



Advice for dog owners regarding dog barking

In law, a barking dog can be a noise nuisance. A dog owner can have legal action taken against them if they fail to stop the dog causing a nuisance after they have been told about it. Often the problem occurs when the owners are out and so they know nothing about it until someone complains. Whilst barking comes naturally to dogs, the constant barking, howling or whining of a dog can be extremely annoying for the people around it. There are some suggestions below for dog owners to try which may help to reduce the amount your dog barks.

Why do dogs bark?

There are many reasons why dogs bark. They are not by nature solitary animals and need security. They regard their owners as their family group and this is why they can become distressed when they are left alone. Dogs may also bark if they are frustrated or when they are defending their territory. Some dogs may bark because they are ill – the cause of the barking could be anxiety. Some dogs may need to see a vet so they can be referred to an animal behaviourist.

Dogs should not bark at everything that moves and should be trained to tell the difference between people who are allowed into the house and intruders. Good training combined with affection and companionship should prevent your dog from developing bad habits. If you are leaving your dog on it's own, there may also be practical things you can do that can prevent your dog from seeing people walking past, cats, birds, etc. Have a look at the area where you leave your dog – how much can they see and hear? Can you prevent them from seeing out of windows or from seeing between fence panels?

Leaving dogs on their own

Some dogs hate being left alone. This is often referred to as 'separation anxiety'. You need to help your dog get used to being left for different lengths of time and at different times of the day or night and this should mean they won't be so concerned every time you leave them. Put the dog in another room for a few minutes, then slowly build up the amount of time you leave them for. Only return to the dog when they are quiet and praise them.

If you work and have to leave your dog alone all day, it is also a good idea to try starting your schedule 10 minutes earlier. Feed the dog and get them settled with a toy or treat. Get completely ready to leave and then sit down and start reading a book or a newspaper, ignoring the dog the whole time. After several minutes of calm separation, quietly walk out of the door and go to work. Do not say goodbye or even look at the dog. You could then quietly return and stand outside for a while to see if the dog starts barking. Doing this regularly means that you can check if this type of training is working.

When you return home, do not make a fuss of your dog either, but rather continue to ignore them. Only when the dog has settled down should you acknowledge it by telling it to sit. Then give a simple pat on the head and say "good dog".

The reasoning behind this is that, when you repeatedly reassure your dog that everything is alright and you will be back soon, you are actually making things worse. Likewise when you make a fuss of them when you come home. This is because you are reinforcing the idea that being left on their own is a big deal.

Toys

Adjustable feeding balls where the dog must roll the ball to get the food stored inside to fall out are often effective. If adjusted properly it will take them a long time to get a full meal's worth of food out. Chew toys are also very good and, if hollow at the ends, you can put food inside these as well. Start with biscuits and once they are used to this you can try packing them with canned food and then put them in the freezer – this way it takes longer for the dog to get the food out. You can get several of these toys and hide them in various places. Of course, for these food-filled toys to be effective your dog must be hungry!

Additional Training

Give your dog a toy and then quietly leave the room and close the door. Return within a few minutes, preferably before the dog has stopped being distracted by the toy and has become distressed by your absence. Walk in and move calmly across the room, ignoring the dog. If the dog rushes to greet you, ignore it completely. Do not say anything or even look at the dog. The idea behind this is to teach the dog that your temporary separation meant nothing to you, and so it should mean nothing to them either.

Try not to praise and pet your dog for doing nothing as it makes it more difficult for them to understand what is good behaviour and what isn't.

Keeping them company

Some dogs will only settle if they can hear a human voice. Try leaving the TV or radio on – but not too loud – you don't want your neighbours to be disturbed by that instead!

Try not to leave them for too long. If you have to, ask a friend to look in on them and let them out in the garden for a while or take them for a walk.

If your dog does have to be left alone for long periods, always ensure that they have been fed and walked before you go out. Also remember to ensure the room is not too hot or too cold and that the room is adequately ventilated. If it's going to get dark before you are due to return home, leave a light on as well.

Some dogs like the company of other dogs, and sometimes two bark less than one. However, this is not always the case – always look into this carefully and get advice from a dog trainer or a dog warden before you take on the extra responsibility.

Homeopathic remedies

Lavender oil dabbed on the inside of a dog's collar once a week and/or some drops on their bedding can have a calming effect on many dogs. Bach flower rescue remedy droplets can be placed on the dog's tongue or in their food three or four times a day and should make them feel more secure. Some camomile tea in their water can also help, particularly if used in conjunction with lavender oil and bach flower remedy. All of these are available from health food shops, pet shops and supermarkets. Whilst these products are natural and should be suitable for all dogs, if you have any concerns you should consult your vet.

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