Barking**
 - Teach your dog an alternative behavior. For example, teach your dog that when he hears the doorbell ring, if he does a down stay he gets a tasty treat. Practice learning a down stay well, then once your dog has it, ring the bell, and issue the command. When your dog goes down, reward with a treat. After several repetitions, your dog will have learned that the ringing of the bell means ‘Down Stay’ and he gets a tasty reward. (Be sure to pick where you want the down stay. Make sure it’s not directly in front of the door!)
 - Teach your dog a ‘Quiet’ command. Once barking, lure your dog’s attention to you with a treat and when he becomes quiet, say ‘Good Quiet’ slowly and calmly, rewarding with a treat for quiet.
 - If you haven’t already, have your pet spayed or neutered. This alone can sometimes curb territorial barking.
 - As a behavior management technique, you can block your dog from having access to the front rooms of the house (which is where this type of barking most often occurs).
- **Fear Barking**
 - You have to determine what it is that is frightening to your dog.
 - Once you know what it is that is scary, start a program to desensitize your dog to the noise. If it’s thunder, you can buy a tape with thunder noises and play it at a very low volume while asking your dog to do things he is good at, like sit, for lots of tasty treats and praise and petting.
 - If your dog is scared of strangers, carry a very tasty treat with you at all times and ask strangers to toss the treats to your dog. Eventually your dog will think that all people are treat dispensers.

- Request Barking
 - This is probably the easiest barking to cure. It's simple – your dog is barking to tell you he wants something. So, he doesn't get it until he is quiet. You should ignore the barking completely. When the barking ceases, then your dog can have what it is that he wanted. Soon your dog will learn that being quiet is a faster way to get what he wants!
 - It's important to note that if your dog has been successful in getting what he wants by barking, he will bark louder and longer the first few times you ignore him. Don't give in! It's a test! Stand your ground and eventually the behavior will extinct itself because it's no longer rewarding.

- Boredom Barking
 - Boredom barking occurs when your dog doesn't have anything better to do than bark! This may occur if your dog isn't getting enough physical and mental stimulation.
 - Increasing your dog's stimulation will help to eliminate boredom barking:
 - Walk your dog at least once every day. It's mentally and physically stimulating.
 - Take your dog through a positive-reinforcement obedience class, or any positive training class like agility or tricks. Practice a few of your commands every day to make your dog's mind work.
 - Provide interesting toys like stuffed Kongs, Goodie Bones, Buster Cubes, etc. Consider rotating the toys so there is always something 'new' in your dog's environment.
 - Consider enrolling your dog in doggie day-care where he can romp and play with other dogs.
 - Consider hiring a dog sitter to help exercise your dog while you are at work.
 - Provide high energy games like fetch to tire your dog, especially before extended absences.

Do Bark Collars Work?

The answer here is 'sometimes' but usually at a price. Even if a bark collar is successful, you have not addressed the underlying cause of the barking. Often, if the barking ceases, the behavior will just manifest in another way. For instance, if your dog is Boredom Barking, you may be successful in ceasing the barking, but you may wind up with a digging dog. In no case should a bark collar be used in cases where your dog is barking due to fear or anxiety.

The most successful type of bark collar is the Citronella Collar which emits a citronella solution when your dog barks. The theory behind why this collar works is that when the citronella is emitted, your dog will sniff it. Dogs cannot sniff and bark at the same time. The primary disadvantage of this collar is that it is sound activated which means that sounds other than your dog barking could potentially set it off, creating one confused pooch! The collar works best as a training tool, when the owner is present to reward the quiet times.

The electric shock collars generally do not have a high success rate and have the potential to have horrific side effects. Aside from your dog being delivered an electrical shock which is bound to inflict pain, shock collars can create aggression problems. For instance, your dog barks when the mailman comes each day. At the bark, the collar shocks the dog. After a few repetitions, the dog has figured out that he gets shocked every time the mailman comes and, therefore, the mailman must be causing the shock. Now you have a dog that believes the mailman is causing him pain, and this can evolve into full-blown aggression at the mailman. Now consider how many times a day this scenario happens when people and dogs pass the house. You have created a dog that is at best fearful of people and dogs and at worst aggressive towards them. These collars are absolutely NOT recommended.