



Controlling Barking



(What? I couldn't hear you over the barking!)

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Keep your dog healthy and happy

First of all, make sure that your dog has enough socialization, exercise, and mental stimulation. Socialize your dog by exposing him or her to many different people, dogs, other animals, other experiences. This will make strange people, dogs, and noises less frightening.

Give your dog plenty of exercise through walks and runs, opportunities to play with other dogs, and activities like chasing and retrieving toys. Give your dog mental stimulation through [games](#) like hide-and-seek, tug, fetch, chew toys, chew "puzzles" (toys like Kongs or Buster Cubes, or tied-up-rags stuffed with food that the dog has to work at to get the food out), opportunities to play with people and other dogs, training, and other brain-work.

Why is your dog barking?

Second, figure out why your dog is barking. Is she barking out of boredom? Is it scared barking, in reaction to something that the dog is uncomfortable about? Is it request barking, where the dog is trying to get your attention for something he wants? Or is it alarm barking, alerting the "pack" of intruders?

Boredom Barking

The first type, boredom barking, is the easiest to fix. Simply make sure your dog is not as bored. This does not mean you have to get up in the middle of the night to play with your dog when he barks. It means you need to give your dog more to do by himself when you can't play. These include hiding toys for the dog to find, leaving chew toys, and leaving chew puzzles. There's a fantastic new product called KongTime that will allow you to distribute previously-stuffed Kong toys throughout the day while you're gone - see [ProActive Pet Products](#) and be sure to use the special Wag'N'Train discount code: 0295-OAXD.

Don't run up with a toy when the barking starts, though, since this will just reward the

barking. *Prevent* the barking by keeping your dog occupied. Most continuous barking that happens when the owner is away is this type.

Scared Barking

The second type, scared barking, is fixed by exposing your dog to more things, or in other words, socialization. The more familiar your dog is with mailmen, bicyclists, passing dogs, sirens, loud noises, strange noises, things that loom up suddenly, etc., the less likely your dog will get alarmed when she encounters them. It's never too late to socialize your dog. Make sure that encounters with new things are positive experiences. Reward your dog for calmly accepting new experiences with treats, toys, praise, petting, attention, and food. Be aware that if you try to "comfort" your scared dog, you may unintentionally be rewarding scared behavior. From your tone of voice, the dog might think you're saying, "Good dog! It's right to be scared of that!" when you're really saying, "Don't be scared! It's not so bad!". Some barking that happens when the owner is away is of this type. It's not alarm barking because your dog isn't trying to alert you to a possible danger. Instead, the dog is trying to warn the scary thing away from herself.

For serious cases of fear and anxiety in dogs, you will need to work with an experienced dog trainer or behavior specialist who can help you with a desensitization and counter-conditioning program. The book [The Cautious Canine](#), by Dr. Patricia McConnell, will also help you.

Request Barking

Also known as attention-seeking barking. The third type, request barking, is also easy to fix, but requires patience and a strong will. The theory is that the barking will stop when the dog realizes that it's ineffective. So if the dog is barking to get your attention, ignore it. Don't open the door, don't pick up the toy, don't go get the leash. In practice, it's hard to ignore a barking dog, and in fact when you start to ignore it the dog may bark *more* (at first). Be patient. When the dog finally does realize that barking no longer works, he will try something else. As long as it's something acceptable to you, like lying down (moping), reward it with attention, praise, and a treat (food or a toy). If it's something unacceptable (like pawing you), ignore that, too, until he tries something you like.

The extra attempt at barking when you ignore it is called an "extinction burst" and it's the exact same thing you do to an elevator button when it stops working. Instead of going immediately to the stairs, you push the button again and again, and push harder, before finally giving up.

