

Barking



Barking is one of many forms of vocal communication for dogs. People are often pleased that their dog barks, because it alerts them to the approach of people to their home or it tells them there's something that the dog wants or needs. However, sometimes a dog's barking can be excessive. Because barking serves a variety of functions, you must identify its cause and your dog's motivation for barking before you can treat a barking problem.

Each type of barking serves a distinct function for a dog, and if he's repeatedly rewarded for his barking—in other words, if it gets him what he wants—he can learn to use barking to his benefit. For example, dogs who successfully bark for attention often go on to bark for other things, like food, play and walks. For this reason, it's important to train your dog to be quiet on cue so that you can stop his attention-related barking and teach him to do another behavior instead—like sit or down—to get what he wants.

Many owners can identify why their dog is barking just by hearing the specific bark. For instance, a dog's bark sounds different when he wants to play as compared to when he wants to come in from the yard. If you want to reduce your dog's barking, it's crucial to determine why he's barking. It will take some time to teach your dog to bark less. Unfortunately, it's just not realistic to expect a quick fix or to expect that your dog will stop barking altogether. (Would you expect a person to suddenly stop talking altogether?) Your goal should be to decrease, rather than eliminate, the amount of barking. Bear in mind that some dogs are more prone to barking than others. In addition, some breeds are known as "barkers," and it can be harder to decrease barking in individuals of these breeds.

WHY DOGS BARK

Territorial Barking

Dogs can bark excessively in response to people, dogs or other animals within or approaching their territories. Your dog's territory includes the area surrounding his home and, eventually, anywhere he has explored or associates strongly with you: your car, the route you take during walks and other places where he spends a lot of time.

Alarm Barking

If your dog barks at any and every noise and sight regardless of the context, he's probably alarm barking. Dogs engaged in alarm barking usually have stiffer body language than dogs barking to greet, and they often move or pounce forward an inch or two with each bark. Alarm barking is different than territorial barking in that a dog might alarm bark at sights or sounds in any location at all, not just when he's defending familiar areas, such as your house, yard or car.

Attention-Seeking Barking

Some dogs bark at people or other animals to gain attention or rewards, like food, toys or play.

Greeting Barking

Your dog might be barking in greeting if he barks when he sees people or other dogs and his body is relaxed, he's excited and his tail is wagging. Dogs who bark when greeting people or other animals might also whine.

Compulsive Barking

Some dogs bark excessively in a repetitive way, like a broken record. These dogs often move repetitively as well. For example, a dog who's compulsively barking might run back and forth along the fence in his yard or pace in his home.

Socially Facilitated Barking

Some dogs bark excessively only when they hear other dogs barking. This kind of barking occurs in the social context of hearing other dogs, even at a distance—such as dogs in the neighborhood.

Frustration-Induced Barking

Some dogs bark excessively only when they're placed in a frustrating situation, like when they can't access playmates or when they're confined or tied up so that their movement is restricted.

OTHER PROBLEMS THAT CAN CAUSE BARKING

Illness or Injury

Dogs sometimes bark in response to pain or a painful condition. Before attempting to resolve your dog's barking problem, please have your dog examined by a veterinarian to rule out medical causes.

Separation-Anxiety Barking

Excessive barking due to separation anxiety occurs only when a dog's caretaker is gone or when the dog is left alone. You'll usually see at least one other separation anxiety symptom as well, like pacing, destruction, elimination, depression or other signs of distress. For more information about this problem, please see the article, [Separation Anxiety](#).

What to Do About Your Dog's Excessive Barking

The first step toward reducing your dog's barking is to determine the type of bark your dog is expressing. The following questions can help you to accurately decide on which type of barking your dog is doing so that you can best address your dog's problem. Think about your answers to these questions as you read through the information below on the different types of barking and their treatments.

1. When and where does the barking occur?
2. Who or what is the target of the barking?
3. What things (objects, sounds, animals or people) trigger the barking?
4. Why is your dog barking?

