

Barking

Barking, howling, whining, growling—it's all dog talk. Barking is a natural means of communication for a dog. A bark can be a warning, a greeting, or an invitation to play. Your dog's tendency to bark a little or a lot is partly inherited. Some breeds bark a lot; others bark very little. Your dog may also have learned that barking gets him what he wants—he barks and you let him in, let him out, feed him, talk to him, play with him. Barking becomes a behavioral problem when it goes on too long or too frequently.

Dogs become problem barkers for many reasons. The first step in controlling excessive barking is to find the reason your dog barks so much. A dog that spends too much time alone may become a problem barker, particularly if he doesn't get enough exercise. Sights and sounds in your dog's environment may trigger barking—not usually a problem unless it's too frequent or lasts too long. Dogs with separation anxiety are often problem barkers. Aggressive dogs and highly territorial dogs may bark at anyone or anything that comes near. Barking is hard to stop because it's self-rewarding. You can usually reduce nuisance barking, though, with time and effort.

If your dog seems to be barking out of boredom or to get your attention, you may be able to slow him down by giving him what he wants—on your terms, of course. Make sure he gets enough exercise every day. Take him through an obedience class. Even if he doesn't bark in class and you don't directly address the problem there, training often helps problems of all sorts. Besides, if he's lonely and bored, he'll love spending time with you in class and practicing outside of class. Don't leave your dog outdoors when you're not home. Let your neighbors know that you're trying to solve the problem. Most people will give you a little leeway if they know you're trying.

Teach your dog that having people around is good for him. Have a friend walk by your yard. Have a tasty treat ready. If he stays quiet, praise him and reward him. Have your friend come a bit closer and repeat the process. It may take several sessions (and several friends so that he learns that the rule applies to everyone), but eventually he should be much more tolerant of people walking near your yard. If he barks indoors, have him lie down and be quiet, and praise and reward him. Be consistent—don't encourage him to bark one time and discourage him the next. For more information see:

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