

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



WHY DOGS BARK

Owners often cite barking as a problem behaviour in their dogs, however barking is a totally normal behaviour for dogs. If a dog is barking excessively, whilst problematic for the owner, it is not really in itself a behaviour problem but rather a symptom of another underlying cause.

When dogs bark they are vocalising their feelings, this may be;

- Fear
- Excitement
- Warning
- Anxiety
- Boredom
- Loneliness
- Pain
- Desire for a particular outcome

Before you can successfully reduce your dog's barking it is important to understand why he is barking.

- Dogs do not bark just to annoy you or your neighbours!
- Dogs do not bark for spite or revenge!
- Dogs do not bark just because they can!

Whilst barking can be annoying, it is unreasonable to expect your dog to never bark just as it would be unreasonable to expect your children to never talk, shout or laugh.

Certain breeds will bark more than others - some types of dogs were actually bred to be barkers!

However, many dogs learn that barking is a successful way to gain attention or a desirable outcome.

If you listen closely, you will eventually learn your dog's different barks and their meanings. In general, dogs will most commonly bark for the following reasons:

Warning/Alert: It is normal and often desirable for a dog to bark when someone is at the door or when strangers pass the house, garden or car.

Most owners accept and even encourage this behaviour. Unfortunately it is difficult for dogs to differentiate between real and perceived intruders/threats so this behaviour often results in a dog who barks at every sight or sound even if it is some distance away. Warning barks are usually sharp, loud and authoritative.

Anxiety: Dogs that bark when left alone are often anxious and distressed at being separated from their owners.

Anxiety however, can also be caused by other stimuli such as unusual smells (burning, BBQ's etc) or loud noises (fireworks, crow scarers or thunder) whether the owner is home or not. This kind of barking is often high-pitched and sometimes accompanied by whining/howling.

Responding to Other Dogs: Many dogs bark in response to other barking dogs.

This may be other dogs in the same house or from neighbouring houses or gardens. Anyone who has visited a kennel will have experienced this, once one dog barks – others join in!

Playfulness/Excitement: Many dogs will bark whilst playing or when they predict an exciting event such as a walk or dinner!

This kind of barking is usually high pitched, fast and repetitive.

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Attention-seeking: Is one of the most common reasons for dogs to bark.

Most owners will understand exactly what their dog wants (food, walk, cuddle, be let in/out) and respond accordingly thus further motivating the dog to repeat the performance. Attention seeking barking may range from short 'low woofs', high-pitched fast barking (as above) through to persistent loud almost demanding barks!

Boredom: Bored dogs often bark!

This sometimes appears to be just for the sake of hearing their own voice but can also be a way of releasing excess energy. Boredom barking can range from all the previous types mentioned as this dog is more likely to be reactive, lonely or attempting to seek attention.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Barking dogs are the most common cause of noise complaints in the UK.
- Barking is one of the top ten reasons that owners relinquish their dogs to a rescue centre.
- A German Shepherd in Essex is officially the loudest dog in the world; Daz's bark reached a gigantic 108 decibels, reportedly the same noise level as a chainsaw!
- A dog's hearing is much better than ours; low sounds (40 Hz, compared to our 20 Hz) high sounds (60,000 Hz, compared to our 20,000 Hz). Not only will your dog be able to hear sounds that you may not even be aware of, some loud noises that humans can tolerate may actually be painful to your dog!

BARKING & THE LAW!

Persistent barking can be annoying to even the most devoted dog owner, let alone to their neighbours who may not be quite as tolerant.

Whilst dogs are allowed to bark, they are not allowed to bark so that it causes a nuisance. Barking nuisance problems are dealt with by the Environmental Health Department of the relevant local council. If a complaint is made to a Council, they have a duty to investigate it. Each case will be taken on an individual basis but will consider;

- Duration of barking
- The volume of the barking
- The time of day it occurs

If a dog's barking is deemed to be a nuisance this may lead to a Statutory Notice under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 being served upon the owner. This is a legal procedure which gives the owner around 21 days in which to resolve the issue. If the problem hasn't been resolved after that point, the owner can incur financial penalties (maximum £5000 for domestic premises) and, as a last resort, the Act does have a provision whereby it can take away the dog from the owner.