If It's Territorial Barking or Alarm Barking

Territorial behavior is often motivated by both fear and anticipation of a perceived threat. Because defending territory is such a high priority to them, many dogs are highly motivated to bark when they detect the approach of unknown people or animals near familiar places, like their homes and yards. This high level of motivation means that when barking territorially, your dog might ignore unpleasant or punishing responses from you, such as scolding or yelling. Even if the barking itself is suppressed by punishment, your dog's motivation to guard his territory will remain strong, and he might attempt to control his territory in another way, such as biting without warning.

Dogs engage in territorial barking to alert others to the presence of visitors or to scare off intruders or both. A dog might bark when he sees or hears people coming to the door, the mail carrier delivering the mail and the maintenance person reading the gas meter. He might also react to the sights and sounds of people and dogs passing by your house or apartment. Some dogs get especially riled up when they're in the car and see people or dogs pass by. You should be able to judge from your dog's body posture and behavior whether he's barking to say "Welcome, come on in!" or "Hey, you'd better hit the road. You're not welcome at my place!" If you're dealing with a dog in the first category, follow the treatment outlined in this article for greeting barking (below). If you're dealing with a dog in the latter category who isn't friendly to people, you'll be more successful if you limit your dog's ability to see or hear passersby and teach him to associate the presence of strangers with good things, such as food and attention.

For treatment of territorial barking, your dog's motivation should be reduced as well as his opportunities to defend his territory. To manage your dog's behavior, you'll need to block his ability to see people and animals. Removable plastic film or spray-based glass coatings can help to obscure your dog's view of areas that he observes and guards from within your house. Use secure, opaque fencing to surround outside areas your dog has access to. Don't allow your dog to greet people at the front door, at your front yard gate or at your property boundary line. Instead, train him to go to an alternate location, like a crate or a mat, and remain quiet until he's invited to greet appropriately.

Alarm barking is very similar to territorial barking in that it's triggered by sights and sounds. However, dogs who alarm bark might do so in response to things that startle or upset them when they're not on familiar turf. For example, a dog who barks territorially in response to the sight of strangers approaching will usually only do so when in his own home, yard or car. By contrast, a dog who habitually alarm barks might vocalize when he sees or hears strangers approaching in other places, too. Although territorial barking and alarm barking are a little different, the recommendations below apply to both problems.

“Quiet” Training

If your dog continues to alarm bark or bark territorially, despite your efforts to block his exposure to sights and sounds that might trigger his barking, try the following techniques:

- When your dog barks, approach him, calmly say “Quiet,” and then prompt his silence by feeding him a steady stream of tiny, pea-sized treats, such as chicken, hot dogs or bits of cheese. After enough repetitions of this sequence, over several days or more of training, your dog will begin to understand what “Quiet” means. You’ll know that he’s catching on if he consistently stops barking as soon as he hears you say “Quiet.” At this point, you can gradually extend the time between the cue, “Quiet,” and your dog’s reward. For example, say “Quiet,” wait 2 seconds, and then feed your dog several small treats in a row. Over many repetitions, gradually increase the time from 2 seconds to 5, then 10, then 20, and so on. If this procedure doesn’t work after 20 attempts, please contact New Dawn Animal Behavior Center: 727-415-1567 or www.newdawnabc.com/contact/
- If your dog barks at people or other dogs during walks, distract him with special treats, like chicken, cheese or hot dogs, before he begins to bark. (Soft, very tasty treats work best.) Show your dog the treats by holding them in front of his nose, and encourage him to nibble at them while he’s walking past a person or dog who would normally cause him to bark. Some dogs do best if you ask them to sit as people or dogs pass. Other dogs prefer to keep moving. Make sure you praise and reward your dog with treats anytime he chooses not to bark.
- If your dog most often barks territorially in your yard, keep him in the house during the day and supervise him when he’s in the yard so that he can’t just bark his head off when no one’s around. If he’s sometimes able to engage in excessive alarm barking (when you’re not around, for example), that behavior will get stronger and harder to reduce.
- If your dog most often barks territorially in your car, teach him to ride in a crate while in the car. Riding in a crate will restrict your dog’s view and reduce his motivation to bark. If crating your dog in your car isn’t feasible, try having your dog wear a head halter in the car instead. (Important note: For safety reasons, only let your dog wear the halter when you can supervise him.)

