



## NEW DOG OWNER TRAINING PROGRAM

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# BARKING DOGS

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*This information is intended as a general guide only*

People and dogs are social creatures, and both people and dogs use verbal sounds (language) to communicate. Dogs bark to communicate different things in the same way that people do.

Barking is a natural behaviour for dogs, with certain breeds and individuals being more inclined to bark than others. Most wild dogs and wolves do not bark excessively as this would alert their prey to their position.

Interestingly it is humans that have accentuated barking in dogs through selective breeding. Humans wanted dogs to alert them to intruders and to bark to move stock or scare out game. So you see humans are actually responsible for the barking!

### Why do dogs bark?

Dogs bark for many reasons, just as people speak for many reasons. It could be to communicate to another dog or person, as a display of excitement, warn of an intruder, as a request for something, to gain attention or because he is bored.

You must remember that barking is a "self rewarding" behaviour - the dog feels better when he barks as it either reduces stress and tension or it gets us or another animal's to pay attention.

Understanding why your dog barks and why he finds it rewarding will help in finding solutions. Some of the common reasons dogs bark:

- Territorial/protection
- Boredom
- Attention seeking
- Anxiety/fear
- Playtime enthusiasm



## **Territorial/protection**

If your dog barks when other people or animals come close to the boundaries of your property or barks when visitors arrive, then he is barking to tell others that this is his place and that he will protect it.

Dogs are social creatures and they see their family (both people and other animals) as part of their social group. Part of the responsibility of being a group member is to alert and protect the other members to potential intruders. This protective trait is one of the main reasons people own dogs.

The dog also sees the family home property as being part of the group's territory, and will therefore feel he should defend it.

Barking is a way of warning intruders they are trespassing on the group's territory and to alert other members of the group of an intruder.

Most other animals and people who don't belong will leave the territory when a dog barks at them. This is very rewarding for the barking dog as he has made the intruder retreat and has reduced the built up tension he felt when he detected the intruder.

This is the reason why dogs continue to chase and bark at the postman every day. In the dog's mind the intruder (postman) came near the dog's territory and when he barked the postman "ran away"! Job done, he repelled the noisy interloper.

You must be a good leader of the social group so that the dog does not feel he has the sole responsibility of protecting the group. This means you must be fair, consistent, a good provider and not put any member of the group in danger.

Yelling at the dog is only going to encourage him to bark more, he thinks you are adding your voice to deter the intruder!

## **How to train the dog to stop barking:**

You need to provide something that makes it more rewarding for the dog to stop barking, like a toy or treat.

You need to acknowledge that he has done his job, and then tell him it is okay to stop. To do this you need to go right to where the dog is barking, tell him "good boy to tell me someone was there" then show him the treat or toy to get his attention. Say, "okay" or "enough" or "quiet", when he stops barking, reward him with the toy or food.

Encourage him to come with you back to the house and reward him for coming with you. If you do this consistently you will eventually be able to call the dog back from where ever he is barking.

This same training can be used when visitors arrive. You can ask the dog to "sit" quietly until the visitors have come inside the area. You have to remember that "visitors" are an exciting situation for the dog so you must make sure you reward him well for containing his excitement.

**Remember**, barking is “self rewarding” so you must continue to reward the dog for responding to the “stop barking” word.

If your dog is barking at people or dogs walking past your yard, you might consider restricting the dog’s access to these areas when you are not there to call him away. A barrier where he can’t see the passing distractions is best.

If the dog ignores people walking past reward him even if you haven’t asked him to do anything. You will be rewarding him for being quiet when people are going past, which is the behaviour you want.



## Boredom

Your dog can suffer from boredom if his environment is lacking stimulation. Even a big back yard can just be a very barren prison if the dog spends all day every day in it.

If your dog is an “urban prisoner” he can become quite stressed. He can’t read a book, flick on the television, go visit a friend or go for walk to relieve his stress as people can.

Barking can be an expression of the dog’s dissatisfaction and a relief for his pent-up energy.

