



Howling is one of many forms of vocal communication used by dogs. Dogs howl to attract attention, to make contact with others and to announce their presence. Some dogs also howl in response to high-pitched sounds, such as emergency vehicle sirens or musical instruments. Read on to learn what to do if your dog howls excessively.

## PROBLEMS TO RULE OUT FIRST

### Separation Anxiety Howling

If your neighbors call you and tell you that your dog is howling when you are at work, your dog's excessive howling might be caused by separation anxiety. Separation anxiety howling only occurs when a dog is left alone or otherwise separated from his owner. This kind of howling is usually accompanied by at least one other symptom of separation anxiety, such as pacing, destruction, elimination, depression or other signs of distress. For more information about this problem, please see the article on [Separation Anxiety](#).

### Medical Causes

Dogs sometimes howl when they're hurt or sick. If your dog starts howling or howls more than usual, take him to a veterinarian to rule out illness and injury before doing anything else.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT EXCESSIVE HOWLING

### Howling in Response to Sounds

If your dog howls in response to some kind of trigger, like another dog howling or a nearby siren, he'll probably stop when the sound stops. This type of howling usually isn't excessive—unless, of course, the triggers occur frequently. If they do, you can use desensitization and counterconditioning (DSCC) to help your dog learn to be quiet.

### Systematic Desensitization and Counterconditioning

When the problem is rooted in how a dog feels about a particular thing, it sometimes isn't enough to just teach him a different behavior—like to fetch a toy instead of howling, for example. Instead, it's most effective to change his motivation and feelings, which are the underlying reasons for the behavior problem in the first place.

Systematic desensitization and counterconditioning are two common treatments for fears, anxiety, phobias and aggression—basically any behavior problem that involves arousal or emotions. It's often most effective to use these two procedures together when trying to resolve animal behavior problems.