“GO TO YOUR SPOT” TRAINING

It also helps to teach your dog a specific set of behaviors to do when people come into your home so that he has fewer opportunities to alarm bark. Plus, when your dog performs his new behaviors and receives rewards, he’ll learn that people coming into his and your space is a good thing.

1. Before you can train your dog to go to a spot and stay there when a door opens, you’ll need to teach him how to sit or lie down and then how to stay. After your dog has learned these skills, you can progress to Step 2.
2. Identify a place in your home where you’d like your dog to go when people come to the door. If possible, choose a place that’s at least eight feet away from the front door but still within sight. It might be a spot at the top of a set of stairs, inside the doorway of an adjacent room, your dog’s crate, or a rug positioned at the far corner of an entryway or foyer.
3. Say “Go to your spot,” show your dog a treat, and then throw the treat onto the spot where you’d like your dog to go. Repeat this sequence 10 to 20 times. By the tenth time, try pretending to throw the treat so that your dog begins to move toward the spot on his own. As soon as he’s standing on his spot or rug, throw him the treat. As your dog catches on, you can stop making the fake throwing motion with your arm and just give him the cue, “Go to your spot.” Then wait until he does and reward him.
4. Once your dog is reliably going to his spot, vary where you are when you send him there. Practice asking him to go to his spot from many different angles and distances. For example, say “Go to your spot” when you’re standing a few steps to the left of it. After a few repetitions, move a few steps to the right of the spot and say, “Go to your spot” from that position. Then move to another area in the room, then another, etc. Eventually, practice standing by the front door and asking your dog to go to his spot, just as you might when visitors arrive.
5. When your dog masters going to his spot, start asking him to sit or down when he gets there. As soon as your dog’s rear end hits the floor on the spot, say “Yes!” and reward him with a tasty treat. Then say “Okay,” and allow him to move off the spot. Repeat these steps at least 10 times per training session.
6. Now add stay into your exercise. Stand next to your dog’s spot. Ask him to sit or lie down, say “Stay” and wait one second. Then say “Yes!” or “Good!” and give him a treat. After you deliver the treat, say “Okay” to release your dog from the stay and encourage him to get off the spot. Repeat this sequence at least 10 times per training session. Progressively increase from one second to several seconds, but vary the time so that sometimes you make the exercise easy (a shorter stay) and sometimes you make it hard (a longer stay). If your dog starts to get up before you say “Okay,” say “Uh-uh!” or “Oops!” and immediately ask him to sit or lie down on his spot again. Then make the exercise a little easier the next few times by asking your dog to hold the stay for a shorter time. Avoid pushing your dog to progress too fast or testing him to see how long he can hold the stay before getting up. This sets your dog up to fail. You want him to be successful at least 8 out of 10 times in a row.