Alarm Barking

This type, alarm barking, requires actual training -- and lots of patience. You will want to train the dog to bark on command -- and then to stop barking on command. First, find out what can trigger the dog to bark, for example, the doorbell, other dogs passing by, or you standing just out of reach with a favorite toy. Then, work in the following sequence:

1. You give the command, "Bark!"
2. You (or a helper) use the trigger -- ring the doorbell, walk by with another dog, or tease with a toy.
3. Your dog starts barking.
4. Praise your dog (but don't click or give a food reward): "Good bark!"
5. You give the command, "Quiet!"
6. Show your dog a really good, desirable (to the dog) treat and try to get his attention on it.
7. When he eventually is distracted from barking by the treat, praise him for being quiet: "Good quiet!".
8. Keep praising until he's been quiet for 3-5 seconds, then give the very good treat. If he starts barking again during this time, say "Oh, too bad!" quietly and start timing the quiet time over again.
9. Start over again from the first step, as soon as possible. Gradually make the quiet times longer, and gradually start playing the game in different locations (at the back door, outside, in the kitchen, etc.).

Think of this sequence as a game. Keep playing it until your dog understands the game: he'll bark when you give "Bark!" command without the trigger, and he'll stop barking when you give the "Quiet!" command without showing him the treat first. If he ever barks after you say "Quiet!" just say "Oh, too bad!" so he understands that his barking cost him a treat.

Don't try using the "Quiet!" command in the real-life situation **until** you've practiced the Barking Game **a lot**, and the dog's gotten very good at it. In other words, only try it when you can turn barking on and off again easily. The first time you try it in the real world, for example when someone actually comes to the door, be ready with a really good treat and go back to showing it to the dog to get his attention as you say "Quiet!" (you won't need to give the "Bark!" command, since the person at the door started the barking anyway). Expect a very short period of silence at first, and reward it heavily. If you go to open the door and he starts barking again, start over with "Quiet!" and a good treat. (You might want to put a sign on your door: "We're training Fido not to bark too much. Please be patient; the door will only be opened after he's quiet.")

Until you've practiced the Barking Game a lot, just ignore barking that happens without your command.

Fence-line barking

Many dogs will bark through the fence at people and other dogs passing by. This often starts out as a friendly greeting, when a young puppy is eager to greet those that he sees. This is a strong instinct that dogs have - to investigate strangers and greet them. Over time, however, he learns that his every effort to get the attention of those walking by fails. He begins to associate the view of strangers walking past with the acute frustration he feels. This feeling of frustration is so strong that it acts as a strong aversive, and the dog begins to feel that "strangers walking past" means "discomfort". The barking often changes in tone, and becomes a furious attempt to drive away what the dog now sees as a cause of his own discomfort.

It's best to stop this sort of barking before it starts. Make sure that your dog cannot see strangers going past your property: keep the curtains closed or move furniture away from the window so they can't view out, and if possible put in a solid fence or cover your fence with something the dog cannot see through. Be sure to allow your dog ample opportunities to meet, greet, and play with other dogs at appropriate times.

Note that "barking at the mailman" is slightly different: most dogs feel that they have successfully driven off this "intruder" each day that he visits. "If I hadn't been here to scare him off, that guy would have come in the house and stolen *everything*. You should be thankful I'm so powerful and fearsome," your dog seems to say. If your mail carrier is willing, the best thing you can do is have him (or her) give a treat to your dog each day (you can leave a bag of them out there for the carrier to use). If that's not possible, you might want to consider installing a mailbox out on the street (if you have one close to the house). Be sure to take your dog around friendly uniformed people (outside of the post office is a good place!) so that your dog gets a lot of experience meeting nice mail carriers.

Barking in Class

Many dogs bark when in a group dog training class situation, and there are many different reasons for it. Dogs might be nervous, and bark at other dogs to tell them to keep their distance. They might be excited, and bark at other dogs to get them to play. Or they might just be barking at the situation in general.

