



## Barking

### Why Dogs Bark

Barking is one type of vocal communication that dogs use, and it can mean different things depending on the situation. Here are some reasons why dogs bark:

- **Territorial/Protective:** When a person or an animal comes into an area your dog considers his territory, that often triggers excessive barking. As the threat gets closer, the barking often gets louder. Your dog will look alert and even aggressive during this type of barking.
- **Alarm/Fear:** Some dogs bark at any noise or object that catches their attention or startles them. This can happen anywhere, not just in their home territory.
- **Boredom/Loneliness:** Dogs are pack animals. Dogs left alone for long periods, whether in the house or in the yard, can become bored or sad and often will bark because they are unhappy.
- **Greeting/Play:** Dogs often bark when greeting people or other animals. It's usually a happy bark, accompanied with tail wags and sometimes jumping.
- **Attention Seeking:** Dogs often bark when they want something, such as going outside, playing, or getting a treat.
- **Separation Anxiety/Compulsive Barking:** Dogs with separation anxiety often bark excessively when left alone. They also usually exhibit other symptoms as well, such as pacing, destructiveness, [depression](#), and inappropriate elimination. Compulsive barkers seem to bark just to hear the sound of their voices. They also often make repetitive movements as well, such as running in circles or along a fence.

### How to Treat Excessive Barking

Getting your dog to bark less will take time, work, practice, and consistency. It won't happen overnight, but with proper techniques and time, you can see progress.

Here are a few tips to remember as you start your efforts to control your dog's barking.

- Shouting stimulates your dog to bark more because he thinks you're joining in. So the first rule is to speak calmly and firmly, but don't yell.
- Most dogs don't know what you want when you're yelling at them to "shut up." So train your dog to understand the word "Quiet!"

Here are two methods:

When your dog is barking, say "Quiet" in a calm, firm voice. Wait until he stops barking, even if it's just to take a breath, then praise him and give him a treat. Just be careful to never reward him while he's barking. Eventually he will figure out that if he stops barking at the word "quiet" he gets a treat.

Alternatively, you can teach your dog to "speak"; once he's doing that reliably, signal him to stop barking with a different command, such as "quiet", while holding your finger to your lips (dogs often



pick up body signals faster than voice commands.) Practice these commands when he's calm, and in time he should learn to stop barking at your command, even when he wants to bark at something.

- A tired dog is a quiet dog. If your dog barks when alone, tire him out before you go. Take a long walk or run, play ball or take a trip to the dog park before leaving.
- Don't allow problems to go on and on. The longer a dog does something, the more ingrained it becomes. Barking can give dogs an adrenaline rush, which makes the barking pleasant. And allowing a dog to bark in certain situations, such as when the mailman arrives, can eventually make a dog aggressive in those situations. What if your dog gets out one day as the mail is being delivered? Deal with barking problems as quickly as possible.
- Some medical problems can cause excessive barking, from [bee stings](#) to [brain disease](#) to ongoing pain. Older pets can develop a form of canine senility that causes excessive vocalizations. It's always a good idea to have a pet checked by a veterinarian to be sure there's no medical reason for a problem.

Once you know why your dog is barking, you can start working on ways to decrease his annoying habit. Here are some specific reasons why dogs bark, and how you can help lessen the noise:

- **Territorial/Protective/Alarm/Fear:** Because this type of barking is often motivated by fear or a perceived threat to their territory or people, it can be lessened by limiting what your dog sees. If he's in a fenced yard, use solid wood instead of chain fencing. Indoors, limit access to windows and doors or cover them with an opaque film.
- **Boredom/Loneliness:** If your dog barks excessively while you're gone, you need to provide more activities or companionship to keep him from being lonely or bored.

Bringing an outdoor dog inside will lessen the noise impact on neighbors. It's also safer, because dogs left alone outside can face theft, escapes, poisoning, harassment, and other dangers. But dogs can still bark inside if bored. So if your dog barks while you're at work all day, get someone to walk your dog or play with her for at least an hour a day.

Providing something for your dog to do during the day also can help. Try leaving out a couple of food-dispensing toys, which come in different shapes and sizes. These can keep him busy for several hours, then he'll probably take a nap.

You also can drop your pet off at doggie [daycare](#) two or three days a week, or take up agility, obedience, or another active form of dog training.

- **Greeting/Play:** To stop a dog from going into a barking frenzy every time you come home or the doorbell rings, you'll need to teach him other behaviors. One way is to train your dog to go to a spot and stay there when the door opens. It's best if they can see the door, but not be too close to it. Pick a spot and practice getting your dog to go there and stay, but don't touch the door yet. Use lots of treats and praise, making it a game.



Once your pet is doing this reliably, start opening the door while he's in his spot. Once you can open the door and your dog will stay in his spot, have someone actually come in the door. Of course your dog will break from the spot at first, but with time and practice, he'll learn to stay in his spot when the door opens and guests come in.

Never reward your dog for barking at you when you come home. Do not pet him or even make [eye](#) contact until your dog stops barking and sits quietly. Then acknowledge him and praise him.

- **Attention seeking:** Never reward barking. If your dog barks when he wants water, and you fill the dish, you've taught him to bark to get what he wants. If he barks to go outside, it's the same. So teach him to ring a bell you tied to the door handle to go out. Bang the water dish before filling it, and maybe he'll start pushing it with his nose to make the same noise. Find ways for your dog to communicate without barking.

If he barks and you see his dish is empty, wait a few minutes, go do something else, then fill it, so he won't know his barking was effective.

Remember not to scold your pet. For a dog, that's still considered attention. The key is to ignore your dog and what he wants, until he stops barking.

- **Separation Anxiety/Compulsive Barking:** Separation anxiety and compulsive barking are both difficult to treat and should be handled with the help of a veterinary behaviorist or a certified applied animal behaviorist. Dogs with these problems often need drug therapy to help them cope while learning new, more acceptable behaviors.

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