



Managing Barking in Our Community

Why do dogs bark?

All dogs bark!

Barking is a widespread dog behaviour problem and the most common community problem reported to Council. Having barking dogs in the community significantly reduces the quality of life for those affected by barking.

Barking is a problem if a dog bark:

- When left alone for extended periods
- Immediately after you leave home
- Excessively when people pass by your property
- When attention seeking

You know you have a problem when:

- Your neighbours tell you
- You get reported to the Council
- It annoys you

Why do dogs bark?

Barking and howling are their natural means of communication. So, what is your dog trying to tell you? The dog is generally barking for a reason. Excessive barking is an indication that something is wrong with the dog's living situation.

If you wish to reduce your dog's barking, you need to understand why they are barking. People are consistently inconsistent and often confuse their dog; sometimes the dog can bark, sometimes the dog is encouraged to bark, yet other times it is severely punished for barking. Sometimes we reward the barking dog when we don't mean to. For example, when the owner shouts at a dog, it understands it as gaining the attention it wants. A barking dog will feel it has successfully defended its territory if the result is that the postman leaves. Barking can reduce a dog's stress levels and boredom.

What prompts a dog to bark?

1. BOREDOM – A big backyard is not the answer to reducing a dog's boredom. Being alone with very little to do for extended periods can lead to dogs' boredom, frustration, and loneliness. Dogs have a great deal of energy, and most breeds were bred for a specific purpose, such as hunting, guarding, and working. Bored dogs also show other anti-social behaviours, like trying to escape, being destructive, and chewing and digging.

2. ANXIETY – Dogs are 'pack' animals, which means they enjoy living in groups. The dog regards its owners and family as its pack and will bark to communicate with the missing members of its collection. When dogs are left alone, they may fret and become anxious, often barking for extended periods. Dogs may also become fearful or anxious about people or objects, like the postman or the neighbour's lawnmower. When dogs bark because of fear or anxiety, it is essential to reduce anxiety levels as early as possible. Ideally will benefit your dog and the community.

3. DISTURBANCES – Barking episodes can be set off when people come to the door or walk past your property (like the postman). The dog's behaviour is reinforced as the perceived "intruder" leaves – the dog believes his barking has sent this unwanted guest away! Some dogs bark and act aggressively through the fence at passers-by. It may cause a noise nuisance and become frightening for strangers outside the house.

4. DISCOMFORT – Pain and discomfort, illness, or even being restricted to a small area may be a cause of barking. Dogs left chained or tied up may find it difficult to get exercise or water to drink. If your usually quiet dog suddenly starts to bark excessively, check its environment, and perhaps take a trip to the vet.

5. EXCITEMENT – Anticipating a walk, playing games, playing with children, seeing people in swimming pools, and hearing their owners arriving home often excite a dog. This uncontrolled barking is easy to fix by removing the source of excitement from the dog and not rewarding the barking behaviour.



Find out why your dog is barking?

If you are unsure why your dog is barking, take the time to determine the following:

- **Time of day** – Does your dog bark at certain times of the day? What is happening in your neighbourhood at that time? Is the postman delivering mail? Is your rubbish being collected? Are children coming home from school and walking past your property? Are straying cats or possums in your yard at night?
- **What are you doing?** – Are you leaving to go to work when your dog starts barking? Are you away for extended periods, resulting in your dog's boredom? Are you rewarding the unwanted behaviour by reacting to it?
- **What is your dog doing?** – Is your dog stressed, excited, bored, or lonely? Is your dog trying to get to you – its 'pack'?

Most owners ignore their dogs when they are well behaved. Good behaviour may be taken for granted, for example, resting and playing quietly. Then, the owner encourages the bad conduct by paying attention to the dog when it barks. It's easy to understand why dogs learn to only get the owner's attention by barking.

