



BARKING

What is your dog telling you?

Many dogs like to bark! It's a totally natural thing for them to do and in most cases it doesn't cause any problems. However, sometimes a dog may bark a lot, disturbing neighbours, keeping you awake at night or frightening visitors to your home. You don't want to get into trouble because of your dog's barking – so what can you do?

Firstly find out why he is barking and then do something about it. Your dog could be barking because:

- **He is excited**
- **He is frustrated**
- **He is guarding you and your home**
- **He is bored**
- **He is trying to get your attention**
- **He is scared**
- **He can't cope with being left alone**

If he is excited, he will probably bark when visitors call, when you get his lead to go for a walk and when you make his dinner. He may also jump around and act like a 'hooligan' at the same time.

What can you do?

- Try to give your dog more exercise. Tired dogs don't have the energy to get too over-excited. If your dog doesn't run about enough on his walks then teach him to retrieve and throw a ball or frisbee for him to really get him moving.
- Brush up on his obedience training. Make sure that he can 'sit', 'down', 'stay' or go to his bed when you tell him to. If you don't know how to then visit a good local training class or read our 'Basic Dog Training' factsheet. When he starts to bark, command him to do something else instead and he should become quiet.
- If you can, try to get him used to the things that make him excited by repeatedly exposing him to them over a period of a few days, ignoring his reaction and praising and rewarding him as soon as he quiets down.
- Remember – don't shout at him to stop barking, as he may think that you are excited too and bark even more loudly!

If he is frustrated, he will be barking because he can't get to something that he finds exciting. Perhaps he's seen a cat in his garden, or can hear another dog barking next door. He may also scratch at the door or garden gate, or jump up at the windows to try to get to the thing that is making him bark.

What can you do?

- Find out what is making him bark and then if you can, prevent him from seeing, hearing or even smelling it in the first place. This may mean stopping him from being able to see out of the windows, or putting the radio or television on to drown out offending noises.
- Don't leave your dog alone in the garden, if this is where he does most of his barking. Instead spend time with him playing games – he'll be too busy to bark.
- Try to get him used to sounds that make him bark by putting them onto a cassette and playing them quietly whilst he's calm and relaxed. As he gets used to them you can increase the volume. Tell him he's good and give him a treat if he stays quiet. Turn the tape down again if he starts to make a noise.
- Make sure that he has a toy that he can take his frustration out on and encourage him to play with it at times that he is likely to bark.
- Male dogs that haven't been neutered can smell a bitch in season up to 6 miles away. If this is the problem then talk to your vet about the possibility of castration.

If he is guarding, he will be barking to protect or alert you. He may also wag his tail and appear to be excited. However, if your dog is guarding he should stop barking as soon as the threat has gone – for example, once you have answered the door and he recognises that the visitor is a friend. Your dog may be of a breed that was bred to be a guard dog or encouraged to bark at the doorbell from an early age.

What can you do?

- You will need to teach your dog to sit and be calm when you want to let visitors into your home, so make sure that you brush up on your obedience training.
- It may help to put your dog on his lead and teach him to sit before you open the door to visitors.
- You and your family members should also make him sit before saying 'hello' to him when you come home.
- Put a pot of treats by the door and ask your visitors to get him to sit and be quiet for 30 seconds before giving him the treat. You can increase this over time.
- If this doesn't work then make sure that he is securely shut away before opening the door to your visitors.

If he is bored, he may not bark all of the time, but just when he has nothing to do. He may also be destructive, ripping up newspapers or chewing the furniture – trying to amuse himself. Bored dogs will bark or be destructive when you are in the house as well as when you aren't there.

What can you do?

- Dogs that bark through boredom are often young and active – so it is up to you to make sure that they have enough to do.
- Make sure that he has enough exercise and activities to keep his brain busy.
- Don't leave him alone for long periods of time and try to get someone to walk him for you if you are out at work all day.
- Get your dog a toy that can be stuffed with treats, so that he has to work to get them out, or a large marrowbone to give him something to do if you have to leave him alone. If he's not bored, he won't bark.

If he is trying to get your attention, he will seemingly bark for no reason and then stop as soon as you speak to or look at him. Attention seekers will often bark when you are speaking on the phone, watching television or stopping to talk to another dog owner in the park – in fact any time that they feel they are being ignored!

What can you do?

- You have to ignore all attention seeking by your dog and it should eventually stop. Attention seeking can be barking, nudging at your hand for a stroke or dropping toys into your lap, for example. Ignoring means no talking to him, no looking at him, no touching him and definitely no telling him off.
- His behaviour will probably get worse before it gets better so don't give in.

- Don't ignore him all of the time – just when he is demanding your attention. If he is being good and quiet, then call him over for some fuss.
- Give him attention only when you want to but make sure that it is attention that your dog will really enjoy - lots of fuss, games and training. Give him 100% of your attention at least an hour every day.

If he is scared, he may bark at strange people, dogs or in certain situations. When he barks, his ears may be back and his tail held low and he will stand away from whatever is frightening him. Even small movements or eye contact from whatever is scaring your dog may start him barking, although this should stop when he is ignored.

What can you do?

- Dogs that are scared bark to tell us that they are not happy and this can be a good thing because it gives us a warning. Dogs that are frightened may eventually bite to get the 'scary' thing to go away and so it is important that you don't ignore this warning.
- If your dog is scared of certain things or situations – try to avoid them and speak to a vet, trainer or behaviourist that can help your dog to safely get over his fears.

If he can't cope with being left alone, he'll probably bark as soon as you leave him and keep going for about 20 minutes. He may also be destructive during this time and soil the house.

What can you do?

- You must get your dog used to being on his own – so don't let him follow you from room to room.
- Find a room that he is most happy and relaxed in and then start leaving him alone for only a few minutes at a time. Perhaps start with using a baby gate so that he can see you, but can't get too close. As long as he is being quiet you can slowly build up the time that he is left alone.
- Try to ignore him for around 20 minutes before you leave him and 20 minutes after you return. Turning on the radio or the television, turning the lights off and closing the curtains can help. Feeding or exercising your dog before you leave can encourage him to sleep and relax.
- Placing an unwashed item of your clothing on the floor on the other side of the door may trick your dog into thinking that someone is still in the house with him.

If you need more help to stop your dog's problem barking, please ask your vet to put you in touch with a behaviour specialist – or contact us for further information.

You may also be interested in these other factsheets from Dogs Trust: Basic Dog Training and Dogs Trust Guide to Behaviour Problems

For more information about Dogs Trust, to become a member, sponsor a long-term resident or help us in our campaigns please call 020 7837 0006 or write to:

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