

7 Reasons Why Dogs Bark and How to Make Them Stop

If your dog barks too much, chances are he doesn't know that silence is golden. This brilliantly simple approach rewards silence, but doesn't come naturally to everyone. Here's how to master it.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Barking is a very natural form of communication for dogs, but some do it to annoying excess
- Dogs bark for different reasons, and understanding what triggers the behavior can provide insights into what, if anything, you should do about it
- Some reasons for excessive barking resolve with appropriate environmental or lifestyle adjustments, while others benefit from positive reinforcement behavior training
- In under-exercised dogs who don't receive adequate physical or mental stimulation on a daily basis, excessive barking can be a way to alleviate boredom
- Rather than trying to prevent your dog's barking, focus instead on rewarding his silence

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Dogs bark — it's an entirely natural form of canine communication. Some dogs do it much more than others, and it seems to be an especially popular activity with the small set. Breeds famous (or infamous) for barking excessively include many types of terriers, the Chihuahua, Toy and Miniature Poodles, and the Pekingese. In addition, some working breeds tend to be very vocal, along with high energy or hyper dogs, as well as those with anxiety issues.

Different Barks for Different Occasions

- **Hello! Good to see you!** — If your dog shows excitement when he encounters other people or dogs, his body is relaxed and he's wagging his tail, the barking he does at those times is his way of being neighborly.
- **What was that? Did you hear that?** — If your dog barks at what seems like everything — every movement or noise he's not expecting — he's distress barking. His body is probably held stiffly during this activity and he may jump forward a bit with each bark.
- **Hey! Stop right there!** — Your pup considers your home, yard, car, his walk route and other places he spends a lot of time, his territory. If your dog barks continuously when a person or another animal approaches his domain, he's communicating that a stranger is invading his turf.
- **Look at me! Look at me!** — Some dogs bark simply for attention — from you or another animal. Your dog might also bark in the hopes of getting food, a treat or some playtime. The more you reward the behavior by giving him what seeks, the more likely he'll be to continue to bark for attention.

- **Hello all you other barking dogs out there!** — If your dog answers when he hears other dogs barking, it's a social thing. He hears the barking of nearby dogs, or even dogs at some distance, and he responds in kind. This type of social barking is often heard at animal shelters and boarding facilities.
- **Help! I can't stop this annoying barking!** — If your dog barks continually, perhaps while performing a repetitive movement like running back and forth along the fence in your yard, he's demonstrating a bit of a compulsion. You might want to try to find a better outlet for his energy — like a rigorous walk or a long game of fetch. A tired dog is a quiet dog.
- **Let me OUT of here!** — If your dog is behind your fence and another dog passes by within view, your pup might bark excessively to signal his frustration that he can't greet his buddy out there on the sidewalk. This type of barking is usually seen in dogs who are confined or tied up to restrict their movement.

As you can see, there are some types of barks that require your attention in the form of environment or lifestyle changes that help soothe your dog and reduce or eliminate his need to bark. And then there are the barks that serve no real purpose and require an intervention.

In under-exercised dogs who don't receive adequate physical or mental stimulation on a daily basis, excessive barking can be a way to alleviate boredom. Dogs with separation anxiety also often bark nonstop or howl when they're left alone.

Teaching Your Dog That Silence Is Golden

Since barking is a natural behavior and means of communication for dogs, it's counterproductive to try to prevent it. Instead, your goal with a dog who barks excessively is to teach her to stop barking on command.

This training will be easier if you're starting with a puppy, but it can also be done with an adult dog. With a puppy, you'll need to train yourself first to ignore his cute little yips and squeaks so as not to reinforce the behavior. Keep reminding yourself those adorable puppy barks will grow louder and more annoying the older she gets.

“You don't punish barking, you reward silence,” says Dr. Nicholas Dodman, founder of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine.¹ It's a brilliantly simple approach, but it doesn't come naturally to everyone.

“There are many benign ways of training a dog not to bark,” writes Dodman. “Most of them involve utilizing a voice command, such as No bark! Some of them simply entail patience, where you wait until the dog eventually does stop barking and then you reward it with some highly sought after treat ...”

If you're consistent in your response to your dog's barking, she'll start to reduce the length of time she barks. You may be able to speed up the process a bit by immediately following your verbal command to stop barking with words that indicate a treat is part of the bargain in exchange for her silence. When she starts barking, you say “No bark,” followed immediately by “Want a treat?”

Gradually reduce the number of treats she receives until you're rewarding her with food only once in a while, and be sure to use only tiny pieces of healthy treats. (However, remember to always reward her with verbal praise and petting when she does what you ask her to do.)

Dodman also points out that some dogs may require negative reinforcement (which is not the same as punishment) through the use of a head halter with a training lead. When the dog barks, tension is applied to the training lead to remind him he’s performing an undesirable behavior. The reward for his silence is release of tension on the lead.

“Most owners make the mistake of feeling that they have to chastise or otherwise punish their pup for barking but the commotion and anguish that this causes does little to improve the situation,” writes Dodman. “In fact, in yelling at a dog that is barking may seem to it as if you’re barking, too.”

3 More Tips to Curb Excessive Barking

1. If loud noises set your dog off, a crate of his own that he can go in and out of at will, coupled with soothing music or a television on in the background can help. Tips and tricks for crate training your dog (including fearful dogs).
2. If he’s barking out of boredom, increase his exercise and playtime, take him on walks, to the dog park, or find other activities that give him both the physical activity and mental stimulation all dogs require to be well-balanced. The best way to create a quiet dog is to exhaust him with exercise.
3. Changes in your dog’s routine and environment can cause stress, so as much as possible, stick to a consistent daily schedule he can depend on. You might also consider talking with an **animal behavior specialist** about desensitization and counter conditioning exercises for a stressed-out pet. Lifelong socialization and positive training are also essential for your dog’s mental and emotional well-being.

Sources and References

[PetMD, January 24, 2024](#)
¹ [PetPlace, Dog Behavior Problems](#)
