

# Tips for Managing Your Dog's Barking

Why does your dog bark? And how can you get him to stop?

Dogs bark to communicate. Have you ever sat down to dinner and been interrupted by your dog's barking? He's trying to say, "I'm hungry too!" How about when other dogs run by? He may bark to say, "Hey! I want to go play with them!"

It's normal for dogs to bark. Excessive barking, however, can become a problem when your neighbors become upset or he keeps you from sleeping at night. There are different kinds of barking and thus various solutions to managing the habit.

Most barking can be resolved by methods of **Positive Reinforcement** and **Effective Time-outs** (see handouts).

If your dog is barking excessively, the first step to resolving the issue is to figure out why he is barking.

**Boredom Barking** occurs with dogs that are left alone for long periods of time without stimulation. Without human interaction, interactive toys, or a "job" to do during the day, this clever dog barks because he simply needs something to occupy his time. Bored barkers won't bark at anything in particular, and they will usually stop once given attention or an activity.

## **Resolve it!**

- Give your dog an interactive toy when you leave the house.
  - Hollowed toys (like a Kong) stuffed with food, treats, or peanut butter will give your dog a job to do.
  - Animal Friends sells puzzle toys and other toys that will give your dog something to work on.
- Get rid of that excess energy.
  - Make sure your dog is getting enough exercise by providing long walks each day (15-30 minutes depending on the dog) in addition to shorter potty breaks.
  - Have him spend the day at a doggie day care center, even if only occasionally.
  - Take him to the dog park before you leave him alone for a long period, so he can burn off excess energy.
- Attend behavior classes with your dog.
  - Structured training can help you and your dog learn to communicate effectively.
  - Training your dog helps stimulate his thinking and also provides "work" to keep him happily occupied.

**Demand Barking** is when your dog wants something from you. Perhaps you are eating pizza and your dog demands a slice by barking.

## **Resolve it!**

- Don't reinforce the behavior by submitting to it. Ignore your dog until the barking stops then praise him (but don't give him a slice of pizza!).
- Make use of time-outs.
  - See handout.
  - Put your dog in another area until the barking stops.



**Protective Barking** might occur when someone approaches your house, and your dog wants to protect his territory. His body language may become more aggressive. He may bark at first, but then settle down after a period of time.

***Resolve it!***

- Train your dog to see visitors as something good by building positive associations with the doorbell.
  - Give him a treat (or something he values), then ring the doorbell.
  - Practice putting your dog into a “sit” and “stay” position while the bell rings. Reward him if he does not bark or move.
- Practice behavior skills.
  - Train your dog to “sit” and “stay” when people come in or around the home.
  - When your dog does not bark, reward him.
- Ask visitors present your dog with “good things” such as a treat or one of his toys.
  - Your dog will start to associate visitors with good things!

**Fearful Barking** occurs in response to a frightening situation, like a thunderstorm. Your dog’s body language may indicate fear if his ears are pinned back and his tail is tucked between his legs. This barking may also sound like howling.

***Resolve it!***

- Desensitize your dog to the scary situation with positive reinforcement.
  - Help him learn that there is nothing to fear by projecting a calm, confident attitude.
  - Bring out his favorite treats or toys during the scary time.
- Don’t coddle your dog.
  - Dogs respond to their owners’ feelings, so if you coddle or fuss over the dog while he is scared, you are reinforcing his belief that there is a reason to be frightened.
- Place him in a secure room where the sound or fearful situation is muted.
  - Identify a small area such as a bathroom or basement without windows where he won’t be exposed to the scary situation.

**Barking due to Separation Anxiety** happens when your dog gets upset about being away from you. Your dog may bark for only a short time after you leave or intermittently throughout the day. He may also wait at the door or whine. Separation anxiety can be a serious problem in dogs and may require the help of a positive-reward based trainer. There are some simple initial steps that you can take.

***Resolve it!***

- Desensitize your dog to your departure.
  - Help your dog realize that your leaving is not a bad thing by use of positive reinforcement.
  - Give him a distraction (interactive toys, Kongs, etc.)
  - Leave something with him that smells like you, like an old shirt.
  - Leave familiar sounds like music or the television while you are gone.
- Practice leaving for short periods of time so that your dog makes the connection that you will return.
- Don’t make a big fuss when you leave and when you return.
  - Ignore your dog for the first few minutes when you return, and then acknowledge him with a simple praise or touch. Don’t over-stimulate him or dramatize the situation.

**In all cases:** Never give your dog attention while he is barking. Instead, wait until the barking ends, then reward him for stopping. Your dog will learn that when he stops barking, he gets what he wants.

**Understand that bark collars are the opposite of positive-reward based training and are NOT recommended.** They are designed to give your dog a negative consequence each time he barks. This can be a citronella spray collar, aversive sound collar, or an electric shock collar. Animal Friends does not recommend using bark collars in dogs (especially electric shock collars). Bark collars can be very stressful for your dog. Before resorting to a bark collar, consider training your dog with aversive sound techniques by sounding a horn or making a clanging noise whenever your dog barks.

Aversive or punishment-based training can make problems worse, especially for dogs that are displaying fearful behavior. Punishing your dog may make him redirect his frustration onto you. In addition, aversive training, such as bark collars, does not get to the root of why the barking is happening. You may put an end to the barking by using a bark collar, but your dog may redirect his frustration in another way.

Need more help? Animal Friends offers behavior training classes. For more information, visit [www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org](http://www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org) or call 412.847.7000.

