

Managing Excessive Barking
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Excessive barking is a common complaint with dog owners (and their neighbors). Dogs bark for a variety of reasons: out of boredom, warning, lonely, fear, communication, to get attention, it is fun, etc. Some breeds, like many herding breeds, may be more vocal than others. For example, my beloved Shetland Sheepdog is a breed prone to barking. They use vocalizing as part of herding. Shelties can be very vocal dogs! Training from day one when barking will and will not be permitted is very important! Many Shelties are given up each year due to barking. Many dogs PERIOD are given up each year due to barking. However, this need not be. Barking is a problem that can be worked with if you are consistent and diligent.

The easiest thing to do is NOT allow barking to get to be a bad habit. As soon as your puppy or dog joins your house, you need to start teaching what will and will not be allowed. Use a command such as NO BARK or ENOUGH and reinforce it with praise as soon as the dog quiets down. Use a firm but not yelling voice and again, yelling can sound like barking and make the situation worse as you are barking as well! Show the dog that you really like it when he is quiet. Just shouting NO can sound like a bark and get your dog even more excited and barky! As soon as the dog stops barking, you need to reinforce the stopping of barking with a treat and praise. No puppy is born knowing command. You have to teach that each command has an action and if that action is done, good things will follow. Positive motivation is a great training technique! Be careful not to inadvertently praise behaviors you do not want. Cuddling and stroking a barking dog can give the dog the impression you like what it is doing.

Now, what if you want the dog to alert bark when someone is at the door. Well, set up training scenarios. Have someone ring the bell or knock. Call the dog to you and have him escort you to the door. Ask excitedly "Who's there?" "Check it out!" or whatever cue you decide to use. Go to the door, have the dog sit and then have him stop barking. Praise and treat the stopping of barking. Teach him that when you get to the door and check out the situation, he can be quiet. Be consistent, be positive and be responsible. Practice several short sessions a day and the dog will eventually learn what you want. Stop undesired barking as soon as it starts. Positively reinforce the behaviors you want. Many issues can be avoided if they are worked with from the beginning. Most dog owners are reactive (addressing issues after they become problems) as opposed to being proactive (not allowing issues to begin or get out of hand).

What if your dog is already nuisance barker? You can try several things. First, identify WHY your dog is barking: Lonely, alerting you to something, fear, bored, aggression, etc. Knowing the trigger or triggers is a big part in working towards a solution. If your dog is alerting you to something, teach him that when you have checked out a situation and you have told him it is fine, he must stop barking. My dogs learn that I want them to alert me to things on the property or that could pose a threat. As soon as a pack leader has checked it out and given the all clear, the dog does not need to alert me

anymore. (I say, "Enough! It's fine" this is their cue that I have given the all clear and alerting me is no longer needed).

If your dog is bored or lonely, you need to get active with him. Toys, games, training, interaction all go a long way to help a bored or lonely dog. A tired dog is generally a better behaved dog. Boredom and loneliness can lead to other undesired behaviors as well. Get a variety of toys like Kongs, safe chew toys, Buster Cubes, etc., that will stimulate your dog's mind and get him doing something. Obedience lessons, Agility or other sport as well as just playing fetch will help. Do not leave your dog unsupervised while outside. Dogs who are outside all day especially when no one is home are more prone to becoming nuisance barkers for a variety of reasons listed above as well as a big one: **NO ONE IS HOME TO TEACH HIM PROPER BEHAVIOR**. If no one shows him what he can and cannot do, the issue will persist.

If your dog barks during play, calm the play down. Relax the dog and start again. Keep play under control and integrate training into the play.

Some dogs are pathological barkers and intervention with a behaviorist may be needed if training does not work, you cannot find the source of the barking, etc. Sometimes just having a trainer or behaviorists watch your dog can help give you ideas. Often we cannot see the forest for the trees and we need an outsider to look at a situation in a different light.

Now, many people want a fast and easy way out and may resort to various collars that stop barking. If any training aid is used wrong, it can frustrate and possibly worsen the situation. Collars negatively reinforce the barking through a shock, noise, or spray with a scent dogs do not like. Some dogs learn to ignore the collars. Others may develop nervous behaviors due to the constant punishment.

There is also a surgical procedure called Debarking. This does not silence a dog at all. It causes the volume to decrease and the dog sound as if it has laryngitis. Debarking does not stop the problem, only helps cover it by dropping the volume. Your dog will still bark and some debarks do not take well and the dog still can be quite loud.

The best thing to do to help with barking is not to allow it to become a habit in the first place. A few things you can do are:

- 1) Train from day one what will and will not be allowed. Remember, some breeds are more prone to barking, but any dog can be a nuisance barker.
- 2) Teach a command that lets the dog know you want him to be quiet like **NO BARK** or **ENOUGH**.
- 3) Keep your dog inside when you are not home. Dogs left outside alone all day are more prone to nuisance barking.
- 4) Obedience training.
- 5) Adequate exercise, proper attention to him, mental and physical stimulation. A dog that gets what he needs mentally and physically is less apt to be a problem barker.

- 6) Teach your dog when he can bark and that once you have checked out a situation, he can stop altering you.
- 7) Try to find the trigger of the bark – like neighborhood kids teasing the dog.
- 8) Do not inadvertently teach the dog that constant barking is good.
- 9) Positive training methods to encourage the dog to stay quiet when told
- 10) Do not let the dog get away with barking for hours before you tell him to stop.
The dog may be getting set to stop anyhow and he is getting attention from you, increasing the chance of barking if he is doing it for attention. Stop the bark when it first starts.

Dogs allowed to become nuisance barkers disturb the whole neighborhood – even if you are not bothered by it. You can end up being fined by your community for violating noise ordinances or even having an irate neighbor take the law into his own hands! Do not allow your dog to become a nuisance in your community.