



My Dog Barks Too Much! Managing Your Dog's Desire to Bark All Day or Night

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Barking is as normal for dogs as it is for humans to speak. Both are verbal forms of communication. However, barking can become excessive and disruptive, particularly when dogs live in our homes and suburban neighbourhoods.

While we can't eliminate barking entirely, we can realistically aim to reduce the barking to be less invasive. Before we launch into how to reduce a dog's barking, we need to look at the reasons why your dog might bark.

1. **Excitement:** dogs will bark to release excitement.
2. **Frustration:** excitement and frustration are closely linked. An excited bark becomes frustration when a dog cannot access the source of their excitement.
3. **Fear or anxiety:** some dogs respond to fear and anxiety by avoiding (running away) or shutting down (freezing in position), but others react. Barking when fearful or anxious can serve two purposes: 1) Barking releases some anxiety 2) Barking sometimes makes the scary thing go away, which unfortunately reinforces the barking! Barking at people or dogs passing by or entering their territory fits into this category, as the dog is anxious of the perceived threat to their home.
4. **Attention or access to a valued Item:** this often ties in with frustration, as the barking only occurs when the attention they want or item they crave is sensed by the dog, but out of reach.
5. **Boredom:** dogs who are bored will find ways to fill their time. As barking is natural to dogs, many will start barking. Once they realise barking is fun, and relieves boredom, they will continue the habit.
6. **Health reasons:** some dogs will bark when they are in pain. If you notice your dog doing a high-pitched bark when you touch or go near a certain area of their body, we recommend a veterinary consultation is organised promptly. Dogs with dementia will also bark as they are disorientated and confused. Often this barking will be at a wall or corner of the room, at odd times of the day or night. Again, an examination with a veterinarian is strongly recommended.



So how can we reduce the amount of barking?

The first step to resolve barking is to manage the environment to prevent barking in the first place (where possible). This is very important as barking (when caused by excitement, frustration, fear, anxiety, or boredom) is an emotional release and can be self-reinforcing. Dealing with the barking after it has occurred is not going to be as effective.

Barking collars such as electric shock collars (which are illegal in NSW) or citronella collars are frowned upon by veterinary behaviourists as being unethical, as they are cruel punishments that do not look after the dog's well-being and do not help to determine the underlying cause of the barking.

1. **Visual and noise blockage:** if your dog is barking as a reaction to sights and sounds outside the house, a helpful tool can be to reduce sight outdoors. Using static attach window frosting can let light in through windows but reduce sight. Playing music softly from a speaker placed near the area the sounds are coming from can reduce reaction to noise.
2. **Provide space:** instead of encouraging your dog towards the scary object or thing, allow them space to move away so they can seek safety and security.
3. **Provide outlets for attention, play and exercise:** this will reduce attention and boredom-induced barking. Pre-empt when your dog is most likely to bark and use these outlets as a prevention tool.

These are just the first steps of a barking reduction plan for your dog. For further environmental modification and training, organise a private behaviour consultation with our Pet Behaviour Consultant to address your dog's needs in more detail.