



## Dog Behavior: Barking

Barking is a natural behavior of dogs. Almost all dogs bark, and some bark more than others depending on individual tendencies, learned behavior, and breed type (for example, Shetland Sheepdogs “Shelties” bark as part of their herding behavior, so it is a behavior that people have selectively bred them to achieve). In order to reduce unwanted barking, you must first determine what the dog is getting out of it and what the trigger is (what starts the barking). Here are some common reasons why dogs bark, and how to work with the behavior:

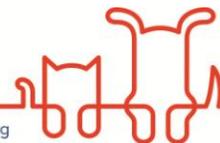
### Fear

A dog may bark due to being fearful of a person, another dog, or other animals/things. In this case, the dog is likely barking to “scare away” the thing he is afraid of. An effective way to approach this behavior is to change the dog’s association with the thing that he is afraid of. For example, introduce him slowly to the person, making sure he is comfortable, and use treats, “jolly talk” (happy, encouraging praise), or toys, so that he learns that when he sees the person, good things happen, and that he not only doesn’t have to be afraid but he can actually look forward to seeing that person again. Punishment is especially not recommended in this case as it could make the dog associate unpleasant things with the person he is already afraid of, and cause him to become more fearful.

### “Watch-dog” Barking

A dog may bark to sound the alarm that a person or other animal is coming near your home or property. Dogs have been valued for this behavior for many centuries, so it is a very natural behavior for a dog to display.

- **Reward for appropriate behavior:** Sit with your dog at the window/door where he usually stations himself to bark. Wait until a person (or other trigger) passes the house, ask your dog to sit and reward him for quietly sitting while the person walks by. Use tiny pieces of a delicious treat so that you can give him multiple treats as the person passes (be generous) and praise in a calm voice. At first it will be helpful to set up training opportunities. For example: have a friend walk past your house multiple times so that your dog can practice the new quiet behavior over and over again, and you can reward him.
- **Time-out:** When the dog is barking and you want him to cease, tell him “that’s enough.” Allow him to bark three more times, then if he doesn’t stop, tell him “too bad” and take him by the collar (or clip a leash on) to a time-out area (a bathroom or laundry room works well). Leave him in there for 30 seconds, then let him out again (unless he’s barking while in time-out; if this is the case, do not let him out until he’s quiet). If he comes out and immediately starts barking again, repeat the procedure but this time the time-out period should be two minutes. At first, since your dog will not know what “that’s enough” means, he will continue to bark and you will need to implement the time out. After you’ve done this numerous times, he should stop barking after he hears you say “that’s enough”—be sure to reward him enthusiastically for this! A few tips: Remain calm as you are taking him to the time-out area, the punishment is the time-out, not a reprimand from you. Do not repeat the “that’s enough” cue. Always follow through once you’ve said “too bad.”
- **When you are not home:** to prevent barking at people, etc, passing your home when you are not home, keep your dog inside and use a crate or a confinement area where your dog can’t see the area.
- **Barking at Visitors to the Home/at the Door:** Often this is excitement rather than protective barking. Either way, teach an alternative behavior. Choose something you’d like your dog to do when someone knocks on the door. For example, go to his bed, go and get a toy, or do a down-stay at a location near the front door. You will first need to teach him to do that particular response on cue in a normal context, not while someone is at the door. When your dog is able to respond to the cue, set up some situations



where someone comes to the door and knocks, and you give the dog the cue to do the trained alternative behavior. Example: knock on door, you cue the dog to lie down and stay on his spot, you reward him. Next step: knock on door, down-stay, walk to door and open it a crack, return to dog and reward. Then: knock on door, down-stay, open door and speak to the person, return to dog and reward. Continue to work on this behavior in steps until the person can come inside and your dog can successfully hold his down-stay until released. It helps if the person is known to the dog at first (a household member, for example) and then you work up to practicing this in “real life.” While you are in the training process, if someone comes to the door and the dog is not ready to hold his down-stay and/or you’re not able to focus on the dog to do training at that time, put your dog in his crate or in another room so that he doesn’t “practice” the unwanted behavior. This approach can also be used as a response to barking at things outside the home.

### **Barking for Attention/“Demand” Barking**

Some dogs learn that barking at a person is the best way to get attention/treats/praise/toys, etc. The most effective way to work on this is to give NO attention whatsoever. Even scolding the dog is attention and may give the dog what he is seeking. If the dog has previously been given attention (or other things that he wants) by barking at you, he is likely to try very hard to get your attention when you ignore him so you must be prepared NOT to give in to the barking. Wait until he is quiet then praise him and give him attention. Try to anticipate the things that he normally would bark at you for and, before he starts barking, ask him to “sit” then give him the attention, toy, invitation to join you on the couch or for a walk, etc. Try to be very aware at what your dog is doing when you give him something he wants or needs. For example, if he is crying when you let him out of his crate, you are rewarding that. Or, if he is jumping up and down in excitement when you put his food dish down, you are rewarding that behavior. Don’t forget to give your dog attention and other things he wants when he is being calm and quiet—the tendency is to ignore the dog then, but it’s important he learns that is the behavior that gets rewards.

### **Boredom/Social Isolation**

If your dog is barking in the yard all day, the best course of action is likely to bring him into the house. If he’s in the yard seeing people and other dogs walk past all day, he’s very likely to bark at them and this is a difficult behavior to change. If he’s bored or lonely in the back yard he may bark all day to relieve the boredom. Dogs are social animals and do best when they have plenty of time with their family. Give your dog toys, plenty of exercise, and mental stimulation (a few minutes of training can tire a dog out in a different way than exercise does). You need to direct how his energy will be spent, if you don’t help him release his energy in appropriate ways, he may resort to barking, digging, or inappropriate chewing in order to expend his pent up energy.

### **Not recommended**

- “debarking” (a surgical procedure)
- shock collars.