### Management ideas for boredom:

- Refer to the “Fun Backyards” handout for enrichment ideas.
- Do some daily positive training with your dog. This can be simple manners or trick training. It doesn’t have to be for long periods, lots of small sessions are best, as like children, dogs don’t have a long attention span. This will stimulate the dog both physically and mentally.
- Take the dog for a walk so he can experience new sights and smells. You can include some short training sessions on the walk and/or play for a while in a safe area. This is best done before you leave the dog for the day as he is more likely to snooze after some physical activity.
- Dogs enjoy physical contact as they are social creatures. Patting, grooming and massaging the dog will help him feel more content.
- Regular access to other friendly dogs and his friends will help.
- Divide his meals between morning and night. This way he will feel more content about you leaving in the morning.
- Leave him things to keep him occupied, large raw bones (never cooked bones) Kongs or chew toys.
- Access to part of the house, via a doggy door, will help him feel more settled. By allowing him access to the house he will see it as part of his territory and be a deterrent to intruders.



## Attention seeking

Being a social creature dogs enjoy company and are not overly content to be left alone a lot. Barking generally gains attention and dogs soon learn that if they bark enough someone will interact with them. Even yelling at him is gaining your attention. Any attention, even negative attention, is better than no attention in the dog's mind because you have interacted with him.

### Management ideas for Attention seeking:

The main issue here is to pay attention to the dog when he is not barking. If we give him attention for being a "good dog" he is less likely to want to gain our attention by prompting us with barking.

If you miss the opportunity and he starts to bark do not pay him any attention. Remember attention barking is different to alert barking and is treated differently. When the dog is quiet then go and interact with him. If you regularly interact with the dog he will have less reason to bark for attention.

If the dog is an outside dog and contained in a pen you need to let him out before he starts to bark. By assuring the dogs social, mental and physical needs are met the likelihood of attention barking will be reduced.



## Anxiety

If your dog follows you everywhere when you are at home, if he complains when shut away from you, then he may be too dependent on you. Letting the dog become too dependent on you can cause him to be anxious when you are away.

This anxiety can lead to barking as a way for the dog to reduce its stress.

Dogs who display severe "separation anxiety" need to be seen by a qualified veterinary behaviour consultant, who will develop a program to assist you and your dog.

### Management ideas to prevent anxiety:

- When you are going to be away from home make sure the dog has plenty of doggy enrichment to keep him occupied.
- Prepare a meal and give him this as you leave. Better still make him up a Kong or food dispenser as this will keep him busy for longer.
- Leave on a TV or radio to give the impression of company.
- Gradually get your dog used to being separated from you for an increasing length of time while you are at home. Put his bed in an area where he can see you moving about and install a child's door barrier to stop him from following you.
- Keep your arrivals and departures very low key - don't make a big fuss at these times.
- Reward the dog, calmly, when his is quiet and relaxed and/or playing with appropriate items.



## Management ideas for playtime enthusiasm:

- The main point here is to reward the dog for calm, quiet behaviour and stop play if he becomes over excited and barks excessively.
- If he doesn't stop put the toys away and try again later.
- Reward him with a treat when he brings toys back to you. Don't try to pull it off him as this encourages him to try to keep it for himself.
- Keep your games to reasonable level of excitement; don't let them escalate to high intensity. Play is about interaction not over excitement.
- Make training part of your play sessions, teach him to drop or give his toys to you. This has to be done with treats as he has no reason to give up his play thing for no reward.
- Train him to settle during play session by teaching "sit" and "down".
- Tug games should be kept to a minimum and children should never be encouraged to play tug with dogs.



## Hunger/Thirst/ Shelter

Many behaviour issues can start if your dog is not given the basic requirements for normal comfortable living conditions. He requires appropriate food, plenty of clean water, appropriate shelter from the heat, cold and extreme weather conditions and needs appropriate social contact.

It is your responsibility as his care giver to make sure he has these things.



If your dog's barking is a problem for your neighbors, it is best to let your neighbors know that you are aware of the problem and that you are working to solve it. If you have a good relationship with your neighbors you may be able to enlist their help by asking them to reward the dog when it is not barking. Make sure your dog is introduced to your neighbors so he is familiar with them and happy to be rewarded by them.

Barking is a frustrating behaviour, however you must understand that there are reasons for dogs to bark. If you are observant and willing to work with the dog you should be able to reduce the instances of unnecessary barking.