



# Problem Barking

There are several reasons that dogs bark, once you've decided what kind of barking your dog does, you can address the issue.

## Watchdog or Alert Barking

The goal is to teach your dog the meaning of the words "bark" and "quiet" (or whatever words you choose to use as your cue). If you first teach your dog to "bark" on command, you can then teach him to "quiet" on command. When teaching the "bark" trick, use something you know will make your dog bark -- such as the doorbell. First teach the dog a reliable bark using the following sequence:

1. Give your "bark" command
2. Ring the doorbell (or other prompt)
3. The dog barks
4. Praise: "Yes!"
5. Treat

Continue doing this until he will bark on command without the doorbell. Fade the doorbell by giving the command and waiting for about 10 seconds, and then ring the bell.

Eventually he'll bark without the bell. Once you have a reliable "bark" on command in different places and under different circumstances, begin teaching the "quiet" command using the following sequence:

1. Give your "bark" command
2. Ring the doorbell (or other prompt)
3. The dog barks
4. Praise: "Yes!"
5. Give your "quiet" command, with an obvious treat in your hand — he'll be distracted from barking by the treat
6. Praise his silence lavishly for 3-5 seconds
7. Give him the treat (only if he's been quiet 3-5 seconds)
8. Repeat the above sequence, gradually lengthening the duration of the silence up to a minute

Do this over and over until the dog understands the "quiet" command. Eventually he'll quiet on the first command without a visible treat (although you still give him a treat -- it's just hidden). If he interrupts a "quiet" with even one bark, say "Too bad! You missed it!" wave the treat under his nose, and start over with the command.



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The most common mistake is trying to use your "quiet" command in a real-life situation before the dog is ready. You must be able to command "quiet" under different circumstances and in different places. You must be able to rapidly go back and forth between "bark" and "quiet." And you must be able to do "cold trials." Cold trials are when you give a command out of the blue – dogs know when you are in training mode. The first few times you give a real "quiet" command, use it under less provoking circumstances -- such as barking in the back yard.

Also, don't be discouraged if he doesn't obey right away. Have your treats ready, and if he doesn't obey, go back a few steps and show him the treat; then quickly work up to where you were when he didn't obey.

## Demand Barking

When a dog wants something, he'll try different things to get it. It doesn't take him long to figure out that if he barks at his owner, he'll get what he wants: door opens, food appears, petting begins, etc. **You must stop rewarding barking!!** Let him out on a regular basis (so you know he doesn't "have" to go out). **NEVER, NEVER, NEVER respond to a barking dog!** If you do, you are only reinforcing his barking behavior.

**BE AWARE** that if you have previously been rewarding your dog's barking, when you begin ignoring the barking, the dog will have what we call an "extinction burst." This means that just before he gives up, he will go through a frenzy of barking (which will almost drive you over the edge), as a last ditch effort.

This is when most people give in, and when they do, it just reinforces that barking behavior even more -- the dog now knows that if he persists, it will work!

Remember, it's you who are changing the rules and the dog doesn't yet know the new rules. The most important thing, and the hardest, is to notice the dog when he's being quiet and reward him!

## Barking When Alone

1. When you're alone, don't let him shadow you. Shut him in various rooms away from you and practice "semi-absences."
2. Ignore any barking. Remember that the dog is barking to get you to come back to him and often having you in the room reprimanding him is better and more reinforcing than being alone.
3. Practice many brief absences every day. Start with 2-3 seconds over and over to get him used to a short absence. Then move up to 5, 10, then 20 seconds. Do not move on to a longer absence until the dog is used to you being gone and does not vocalise at the level you are currently working on. Occasionally throw in a shorter

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absence just so he isn't able to predict how long you will be gone. Once he learns the game, you can increase the time you are gone by large jumps.

4. When leaving or arriving, be low-key. Never make a fuss over him, just be very matter-of-fact about the whole coming and going business.
5. Dogs are extremely social animals and do not cope well with being alone. You might consider doggie daycare if you are gone all day.
6. Increase physical and mental stimulation. If your dog were living in the wild, a lot of his energy would be used up in survival activities. Pet dogs lead very under-stimulated lives. Try to tire him out physically before a long absence. This means high intensity games such as fetch, Frisbee, tug-of-war, etc. Be more creative in your feeding process. Make him work for his food. Get him more focused on toys. See the handout on Mental and Physical Stimulation.
7. If your dog is panicky when left alone, he may have severe separation anxiety, which will require formal desensitization. Please call and we'll talk about this in more detail.

## Spooky Barking

Spooky barking is usually caused by under-socialisation. If your dog wasn't socialised as well as he could be (and don't feel guilty because few dogs are -- just be aware for the next time you get a puppy), you'll need to do remedial socialisation.

This is a long process requiring patience and commitment. Please call and we'll talk about this in more detail.

## Boredom Barking

If you don't have time for a dog, don't get a dog. It used to be thought that dogs needed a lot of space. Well, we now know that it isn't space dogs need, it's time! If your dog is an outside dog, train him to be an inside dog -- don't forget that they are social animals and need to live with their family.

There is no quick fix. You must meet your dog's basic needs for mental and physical stimulation. See the handout on Mental and Physical Stimulation.

**If you experiencing problems with Barking call us today to get the situation under control before it's too late.**



**urban**  
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