



JSPCA BARKING FACT SHEET

Barking is a normal behaviour. However, barking can become a nuisance. Problems with barking occur when it disturbs neighbours, frightens visitors or is keeping the owner awake at night.

In order to be able to attempt to resolve a barking problem, it is important that the reasons that dogs bark are fully understood.

Punishing the dog can often make the problem worse and should be avoided.

Reasons why dog might bark:

- Excitement
- Frustration
- Guarding
- Boredom

- Attention seeking
- Fear
- Anxiety/over excitement

Excitement

A lot of dogs bark when they are excited. This is often a behaviour that they have learnt to do at some time in their life because they have received praise for barking, for example at exciting moments such as meal times or prior to walks, or even when there are visitors to the house. Barking due to excitement may also be associated with jumping up and whining.

Many dogs that are easily over-excited may not receive enough physical exercise and obedience training can help to teach excitable dogs not to bark.

If you have already given your dog obedience training, decide how you would like your dog to behave during the times when he would normally bark. Then use the obedience commands that you have taught him, such as sit and lay down, to teach him what you want him to do.

Try to ignore all barking behaviour and stay calm. Shouting at the dog or raising your voice is likely to make things worse because the dog will think you are excited too.

Also, it may be helpful to get the dog used to situations that make him excited. For example, if visitors make your dog excited, arrange for friends to visit several times in one day, asking them to ignore your dog completely unless he is calm and quiet. If going for a walk makes him

excited, go through the routine that you would normally do before a walk, such as gathering your coat, keys and dog lead. Then ignore him and put them away again.

Dogs that bark due to excitement can easily revert back to their old ways. Therefore, if you begin to train him, it is important to ensure that the household and all of the visitors follow the same rules.

Frustration

Frustration can result in barking. This often happens when the dog can hear something outside, may be see a cat in the garden or know that something is happening that they would like to be involved in. Barking through frustration can be accompanied by scratching or chewing at windows, doors, gates and fences in an attempt to reach the object of their frustration.

In order to help correct the barking in these situations, it is necessary to determine what is causing the dog to bark. Often it is something that the dog can see or hear and sometimes it is something that they can smell. For example, an un-neutered male dog can smell a female in heat that may be several miles away, which can lead to frustration.

If a dog barks in the garden, may be at cats it sees or other dogs, try not to leave the dog unsupervised in the garden and whilst in the garden, playing games with the dog might help.

If the dog is barking at things he can hear or see from inside the house, try to prevent the dog from having access to windows and doors. The introduction of an indoor kennel may help. If it is noises that the dog can hear that causes the barking, play tape recordings of

these sounds to the dog in an attempt to get the dog used to the noises, so that they do not bother him any more. Initially start playing the sounds at a very low volume, during quiet times and then gradually increase the volume as the dog becomes accustomed to them.

Dogs that are barking through frustration are often quite active and intelligent and require a lot of physical and mental exercise. Whilst out walking with the dog, try to incorporate games and training, in addition to lots of physical exercise. It may also help to give the dog a toy which he can take his frustration out on, so when you believe the dog is likely to become frustrated, encourage him to play with his toy.

Guarding

Dogs can bark to protect or alert their household. Guarding dogs may wag their tail, but not in an excited fashion and they tend to be very alert and forward in their behaviour. Guarding dogs bark for similar reasons to dogs barking through excitement. For example, a dog that is guarding will stop barking as soon as the threat to the property has ended; if the owner answers the door and shows the dog that the person is welcome, the dog will stop barking.

Some dogs have been bred to be good guard dogs. These dogs probably started barking at a young age and they were often encouraged to do this. Other dogs guard the house because they are uncertain about who is in charge of allowing visitors into the house. In both cases, the dog needs to learn that it is up to you to decide who can go in and out of the house.

In situations like these, the owners must become very

good 'pack' leaders. Obedience training will help, especially teaching him to come when called and to walk without pulling on the lead. Other behaviour traits need to be reinforced, such as not allowing the dog up on furniture without invitation, ignoring the dog if he ever demands attention. Teaching the dog to sit whenever household members come home and want to say hello may also help, as well as teaching the dog to sit when visitors arrive.

Teaching the dog to pick up a toy and sit quietly, a behaviour which the dog is then acknowledged and rewarded for, can help reduce barking that occurs during greetings.

Boredom

Some dogs, if they are bored and full of energy, will bark. Often these dogs are also destructive. Bored dogs may not bark all the time; they may bark for a while and will stop if they find something else to keep them occupied

Dogs that bark through boredom are usually young and active and hence need plenty of mental and physical exercise. Try to ensure that the dog receives sufficient exercise through walks, as well as through play and training.

Leaving the dog with an interesting toy when you go out may help with boredom. For example, leave a food-stuffed 'Kong' toy for the dog to play with, or hiding treats around the house so that the dog has to search for them can help to alleviate boredom.

Attention seeking

Some dogs bark because they have learned that it is a good way of receiving attention. This may begin if they are told off for barking when they were a puppy. These dogs often bark in short bursts and then wait to see if anyone is coming. They always stop barking as soon as someone gives them attention. Attention seeking dogs will often bark when their owners are watching television, on the phone, talking to friends or at any other time when they feel that they are being ignored.

Some dogs bark whilst their owners are out to get attention and others will bark at their owners when they are being ignored. The dog believes that he will get what he wants when he barks. Often, shouting at the dog is perceived by the dog as getting attention, so that the dog will bark even more if he thinks that you may shout at him.

Such behaviour may stop if it is ignored, which could be achieved by the owner looking away. However, this may result in a temporary burst of increased barking, but it should subside over the course of a few days and soon the attention-seeking barking should cease.

However, it can be very difficult to ignore a dog that is barking for attention. An alternative is to teach the dog some basic obedience, such as 'sit' and ask the dog to sit before any attention is given.

Dogs need good quality attention, so it is important that the dog receives training and the opportunity to play in controlled games when you have time to give him your undivided attention. Try to set aside at least one to two hours daily for games and training.

Fear

Dogs may bark if they are frightened of people, other animals or certain situations. These dogs bark, but will stand away from whatever is frightening them, with their ears back and their tails held low. Even small movements or eye contact sometimes can trigger barking. If ignored, these dogs often stop barking.

Frightened dogs bark as a warning that they are not happy. Fearful dogs may bite, so it is important to understand the severity of the situation.

Anxiety/over attachment

Some dogs bark because they cannot cope with being left alone. These dogs sometimes soil the house and can be quite destructive. These dogs will often start barking soon after being left and seem very over excited when their owners return. They may follow their owners from room to room.

Anxious dogs bark to help themselves cope with the stress. However, it is important to get these dogs used to being left on their own. Identify a room in which the dog feels relaxed and happy. Then start to leave the dog in this room for only a couple of minutes at a time. Gradually build up the length of time that the dog is left for so that the dog gets used to the idea of being left alone. Try to ignore the dog for at least twenty minutes before putting him in the room and for twenty minutes after you return. Stop the dog from following members of the family from room to room. Making sure the dog is well exercised, turning the lights off and putting on some relaxing music can help.

If you need further help or advice, ask your veterinary surgery for a referral to a behaviour specialist.

References and further reading:

Dogs Trust Barking Fact Sheet - www.dogstrust.org.uk

BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Behavioural
Medicine