



## **SUGGESTIONS HOW TO REDUCE ANIMAL NOISE**

Part of responsible pet ownership is ensuring that your animal is not a nuisance to others. Barking, snorting, growling, whinnying, etc. is a natural animal behavior and most people want their animals to alert them to potential danger. It is perfectly normal and reasonable for animals to make some noise from time to time. However, continual noise for long periods of time is a sign that your pet has a problem that needs to be addressed.

This information sheet is designed to assist you to correct one of the most common animal noises; barking dog problem.

**WHY DOGS BARK?** Dogs bark for many reasons. Some breeds, such as hounds, huskies, and herding breeds have been bred to be vocal. It can be difficult to eliminate this behavior since it is inherited. Other dogs bark out of fear or defense of their property. Being located near a busy sidewalk or other stimulus will cause many dogs to bark. Many excessively barking dogs do so out of boredom, loneliness, and frustration. Changing their living conditions, finding them a companion, or devising other environmental changes can address this problem.

The first step to addressing a barking dog problem is to identify the reason for the dog's behavior.

**Loneliness:** In most situations, dogs bark because they are lonely. Dogs are pack animals and must have companionship to feel secure. In our society, the dog's pack is his human family. The dog that is kept exclusively outdoors, separated from his family, is frustrated and isolated.

### **Recommendations:**

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:

- Walk your dog daily – its good exercise for both of you.
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with him/her as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks and practice them every day for five to ten minutes.
- Take an obedience class with your dog.
- Provide interesting toys to keep your dog busy when you're not home (Kong-type toys filled with treats or busy-box toys). Rotating the toys makes them seem new and interesting.
- If your dog is barking to get your attention, make sure he/she has sufficient time with you on a daily basis (petting, grooming, playing and exercising) so he/she doesn't have to resort to misbehaving to get your attention.
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him/her.
- If you work very long hours, take your dog to a doggie day care or have a friend or neighbor walk and/or play with him/her.

**Protectiveness/Fearfulness:** Other dogs bark because outside stimulus agitates them. Being located next to a busy sidewalk, stairwell, a playground, or other area of high human activity will cause dogs to bark to protect their territory or out of fear of strangers. Try to find a location on your property where the dog will be the least exposed to these triggers. Provide a crate (if indoors) or doghouse (if outdoors) for the dog to retire to if he chooses. Never leave your dog in an area where he can be teased by passing children. This torment causes heightened aggression in dogs and may result in a bite or attack.

### **Recommendations:**

- Teach your dog a "quiet" command. When he/she begins to bark at a passer-by, allow two or three barks, then say "quiet" and interrupt his/her barking by shaking a can filled with pennies or squirting water at his/her mouth with a spray bottle or squirt gun. This will cause him/her to stop barking momentarily. While your dog is quiet, say "good quiet" and pop a tasty treat into his/her mouth. Remember, the loud noise or squirt isn't meant to punish your dog; rather it's intended to redirect his/her behavior into being quiet so you can reward him/her. If your dog is frightened by the noise or squirt bottle, find an alternative method of interrupting his/her barking.
- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach your dog that the people he/she views as intruders are actually friends and that good things happen to him/her when these people are around. Ask someone to walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog isn't barking, and then reward

him/her for quiet behavior. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward his/her quiet behavior. It may take several sessions before the person can come close without your dog barking. When the person can approach without your dog barking, have them feed him/her a treat or throw a toy for him/her.

- If your dog barks while inside the house when you're home, call your dog to you, have him/her obey a command, such as "sit" or "down," and reward him/her with praise and/or a treat.
- Avoid inadvertently encouraging this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he/she hears or sees outside.
- Have your dog neutered or spayed to decrease territorial behavior.
- Limit the dog's access to views that might be causing him/her to bark when you are not home. This is important if you live next to a horse or bike trail.

**Lack of Socialization:** Well-socialized dogs are less likely to bark excessively. They have been exposed to a variety of situations, people, and other animals and are less likely to bark out of fear or protection. Well-socialized dogs live indoors where they are part of the family and learn, on a daily basis, what is acceptable behavior. They are trustworthy around new people and new situations. All dogs should be positively exposed to new situations and rewarded for their good behavior.

**Recommendations:**

- If your dog barks when left alone, leave him with plenty of toys to occupy his attention. If he is playing or chewing on toys he will be too preoccupied to bark. Good diversions are Kong toys (available at your local pet supply retailer) that you can stuff with kibble, peanut butter, or other treats. Freezing the Kong first makes the treats last longer and can occupy your dog for hours. Rotate the toys so your dog doesn't become bored with them, and only give them to him when you are gone. This will increase their attraction for your dog and he will be even more inclined to devote his attention to them instead of barking.

**Training:** Use training to modify your dog's excessive barking.

- Never pet or soothe your dog if he is barking from fear. This reinforces his barking, which you are trying to stop. Do not encourage aggressive barking. Any positive reaction he gets from you will reinforce his behavior and make it more difficult to control.
- If your dog is barking to demand something – a toy, treat, car ride, etc. – do not give into his demands and reward the undesirable behavior. Wait until he is quiet to give him his reward.
- Teach your dog the "quiet" command.
- Praise and reward your dog when he is being quiet. Dogs want to please, and will learn you like it best when it is quiet. When your dog is exposed to a situation where he otherwise would have barked, but chose not to because of the training you have taught him, reward him with petting, treats, and attention.
- Never hit, kick, or hold your dog's mouth shut. This will only teach your dog to fear you and may cause aggression problems. The proper way to curtail barking is to identify the cause and create interventions that both reduce the reason for the barking and train your dog that it is not acceptable behavior. Remember, it is your job as his owner to teach him the rules and provide an environment that doesn't support undesirable behavior.
- Only use a bark collar as a last resort. Since they do not address the underlying cause of the problem they will not be a permanent solution. Avoid using electronic bark collars – they are only about 50% effective and can be painful. A better alternative is the Citronella collar. This collar contains a reservoir of citronella solution that sprays under your dog's face every time he barks. While the scent is pleasant to humans and not harmful to animals, dogs do not like the odor. A citronella collar is considered humane and a recent study reported an 88% rate of success with the use of this collar. One possible drawback is that the collar contains a microphone and the spray is delivered in response to the sound of the bark. Therefore, other noises may set off the collar, causing your dog to be sprayed even if he hasn't barked. Also, some dogs can tell when the citronella reservoir is empty and will resume barking.