

Bark Management & Reduction

What is the behavior?

Dogs have an incredible range of elaborate body language and vocalizations which communicate intentions and emotions to other dogs and people. Barking is a dog's voice. In some situations, you might want your dog to bark (intruder alert). In other situations, your dog's barking might create problems (at a neighbor). What you want to do is to reduce your dog's barking, but not eliminate it altogether.

Why do dogs bark?

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons including alerting the pack to an intruder, excitement over a hunt, loneliness, anxiety, fear and fun. Some breeds of dogs were developed to be guard dogs or alert barkers. These dogs are more sensitive to sounds or intruders and will often "bark first and ask questions later."

In addition, barking is a self-reinforcing behavior. Some dogs simply enjoy "talking." Hoping the behavior will go away on its own will likely fail. Yelling at your dog for barking simply teaches him that you can bark, too. What you need to do is to remove the reinforcement.

How do you modify the behavior?

Evaluate the situation:

The first thing to do is to evaluate the situation(s) that cause your dog to bark. Once you have determined the reason for the barking, you will know how best to address it. The main reasons are:

- ***Alert barking:*** Dog barks to let you know he has seen or heard something out of the ordinary.
- ***Defensive barking:*** Dog barks to make something he is afraid of or doesn't like go away.
- ***Attention barking:*** Dog wants attention.
- ***Frustration barking:*** Dog is confused, frustrated or stressed.
- ***Boredom barking:*** Dog barks to amuse himself.

Alert Barking:

Training the "Quiet" Cue: When your dog barks and you are home:

- Go out to him and find out what is causing him to bark – the trigger.
- Praise his alertness and call him to join you back in the house.
- Reward him for coming and label the behavior as "Quiet."
- Cue him to do something else or go to an alternate space to prevent a recurrence.
- If he alerts again, do the same thing and cue "Quiet" after a few barks. Be prepared to do as many repetitions as required to reduce the length of the barking session.

Eliminating the Trigger: Of course, eliminating the trigger altogether may be an option to consider.

- If he barks at people or animals passing by the living room window, manage his behavior by closing the curtains or putting him in another room.
- If he barks at passersby when in the yard, bring him into the house. Never leave your dog outside unsupervised all day or night.
- Cover up sporadic noise with a white noise machine, radio or television.



Desensitization to the Trigger: Desensitize your dog by gradually getting him accustomed to whatever is causing him to bark.

- Start with the trigger at a distance or at a low sound level. It must be far enough away or at such a low sound level that he doesn't bark when it is first detected.
- Feed him good treats and praise calm behavior.
- Move the stimulus a little closer or increase the sound level. You want your dog to learn that the presence of the stimulus leads to good things (treats!).

Defensive Barking:

Move your dog away from the object he is afraid of. He is barking to make "it" go away. Your action tells him that you have the situation handled and he doesn't need to worry. Consider adding the steps for Desensitization to the Trigger method above to your training routine.

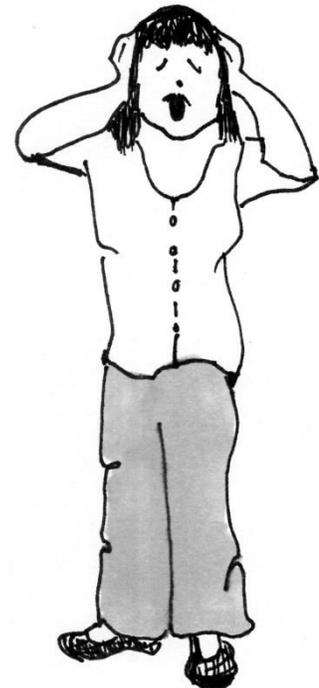
Attention Barking:

When your dog barks at you for attention, it is often an escalation of his previous efforts to connect with you. If you provide very brief bits of attention to your dog each time he seeks it, it's unlikely the escalation to barking will occur.

If, however, your dog discovers that his barking leads to your attention, you will want to ignore him when he barks and reward him when he is quiet.

Frustration Barking:

If your dog barks when he is on leash, it is most likely frustration barking. Cue an alternative behavior such as "Find it" or "Touch" and move away from the object of frustration. Removing your dog from the environment will eliminate the cause of the stress. (Please see our handout on **Barking & Lunging & Snarling, Oh My!** for further information.)



Boredom Barking:

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 every day.



When you leave your dog alone (after a good game of fetch), leave him with a stuffed Kong or hide treats around the house for him to discover. These will engage him and reduce the chance of boredom barking. (Please see our handout on **Enrichment Toys** for more ideas.)

Barking in Class:

Most dogs will occasionally bark in a group class setting. Redirect your dog by cuing a “Find it” or “Touch” or give him an appropriate chew item. Providing a visual barrier between a barking dog and the rest of the class will often help reduce the barking caused by seeing other dogs. But if your dog can still not be quieted after a few sessions, then he may be under too much stress in that environment. Not all dogs do well in class settings and private one-on-one sessions are more appropriate.

Training Resources:

Marin Humane’s **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It’s the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog’s collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn’t require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by Marin Humane, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.