7. When your dog can consistently stay on his spot for at least 30 seconds, with you standing in front of him, you can start moving toward the door. Say the cue “Go to your spot,” walk with your dog to his spot, ask him to sit or lie down and ask him to stay. At first, just turn your head away from your dog. Then turn back to give him a treat and release him from the stay. After a few repetitions, make things a little harder. After your dog is sitting or lying down on his spot, ask him to stay and then take one step toward the door. Return immediately, give your dog a treat and then release him from the stay with your release word or phrase. Gradually increase the number of steps that you take away from your dog and toward the door. Eventually you’ll be able to walk all the way to the door and back while your dog stays sitting or lying down on his spot. (Don’t forget to keep rewarding him for staying!) If your dog stands up or leaves his spot before you release him from the stay, say “Oops!” the moment he gets up. Then immediately tell him to sit or lie down on his spot again and stay. Wait a few seconds and then release him. You may have progressed too fast. Next time, make the exercise a little easier so your dog can succeed. Ask him to stay for a shorter period of time and don’t move as far away from him. When he’s successful at an easier level, you can gradually make the exercise harder again. Never end your dog’s stay from a distance. Instead, always return to him, say “Yes,” give him a treat, and then say “Okay” to release him.
8. When your dog can consistently stay in a sit or a down on his spot for 30 seconds, while you turn away and walk to your front door, you can start to introduce some distractions. Tell your dog to stay, and then do something distracting. At first make your distractions mild. For example, start by bending down or doing a single jumping jack. Over many sessions of training, gradually intensify your distractions to things like running a few steps or tossing a treat on the floor. Reward your dog quickly after each distraction for holding the stay. If he breaks the stay, quickly say “Uh-uh,” ask him to sit or lie down on his spot, and try again. When your dog can stay while you do all sorts of distracting things, ask him to stay while you go to the front door of your home and pretend to greet someone there. Your goal is for him to learn to stay the entire time you’re at the door.
9. The next step in “Go to Your Spot” training is to recruit friends and family to help you conduct mock practice visits. Arrange to have someone come to the door. You will work with your dog to help him stay on his own. Be prepared! This will probably take a long time the first few visits. When you open the door, one of two things can happen. Sometimes you leave your dog there on his spot while you talk to the person at the door, as if your visitor is a courier or delivery person. Your dog never gets to say hello. (However, you, the person or both of you should frequently toss treats to your dog to reward him for staying.) At other times, invite the visitor in. Wait until the person sits down somewhere, and then release your dog to join you and your guest. When you have a friend help you with a mock visit, be sure to repeat the scenario over and over, at least 10 to 20 times. Practice makes perfect! Have the person come in for 5 to 10 minutes or just pretend to deliver something, then leave for 5 to 10 minutes, then return for a second visit, and so on. Your dog should experience at least 10 visits in a row with the same person. With each repetition, it will become easier for him to do what you expect because he’ll be less excited by the whole routine—especially when it’s the same person at the door, over and over again.
10. Continue to recruit people to help you practice “Go to Your Spot” exercises until your dog reliably goes to his spot and stays there until you release him by saying “Okay.” At this point, your dog should be able to perform his new “Go to Your Spot” skill perfectly about 90 percent of the time during training sessions. The hardest part for your dog will be going to his spot and staying there in real-life situations, when he hasn’t been able to do a few warm-up repetitions. To prepare your dog for times when real visitors arrive, ask friends who already know your dog well to drop by randomly when you’ll be home. Then ask friends who don’t know your dog well to drop by. With plenty of practice, your dog will be able to go to his spot and stay there, even when neither of you knows who’s at the door!
11. Eventually, when real visitors come to your home, you can ask your dog to go to his spot as soon as they knock or ring the doorbell. After letting your guests in, ask them to sit down. Wait about one minute before releasing your dog from his spot to greet them. Put your dog on a leash if you think he might jump on your guests or behave aggressively. After a minute or two of allowing your dog to greet people, ask him to lie down at your feet and stay. Give him something to keep him busy, such as a rawhide or a puzzle toy stuffed with something really tasty, like low-fat cream cheese, spray cheese or low-fat peanut butter, frozen banana and cottage cheese, or canned dog food and kibble. After your dog finishes with the rawhide or the KONG, he’ll probably go to sleep. If you repeat the ritual above for a while, your dog should learn to settle down calmly when guests visit your home.

