

Six ways to control your dog's barking

While all of these techniques can help stop your dog from barking, don't expect results overnight

Here's a list of six techniques that can help stop your dog from barking. While all of them can be very successful, you shouldn't expect miraculous results overnight. The longer your dog has been practicing the barking behaviour, the longer it will take for him to change his ways.

Some of these training techniques require you to have an idea as to why your dog barks. I can help you get some insight into what is behind the bark.

Always remember to keep these tips in mind while training:

- **Don't yell** at your dog to be quiet—it just sounds like you're barking along with him.
- Keep your training sessions **positive and upbeat**.
- **Be consistent** so you don't confuse your dog. Everyone in your family must apply the training methods every time your dog barks inappropriately. You can't let your dog get away with inappropriate barking some times and not others.

1. Remove the motivation

Your dog gets some kind of reward when he barks. Otherwise, he wouldn't do it. Figure out what he gets out of barking and remove it. Don't give your dog the opportunity to continue the barking behavior.

Example: barking at passersby

- If he barks at people or animals passing by the living room window, manage his behavior by closing the curtains or putting your dog in another room.
- If he barks at passersby when he's in the garden, bring him into the house. Never leave your dog outside unsupervised all day and night.

2. Ignore the barking

Ignore your dog's barking for as long as it takes him to stop. That means don't give him any attention at all while he's barking. Your attention only rewards him for being noisy. Don't talk to him, don't touch him, and don't even look at him. When he finally quiets, even to take a breath, reward him with a treat.

To be successful with this method, you must wait as long as it takes for him to stop barking. If he barks for an hour and you finally get so frustrated that you yell at him to

be quiet, the next time he'll probably bark for an hour and a half. He learns that if he just barks long enough you'll give him attention.

Example: barking when confined

- When you put your dog in his crate or in a gated room, turn your back and ignore him.
- Once he stops barking, turn around, praise him, and give him a treat.
- As he catches on that being quiet gets him a treat, lengthen the amount of time he must remain quiet before being rewarded.
- Remember to start small by rewarding him for being quiet for just a few seconds, then working up to longer periods of quiet.
- Keep it fun by varying the amount of time. Sometimes reward him after 5 seconds, then 12 seconds, then 3 seconds, then 20 seconds, and so on.

3. Desensitise your dog to the stimulus

Gradually get your dog accustomed to whatever is causing him to bark. Start with the stimulus (the thing that makes him bark) at a distance. It must be far enough away that he doesn't bark when he sees it. Feed him lots of good treats.

Move the stimulus a little closer (perhaps as little as a few inches or a few feet to start) and feed treats. If the stimulus moves out of sight, stop giving your dog treats. You want your dog to learn that the appearance of the stimulus leads to good things (treats!).

Example: barking at dogs

- Have a friend with a dog stand out of sight or far enough away so your dog won't bark at the other dog.
- As your friend and her dog come into view, start feeding your dog lots of very yummy treats.
- Stop feeding treats as soon as your friend and her dog disappear from view.
- Repeat the process multiple times
- Remember not to try to progress too quickly as it may take days or weeks before your dog can pay attention to you and the treats without barking at the other dog.

4. Teach your dog the "quiet" command

It may sound nonsensical, but the first step of this technique is to teach your dog to bark on command. Give your dog the command to "speak," wait for him to bark two or three times, and then stick a tasty treat in front of his nose. When he stops barking to sniff the treat, praise him and give him the treat. Repeat until he starts barking as soon as you say "speak."

Once your dog can reliably bark on command, teach him the "quiet" command. In a calm environment with no distractions, tell him to "speak." When he starts barking, say "quiet" and stick a treat in front of his nose. Praise him for being quiet and give him the treat.

Example: someone at the door

- When the doorbell rings, your dog alerts you to the presence of an "intruder" by barking wildly.
- Once you've taught your dog the "quiet" command in a calm environment, practice in increasingly distracting situations until your dog can immediately stop barking when asked to, even when that "intruder" arrives at the door.

5. Ask your dog for an incompatible behaviour

When your dog starts barking, ask him to do something that's incompatible with barking. Teaching your dog to react to barking stimuli with something that inhibits him from barking such as lying down in his bed.

Example: someone at the door

- Toss a treat on his mat and tell him to "go to your place."
- When he's reliably going to his mat to earn a treat, up the ante by opening the door while he's on his mat. If he gets up, close the door immediately.
- Repeat until he stays on his mat while the door opens.
- Then increase the difficulty by having someone ring the doorbell while your dog is on his mat. Reward him if he stays in place.

6. Keep your dog tired

Make sure your dog is getting sufficient physical and mental exercise every day. A tired dog is a good dog and one who is less likely to bark from boredom or frustration. Depending on his breed, age, and health, your dog may require several long walks as well as a good game of chasing the ball and playing with some interactive toys.

Why Dogs Bark

Check out some of the reasons why dogs sound off

Dogs have a lot to say, and they do it by barking. They bark to go out, come in, to tell you a stranger's in your yard, and at people, cars, and other animals.

Too much barking or barking at inappropriate times can be a problem. You want to be respectful of your neighbours as well as local laws, so you need to get your dog's barking under control.

In order to determine why your dog barks, you may need to do some clever detective work—especially if it occurs when you're not home. You can ask your neighbours what they see and hear, go around the block and watch and listen, start a tape recorder or video camera when you leave the house. After some sleuthing, you may be able to find out which of the following common problems is causing your dog to bark.

Common causes of barking

Attention/Demand: Your dog may want to eat, go outside, or your undivided attention.

Boredom/Frustration: Your dog may have been left outside day and night, or confined to one room for a long period of time.

Fear: Your dog may be afraid of objects, people, places, other animals, or loud noises such as thunder and fireworks.

Tip: Your dog's posture can tell you if he's barking out of fear. Typically his ears are back, and his tail is held low.

Territoriality/Protectiveness: Your dog is barking in the presence of "intruders," which may include people and other dogs in adjacent yards.

Tip: If your dog is being territorial, his posture appears threatening with his tail held high and his ears up and forward.

Playfulness/Excitement: Your dog may be overly playful and excited when greeting people.

Health Issues: Your dog may have Canine Cognitive Dysfunction or deafness, causing him to bark because he's unable to hear himself bark.

Dealing with health-related barking

Some dogs bark because of age-related dementia or deafness. Be patient with your dog. Keep his environment simple and orderly; don't make frequent changes. Talk to your vet about medications that may help the dementia. Teach your deaf dog the "quiet" command using hand signals or a flash of light or a vibrating collar (NOT a shock collar) as the cue instead of saying the word "quiet."

Dealing with multiple barking dogs

If you share your home and your life with more than one dog, you know how they can set each other off. The doorbell rings and deafening, out-of-control barking ensues. You must train each dog individually before you can work with them as a group. It takes a little more effort to settle your pack of wild hounds, but you'll be rewarded with a group of well-mannered dogs. And your friends and relatives will no longer dread coming to your house!