In general, in a dog training class situation, break up eye contact between your dog and others': stand between them, get your dog's attention on you or on a toy or chewie. Keep

your dog occupied by practicing commands that he knows, or give him peanut butter smeared on a spoon or in a cup. While he's licking the peanut butter, stroke him gently and slowly from his ears to his tail. Don't accidentally reward him with attention when he barks, but do try to calm him down between barks if he's nervous. If possible move the dog further from others, and ask the instructor if you can set up some sort of visible barrier so your dog can't see the other dogs (but you can still watch the class demonstrations!).

Use calming signals (yawn, turn away, be bored). Use Rescue Remedy. Make sure that you are not nervous. If necessary, use your dog's desire to leave the situation as a reinforcement -- click & step towards the door for non-nervous, focused behavior.

Of course, reward your dog when he's quiet. Use a clicker to capture that moment of silence and really let him know how rewarding quiet attention to you can be with great treats and attention.

Punishment for barking

Please note that punishing your dog for barking *won't* teach him to not bark. It will only cause a *temporary* stop. It gives you the opportunity to ask for and reward a behavior you like better, like sitting, lying down, getting a toy, or being quiet. If you just punish the dog, she won't learn that it's wrong to bark, she'll only learn that it's dangerous and scary to bark when you're around. If you reward her for doing something else, she'll learn that it's better for her to do that instead. Note you **can** reward her for being quiet — in fact, it's essential.

The most effective "punishers" — things that will buy you time to reward something else — are things like squirting the dog with a short spurt of water or using a citronella collar (available in most pet stores). In other words, they startle the dog, not hurt him. As far as the dog knows, he isn't being "bad". He's just doing a natural behavior, and it happens that you don't like it. You want to stop the behavior, not "make the dog pay for it".

Since it's as hard to get a punisher to the dog at the exact moment of the behavior as it is to get a treat to them, pair the punisher with a marker like "No!". The punishment-marker will work just like the reward-marker (the click in click-and-treat) to indicate that *that* behavior will result in a punishment. (Be sure not to use the No Reward Marker that you have for when they "guess wrong" and lose out on the chance for a treat!).

Another excellent resource for barking: [The Bark Stops Here](#), by Terry Ryan.

Return to [Training Tips](#) or go on to next Training Tip: [Games](#).



Victoria Farrington's Advice For Dogs Who Bark in the Backyard

I am one of those weird people who love dogs and hate barking. I've fostered 40+ terriers and terrier mixes. Of all those dogs, there were 2 non-stop incorrigible barkers. (One was eventually known to us as "Yap-Yap" and placed with a semi-deaf woman who found his constant noise comforting. Now THAT's management!)

This is what I do, now consciously, once upon a time unthinkingly because barking annoyed me. It lies somewhere between management and P- [negative punishment] but please remember, punishment, like reinforcement, lies in the heart and mind of the animal. I don't think about it - I just set a behavior/consequence pattern.

The dogs bark in the yard. I agree that there are certain circumstances in which this could be a good and valuable thing so I always appear at the door and check out the provocation. Anything strange - "Yes, thank you, now come in while we call the police"; OR, "Yes, that squirrel just outside the fence probably deserves to die, please sit so I can open the gate" and WHAM their butts are on the ground and I release them for an execution that (sadly for them) never occurs, because the squirrels are also very bright and also understand behavior-consequence. Lounging squirrels as the dogs sit is not something that happens more than once. (Actually it has NEVER happened. Squirrels: 5 million provocations Dogs: 0 Executions. But that doesn't mean the dogs don't enjoy trying anyway!) This also gives you practice in asking for "sits at the gate" when the dogs dearly want something outside the gate. It's not your problem if they can't sit. It's their problem and they figure that out quickly enough. One problem with much of the training we can do is that we very much want a sit or a down or a paw motion, but the dogs want something else. It's terrific, it's wonderful, when we can say, "Okay darling, this is what I want and we can entirely ignore what they want until we get what we want." It's not my job to see that my dogs sit swiftly in front of the gate - it's theirs because they are the ones with their eyes on the ever-receding squirrels.