Assess your problem:

- What makes your dog bark?
- When, where and why does my dog bark (day/night) when I'm not at home?
- What happens after my dog barks? Does there appear to be any form of stress release for the dog?
- Is the behaviour normal for my dog?
- Is my dog's behaviour learned or conditioned?
- How long has my dog been barking?
- How did the behaviour problem start? What were the circumstances?
- Look at the length of time this behaviour has been going on; has it been gradual, or is it occasional or progressive?

Once you have assessed yourself, your problem, and your dog, use the information in this kit to determine what you can do or who you can ask for help to prevent your dog from barking and becoming a neighbourhood nuisance.

Keep a diary – Some dog owners find it helpful to keep a journal or log of their activities and their dog's barking. It may be beneficial to pinpoint when and why your dog is barking.

Can't find a cause? – Sometimes, it is difficult to determine the cause of barking. Your dog may be unpredictable. The barking may be a bad habit, and it may be attention-seeking or in response to something you can't see. An alternative is to seek professional help.



Methods of controlling dog barking.

- Avoid conditioning – do not reward your dog for bad behaviour.
- Companionship – before leaving home, turn on the television or radio or give your dog an old coat or item of clothing that belongs to you.
- Never call your dog after it has stopped barking and then punish it.
- Increase physical exercise.
- Regularly walk your dog and change the route you walk.
- Take your dog for a drive.
- Spend FUN time with your dog.
- Avoid routine, e.g., carry your keys with you at different times, not just when you leave.
- Access to the house – if you can let the dog inside the house, provide it with a single room that may smell like you (for comfort) to relax the dog (the 'denning' principle).
- Obedience training – a dog can be trained to be alone and bark only on command.
- Avoid stimulus – distract your dog with another form of reward at the time it usually barks at a neighbourhood disturbance (e.g., the postman).
- Fence design – a fence correctly designed to restrict your dog's vision of outside stimuli if your dog can see outside.
- anti-barking devices can reduce barking, used in conjunction with obedience training.
- Discipline – show your dog that you are the head of the house. Dogs are pack animals and need to be shown where they stand concerning the family unit.
- Spend the time to work out why your dog is barking.

The leading cause of barking is boredom.

As well as the other methods of control mentioned above, there are also some simple ideas worth a try.



Avoid boredom.

To avoid boredom, you need to give your dog plenty to do when it's alone.

Here are some suggestions:

For the best results, try interactive toys that hide food, such as a Kong (a rubber toy) or ones designed to require manipulation and work to obtain the food reward. Leave toys, rope chews, rawhides and even bones for a dog to play with and use up time while alone. Leaving an article of clothing with the scent of the missed loved one on it also works well, especially for puppies.

- Use old drink bottles or milk containers – **remove the lid**, cut a few squares in the side and place dry biscuits or ice inside. Your dog will roll them like a toy. They also make good chew toys (when empty).
- There are food reward toys available (e.g., Kongs). Talk to your vet or pet shop.
- Make sure your dog has plenty of water available.
- Give your dog a bone or dog treat (e.g., a pig ear or chew toy) when you leave the house. It will teach your dog a positive reward when you go – the bone or treat.
- A variety of toys (balls, chew toys, something to climb on) can be left in the yard for your dog to play with. Remember, toys need not be expensive. Be mindful to alternate your dog's toys as they are just like kids - they will get bored with the same toys and ignore them.
- Making fun toys is simple – buy a giant tug toy and some heavy-duty rope, attach the rope to a big tree and the toy to the end of the string. Now your dog can play tug while you are away.
- You can also try feeding your dog during the day when you are NOT at home – as this activity alone can keep your dog busily distracted for hours while it 'hunts' for the food you have hidden, fulfilling its natural 'hunting' instinct.



Dear neighbour,

I believe my dog/s may be barking/howling excessively, causing some concerns in the neighbourhood. I am currently trying to address this situation and would like your assistance.

Please complete the below and drop this survey back in my letterbox.

Address:

Kindest regards.

Survey:

- Your dog/s is/are NOT causing me concern. Your dog/s is/are causing me anxiety.

If my dog is causing you concern, please provide details of this noise [date, time, and regularity].

Please include your name and phone number if it is okay for me to contact you about your feedback.