If you need help teaching your dog these skills, don’t hesitate to enlist the help of our Certified Professional Dog Trainers at New Dawn Animal Behavior Center: 727-415-1567 or www.newdawnabc.com/contact/

Greeting Barking

If your dog barks at people coming to the door, at people or dogs walking by your property, at people or dogs he sees on walks, and at people or dogs he sees through the fence, and his barking is accompanied by whining, tail wagging and other signs of friendliness, your dog is probably barking to say hello. He most likely barks the same way when family members come home.

- Keep greetings low key. Teach your dog to sit and stay when meeting people at the door so that he has something to do instead of barking. This will reduce his excitement level. First teach him to sit and stay when there aren’t any people at the door so that he knows the behavior well before you ask him to do it with the distraction and excitement of real visitors arriving.
- If your dog likes toys, keep a favorite toy near the front door and encourage him to pick up the toy before he greets you or guests. If he learns to hold a toy in his mouth, he’ll be less inclined to bark. (He’ll probably still whine, however).

- On walks, teach your dog that he can walk calmly past people and dogs without meeting them. To do this, distract your dog with special treats, like chicken, cheese or hot dogs, before he begins to bark (soft, very tasty treats work best). Show your dog the treats by holding them in front of his nose, and encourage him to nibble at them while he's walking past a person or dog who would normally cause him to bark. Some dogs do best if you ask them to sit as people or dogs pass. Other dogs prefer to keep moving. Make sure you praise and reward your dog with treats anytime he chooses not to bark.
- It may help to have your dog wear a head halter at times when he's likely to bark (for example, on walks or in your house). A halter can have a distracting or calming effect and make your dog less likely to bark. Make sure you reward him for not barking. (Important note: For safety reasons, only let your dog wear the halter when you can supervise him.)

Attention-Seeking Barking

One reason that it's so easy to live with dogs is that they're very expressive. They find a way to let us know their needs. They often do this by barking or whining. Indeed, we find it desirable when they bark to ask to go outside to eliminate or to request that their water bowl be filled. It's less attractive, however, when your dog barks to demand anything and everything, needed or not! This pattern of barking does not happen by accident. A demanding, noisy dog has been taught to be this way, usually not on purpose! To get your dog to stop, you'll need to consistently not reward him for barking. Don't try to figure out exactly why he's barking. Ignore him instead. Treatment for this kind of barking can be tough because, most of the time, pet parents unwittingly reinforce the behavior—sometimes just with eye contact, touching, scolding or talking to their dogs. To dogs, all of these human behaviors can count as rewarding attention. Try to use crystal-clear body language to tell your dog that his attention-seeking barking is going to fail. For example, when your dog starts to bark for attention, you can stare at the ceiling, turn away from your dog or walk out of the room. The instant your dog stops barking, ask him to sit and then give him what he wants, whether that's attention, play, treats, to go outside or to come in.

To be successful, try your best to NEVER reward your dog for barking at you again! In some cases, it's easiest to teach your dog an alternative behavior. For instance, if you don't want your dog to bark when he needs to go out or come in, get a doggy door installed or teach him to ring a bell hanging on a door by touching it with his nose or paw. If your dog barks to get you to play with him, teach him to bring a toy and sit in front of you. Sometimes, it's easier to avoid problems by eliminating the things that cause your dog to bark. If your dog barks to ask you to retrieve his toys from under the sofa, block the space so that the toys don't get stuck beyond his reach. If your dog barks at you when you're talking on the telephone or working on the computer, give him a tasty chew bone to occupy him before he starts to bark.

You can also teach your dog to be silent on command. This will help strengthen the association between quiet behavior and attention or rewards. Your dog should always be quiet before receiving attention, play or treats. By giving your dog a guaranteed method of getting attention, he's no longer forced to bark for attention. Regularly seek your dog out to give him attention—sweet praise, petting and an occasional treat—when he's not barking.

