

EXCESSIVE BARKING

Work on the Cause Before Tackling the Solution

Dogs generally become excessive barkers because they were not properly taught as pups what is acceptable barking and what is not. The problem can begin when an unwary owner tries to teach a puppy to be a watchdog by saying, "What is it?" in an alarmed voice, thus encouraging the pup to bark and rewarding it when it does. By the time the dog is two years old, chances are it will be a nuisance barker. Don't teach any puppy to be a watchdog; nature will handle it in good time.

TYPES OF PROBLEMS

Neighbourhood Nuisance

If a dog's barking is annoying neighbours, chances are the dog is left outside, either fenced or on a tie-out. Everyone in the family goes to work (or school), and very likely the only attention the dog receives before they leave is a bowl of water and a dog biscuit.

Once its people are gone, a dog's instincts tell it that the entire house is its responsibility to protect. This causes stress, and the dog on a tie-out suffers even more stress. It knows it is vulnerable and unable to protect its property.

This dog barks at every noise it hears, particularly when it can't see the source. It barks at every delivery person, every passerby and every other animal within its acute hearing range. It barks long after the supposed danger has gone because of the build-up of stress. Eventually, it just barks out of sheer habit. This is called "IDIOT" barking because, by now, it is purely a habit without a cause. Too often, there is no alternative activity for the dog.

Night Owls

Not all dogs feel comfortable when left outside at night. Young dogs might be frightened, and older dogs could be suffering from hearing loss or some physical discomfort such as arthritis.

Night barking may begin legitimately at a passerby or at a wandering nocturnal animal, then escalate to barking at every shadow that falls. A dog that engages in excessive barking at night can be brought indoors, at least while being retrained. Bear in mind that some dogs will remain quiet and well-behaved in the house, but even with training will return to the barking habit when put

back outside. The only answer may be to let them remain indoors.

Car Barking

Excessive barking in the car is a sign of either aggressive or phobic activity. Do not use force to correct this behaviour for the simple reason that aggression feeds on aggression.

Hysteria could be caused by any number of fears or even by motion sickness. The behaviour will only become worse if strong-arm methods are used. This is a situation in which a head halter (discussed below) may be useful. You will need an extra person to help with the training process.

THE OUTSIDE BARKER

There is no reliable way to modify excessive barking if no one is home to train the dog. Also, the barking can't be stopped without first determining and eliminating the underlying causes; punishment cannot take the place of retraining. The underlying cause - often the stress of being alone - must be alleviated first.

There are countless solutions, but that is a large part of the problem. People try one thing and it doesn't work, so they switch to another and then another until the dog has won all the games and the owners give up. There are two possible ways to get around the combination of too many solutions and no one at home.

Plan to spend your vacation retraining the dog. Pretend to be going to work as usual and sneak back into the house to observe the dog. Are activities going on that encourage barking? Does the dog seem upset - pacing, running, panting - over nothing in particular? This is caused by separation anxiety.

Do not yell at the dog, hit the dog (or even pretend to hit it) or throw anything at it. These actions are counter-productive and they will only increase the barking. Punishment is not the way to go because the dog will invariably have the last word.

Start by giving the dog a good physical workout: a brisk walk, jogging or a vigorous game of fetch. In other words, exhaust the dog. Dividing one meal into two feedings also helps.

Distract the dog by telling it to do something it knows: sit, or down, or come. When the dog obeys, praise it or offer a food reward. It's important to do this EVERY time the dog barks. That's why it will take up your entire vacation!

THE INSIDE BARKER

The dog that barks when someone comes to the door and then doesn't stop after the person has been admitted to the house can be retrained in a couple of fairly easy ways. By teaching the dog to "speak" or bark on command, it can also be taught to not speak or not bark.

Another way is to give the dog a specific item to hold (preferably something large and soft, such as a knotted towel) after it has barked to give notice that someone is at the door. (This is another opportunity to put those obedience lessons to use around the house. What was learned in class is not meant to sit on a shelf. The basics - come, sit, down, stand and heel - can and should be incorporated into your daily life to reassure the dog that you are still in control, as well as to give the dog things to do for which there are rewards such as your approval.)

Praise does not have to be extravagant because this often serves only to encourage more vocal response from the dog. A quiet "good dog" is approval enough. We sometimes forget what constitutes praise when training a dog. A smile, a pat on the head and anything said in an approving voice are all praise.

OTHER SOLUTIONS

A Second Dog?

Once barking has become a problem, it will not be cured by adding a second dog. If the first dog was not trained to be quiet, you'll soon have two dogs that bark. Completely retrain the barker first, then bring in a new companion.

Headcollar

A headcollar/halter or muzzle works especially well if the dog barks as it runs fences. It requires time and at least two people - one to walk outside the fence to provoke the barking and another to enforce a "no bark" command by utilizing the halter, which actually closes the dog's mouth. This training device has a calming effect on the dog, and it does not inflict any pain. By simultaneously closing the dog's mouth as it barks and saying a growly "no bark", the teaching time can be

relatively short. Dogs should not be left unattended while wearing this device. It is also recommended that you speak with your veterinarian about training devices.

Electronics

There are various electronic devices on the market to curb excessive barking. They are, for the most part, very expensive and their success depends entirely on the training capabilities of the person using them and the type and temperament of the dog. These collars should be used only under the supervision of an experienced trainer and in conjunction with the advice of your veterinarian.

One type of electronic collar emits a high-frequency sound, rather than an electric stimulus, when the dog barks. It does not, however, work all by itself. The owner must first teach the dog acceptable behaviour. The collar acts as an aid and, later, as a reminder when the owner is absent.

Shock Collar not recommended!!

De-Barking

This is the one remaining option to be used as a last resort for the owner who has tried all retraining procedures and has been unsuccessful. Talk it over at length with your veterinarian, then go home and think about it. After carefully weighing the pros and cons, go back and get answers to all your unanswered questions. This is irreversible surgery, so you must be certain that other alternatives have been exhausted before attempting this solution.

After surgery, the dog will continue to make sounds. Each de-barked dog makes slightly different noises, ranging from a sort of gurgling to a very hoarse cough. (The above surgical procedure should only be contemplated when all other possible remedies have been thoroughly exhausted. As the owner of a companion animal, we do not have the inherent right to inflict animal suffering as we please for our own benefit. Surely then, this procedure must only be considered if the only other alternative for the animal is euthanasia.)

Citronella Collar should also be considered