



RSPCA School for Dogs Information Sheet

Barking

Barking is a normal canine behaviour with many different causes. Dogs can produce many different sounds, and owners are often able to recognise the varying sounds their dog makes depending on the situation. Barking should never be totally eliminated as it is natural canine communication. We need to understand what is causing our dogs to vocalise and teach them which stimuli are acceptable to react to.

Common Reasons Why Dogs Bark:

- Communication
- Excitement
- Warning
- Boredom
- Frustration
- Fear
- Learned behaviour
- Anxiety
- Stereotypic behaviour
- Medical and/or age related



Dogs may actually have more than one motivation to bark. It is for this reason that all factors surrounding the barking behaviour must be identified. Some questions that will help you to uncover your dog's motivation and/or reward for barking include:

- **Where** is the dog when the barking occurs?
- **When** does the dog bark? (What time of day, for how long and for how often?)
- **What** is the dog barking at?
- **Who** is around at the time? (Family members, strangers, other pets, alone?)
- **What** other behaviours are displayed at the same time? (e.g. digging, scratching, pacing).

You may need to keep a journal for a week or use a tape recorder, video camera or smart phone to investigate your dog's barking behaviour, particularly if it occurs when you are absent from the area. A 'Bark and Activity Counter Collar' made by Premier Pets can be a great tool. This will give you the best possible chance of identifying the underlying causes, making a reduction in the barking behaviour far more achievable. The more accurate your records are the better.



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A journal may look like this table:

Date	Barking start time	Barking stop time	Total time	How does it sound?	Where is the dog?	What is he barking at?	What is he doing? movements
6/9	5.36am	5.39am	3min	hysterical	At gate	Garbage truck	Running back & forth till stopped

Barking can increase if your dog is trying to tell you something and you are not paying attention, or if you appear to be joining in by yelling (at) with your dog!

Step one of changing any problem behaviour is developing a strategy to help prevent the dog from repeatedly practicing the undesirable behaviour. This is important as each time the undesired behaviour is practiced it is reinforced. Consequently, the chance that the behaviour will be exhibited in the future is increased.

Controlling the Environment

Adjusting the environment to prevent or minimize your dog's exposure to barking triggers (such as blocking the view to passing people) is an important part of managing the barking problem in the short term and as training progresses.

Prevent access to known barking areas using additional fences and/or keeping your dog in a different area such as a den, crate or inside.

You can use shade cloth or plants to block the view through fences or window film if your dogs are inside. Refer to our info sheets on Denning and Crate Training.

Physical and Mental Exercise

Each dog has a requirement for a certain amount of physical, mental and social stimulation each day. When these requirements are not met, or exceeded, it is likely that unwanted behaviours will occur, or normal behaviours, such as barking, may become excessive. Toys, regular exercise and play are essential in maintaining your dog's physical and psychological wellbeing, so is adequate rest and the ability to practice calm behaviours.

While barking is not a training problem and classes alone will not reduce your dogs barking, they will provide you with the skills to manage your dog's behaviour at home and in the community. Training classes will also assist in providing your dog with some mental, physical and social exercise necessary to remain happy and healthy.

Step two is to teach your dog exactly what you would rather they do in each situation, i.e. a dog that barks at the garbage truck can learn: the garbage truck is coming so go and play with your toy! Playing with a toy works really well in this situation as it can be self-rewarding for the dog and it is hard to bark with a toy in your mouth!

There are also lots of interesting and interactive ideas to teach your dog to engage with instead of barking. Refer to 'Entertaining Your Dog', 'Kongs' and 'Food Dispensing Toys' info sheets.



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Step three is to reward like crazy when your dog gets it right. Do make sure your dog thinks the reward is really rewarding too!

Will punishment stop my dog barking?

Punishment is the least effective method of changing any unwanted behaviour and has the potential to induce fearful or aggressive behaviour in dogs. Furthermore, the RSPCA does not condone the application or exposure of an animal to an electronically activated electric shock, high pitched sound or other painful stimuli for behaviour modification. See handout on 'Barking Collars'.

References and further reading

Rugaas Turid (2008) Barking The Sound of a Language, Dogwise Publishing USA

RSPCA School for Dogs, Whats All the Barking About (2018)

<https://sfddev.rspcaqld.org.au/blog/what-s-all-the-barking-about>

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