But back to barking: I live in an area of summer homes and my wealthy neighbors hire entire brigades of lawn care workers. We also live on a river. That means my dogs may be barking at weed whacking, lawn mowing, bush trimming, heron squawking, barge moving down river, on and on. If anything they are barking at is something they should be able to ignore, I say,

"Thank you, that's enough." And I hover just inside the door. The first dog who barks again is the first dog to come inside. I go out, I say, "YOU" in a calm, steady, inevitable voice and I walk steadily toward it. My dogs and my fosters quickly learn that I am inevitable. I teach a lot of collar/neck/closeness behaviors (as many of our fosters have been collar shy and darty-out-of-reach clowns) and most of them immediately allow me to take them by the collar and gently lead them inside.

(If your dog won't do this, work on it - constantly. A million and then a million and another million more times, R+ [positive reinforcement or reward] for a hand reach, a collar touch, a light collar pull, etc., until you can reach for the collar and the dog moves toward you and cooperates as you guide it. This, I tend to think in my terrier-centric POV is especially important for terriers who have strong "dodge 'em, dart 'em, fight 'em, escape 'em" responses and will pay off a thousand fold no matter how often you practice. Plus, it's easy to practice. Take half of dinner and play collar games.... A huge compliment paid to me by a vet tech after my dogs escaped twice from the waiting room was: "Your dogs never try to escape from YOU." Nope. I both pay off and I'm inevitable. The inevitable part is "walking down" a dog who tries to avoid you. Patiently, calmly, keep walking back and forth until you've cornered the dog and then with no emotion say, "Okay," and take them by the collar. I once spent 45 minutes walking down a recent foster Airedale male who was determined to avoid me. He got tired before I did and he never tried it again because I exhausted his patience.)

Take the dog who barked inside. The better your dog is at understanding that you own its collar and the right to guide it, the faster this will happen and so the more important it is to work on. The dog barks, you say, "Enough" and if the dog barks again, you are ABLE to bring it inside. (Lessons inside lessons--how Byzantine!) The dog is put in a crate or X-pen and ignored for 15-20 minutes.

I'm not sure if this is P- or P+ [negative or positive punishment - the removal of something to be desired, or the addition of something to be avoided]. When does removal from the yard become confinement/boredom? I dunno. In fact, for my wire fox terrier bitch Shiva who isn't crazy about being outdoors with a bunch of dogs AND with something going on across the river, it may very well be R+ [positive reinforcement]. At the very least, it's management. With my fox terrier Dash who loves to be outside, it's P- [negative punishment]. I know because if he barks again and I so much as cast a shadow over the doorway, he'll clamp his mouth shut and lie down and stay silent for at least another 20 minutes. He wants to stay outside. He wants to stay outside more than he wants to bark so he glues his mouth shut when he might otherwise bark--I can tell by the firm line of his mouth clamped shut! You'll have to do this a number of times before it becomes a predictable pattern of behavior. If the dog thinks coming inside and being in its crate for

20 minutes is punishing, then the dog will not bark at something silly. (And the scientific, the behavioral definition of punishment is simply something that by the application of or the removal of something decreases the frequency of a behavior - don't get hung up on the emotional baggage of what punishment means in the generic sense). If the dog doesn't mind, then you're managing the problem by bringing in and keeping the dog in a crate for 20 minutes at a time. If the dog feels overwhelmed by the threat of something out there, you might be reinforcing the behavior by allowing the dog to escape that threat. IT DOESN'T MATTER - you set the pattern and the dogs at the very least have that pattern to act on or not act on, as the case may be.

An eight month old Airedale is very likely to be a loudmouth. My next dog is a loudmouth Airedale and I love them to the bottom of my heart but if a blessed single dog barks after I've said "enough", it comes inside, and forty dogs or so have decided that isn't worth the bark for the great outdoors. Two said they'd rather bark but maybe I wasn't patient enough.

Patterns--set patterns and see what happens.

Victoria Farrington

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