Compulsive Barking

Dogs occasionally become compulsive barkers, meaning they bark in situations that aren't considered normal or they bark in a repetitive, fixed or rigid way. If your dog barks repeatedly for long periods of time, apparently at nothing or at things that wouldn't bother other dogs, such as shadows, light flashes, mirrors, open doors, the sky, etc., you may have a compulsive barker. If your dog also does other repetitive behaviors like spinning, circling or jumping while barking, he may be a compulsive barker. To help reduce compulsive barking, you can try changing how you confine your dog. For instance, if your dog is tied or tethered, you can switch to keeping him loose in a safe fenced area, or if he's left alone for long periods of time, you should increase exercise, mental stimulation and social contact.

If you need help teaching your dog these skills, don't hesitate to enlist the help of our Certified Professional Dog Trainers at New Dawn Animal Behavior Center: 727-415-1567 or www.newdawnabc.com/contact/

Socially Facilitated Barking

Dogs are social animals, so it's natural for them to bark when they hear others barking. You can discourage this tendency by keeping your dog indoors when other dogs are barking, by playing music to drown out the sound of other dogs, and by distracting your dog with treats or play when other dogs bark (whether it's in real life or on TV).

Excitement or Frustration Barking

Dogs often bark when they find themselves excited but thwarted, or frustrated, from getting to something they want. For example, a frustrated dog might bark in his yard because he wants to get out and play with children he hears in the street. A frustrated dog might bark and run the fence line with the dog next door, or bark by the patio door while watching a cat or squirrel frolicking in his yard. Some dogs bark at other dogs on walks because they want to greet and play, or they bark at their caretakers to get them to move faster when preparing to go for walks. The most effective means for discouraging excitement or frustration barking is to teach a frustrated dog to control his impulses through obedience training. You can teach your dog to wait, sit and stay before gaining access to fun activities like walks, playing with other dogs or chasing squirrels. This can be a daunting task, so you may need the assistance of a Certified Professional Dog Trainer to help you.

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You can also discourage the presence of cats and other animals in your yard by using motion-activated devices to startle intruders.

Anti-Bark Collars

A variety of devices are designed to teach dogs to curtail barking. Most often, these are collars that deliver an unpleasant stimulus when your dog barks. The stimulus might be a loud noise, an ultrasonic noise, a spray of citronella mist or a brief electric shock. The collars that deliver noise are ineffective with most dogs. One study found that the citronella collar was at least as effective for eliminating barking as the electronic collar and was viewed more positively by owners. Virtually all dogs become “collar-wise,” meaning that they learn not to bark while wearing their anti-bark collars but revert to barking when they’re not wearing them. Collars that work on a microphone system to pick up the sound of a dog’s bark should not be used in a multidog home because any dog’s bark can activate the collar.

Anti-bark collars are punishment devices and are not recommended as a first choice for dealing with a barking problem. This is especially true for barking that’s motivated by fear, anxiety or compulsion. Before using an anti-bark collar, please contact New Dawn Animal Behavior Center: 727-415-1567 or www.newdawnabc.com/contact/

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not encourage your dog to bark at sounds, such as pedestrians or dogs passing by your home, birds outside the window, children playing in the street and car doors slamming, by saying “Who’s there?” or getting up and looking out the windows.
- Do not punish your dog for barking at certain sounds, like car doors slamming and kids playing in the street, but then encourage him to bark at other sounds, like people at the door. You must be consistent!
- Unless a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist or veterinary behaviorist advises you to do otherwise, never use punishment procedures if your dog is barking out of fear or anxiety. This could make him feel worse and, as a result, his barking might increase.
- Never use a muzzle to keep your dog quiet for long periods of time or when you’re not actively supervising him. Dogs can’t eat, drink or pant to cool themselves while wearing muzzles, so making your dog wear one for long periods of time would be inhumane.
- Never tie your dog’s muzzle closed with rope, cord, rubber bands or anything else. Doing this is dangerous, painful and inhumane.

Source: www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care/common-dog-behavior-issues/barking