

How to help your dog overcome barking

Barking is normal dog behaviour that can become frustrating, especially when continuous.

Some dogs have a natural inclination to bark. Some breeds are more vocal because of their breeding. In other cases, while the barking isn't desirable, it has somehow remained intact in their genetic code. For example, a herding breed may be more inclined to bark than a stealthier hunting breed.



Barking is part of owning a dog. Owners have different expectations of what type of barking is a nuisance and what type and amount of barking is desirable and anticipated.

Knowing why your dog is barking can help you determine realistic expectations for your dog and what you are comfortable with as you navigate life together.

Some people want their dog to let them know when a delivery person has arrived or when something suspicious is happening outside. Others may prefer their dog to be less vocal, especially when they are out and about in public.

Barking is a behaviour that can quickly become more frequent if your dog practices it regularly. Your dog may soon bark whenever excited. Promoting calmness to prevent your dog from barking at everything is essential for everyone's sanity!

As barking is also an emotional response, and it's essential to determine the cause when trying to curb barking in your dog.

Barking is information

Understanding the cause for your dog's barking is essential to determine how to address it – managing fear barking will differ from that of boredom barking. There are several potential reasons why a dog might bark, including:

Excitement or frustration barking

You will see this high-pitch barking often during play or training. If a dog anticipates something rewarding is about to happen and begins to bark, they may be excited or frustrated that the event hasn't happened yet.

Anxious barking

You may hear this high-pitch barking (and sometimes howling) in dogs with separation-related struggles. It can carry on for a while, and it's important not to let your dog rehearse this barking but instead focus on games that encourage calmness and gradually build up independence.

Fear-based barking

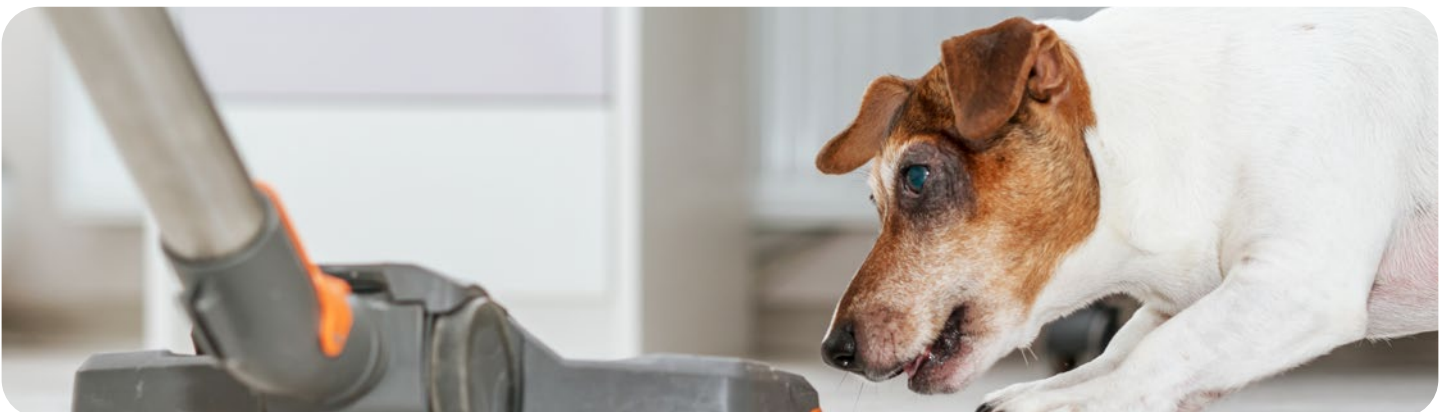
This barking sounds similar to frustration barking, except it sounds deeper and more fearful. The dog's body language may include lunging or trying to move away.

Attention-seeking or demand barking

This can start as a high-pitch frustration bark and then develop into attention-seeking/demand barking reasonably quickly after the initial barking is reinforced. Did you know you can inadvertently reinforce this barking by telling your dog to quiet down? Any attention can be perceived as reinforcement.

Boredom barking

This type of barking can occur when a dog is under-stimulated, such as when confined, in the garden, etc. The barking is often disjointed, and there may not appear to be a trigger or intention behind it.



Solutions

Here are several solutions to help your dog become less vocal. Remember, these are generalised solutions, and you may wish to seek further help from a professional reward-based, force-free, positive-reinforcement dog trainer.

Meet your dog's needs

As described, many dogs bark because their needs are not being met through social interaction, lack of enrichment or emotional distress. Once you learn why your dog is barking you will be able to provide activities and training to help fulfil your dog's needs.

For example:

- Desensitise your dog to triggers that cause barking
- Provide activities for your dog while they are left alone
- Play games that do not stimulate your dog to bark

Calmness

Calmness creates a dog that chooses independence over attention barking or a quiet, relaxing activity over boredom barking, such as engaging with a:

- Safe long-lasting chew
- Filled Kong
- Calm or lick mat
- Scatter feeding
- Scenting/sniffing



Ensure your dog can get plenty of rest and, more importantly, sleep in an area with few distractions! This simple activity minimises choices and encourages calmness.

Sleep and rest allow a dog to decompress and process the stress chemicals within its system.

Management and rehearsal

Prevent your dog from practising barking by removing them from situations that promote barking, for example:

- if your dog patrols the front of the house and barks at passersby, block visual access to windows or do not allow your dog in that part of the house
- if your dog reacts to the neighbour's dog, don't leave them out unsupervised. When you are out in the backyard, give your dog an activity to keep them occupied so they don't engage with the barking trigger.

Rehearse the space or room you want your dog to be quiet in. For example, if you want your dog to be quiet in the house don't engage them in highly excitable activities. Make the inside of your home a quiet or 'Zen' zone and show your dog that when they enter your home that only calm and quiet activities will occur within.

Boundaries/crates and place training

Grow your dog's ability to settle on their bed/crate or other designated place to prevent barking.

Make a bed or crate a great choice by:

- rewarding your dog whenever they choose to go to their place
- giving them a rewarding activity to complete on their place, such as a meaty bone or filled Kong
- not disturbing your dog when it chooses to retreat to a place for some quiet time.



Capture and reward silence

Capture and reward moments of calmness and silence. The more your dog is rewarded for the behaviours you want, the more they will repeat those rewardable moments.

Quiet or silent cue

Train your dog to respond to a quiet or silent cue or signal that you can use to halt unwanted behaviours and then redirect your dog to a more appropriate activity or their boundary.

*Should these solutions not help your dog reduce its barking and vocalisation, please consult an **APDT-approved trainer** to assess your pet and provide a more structured transformation plan for you and your dog. You may find your dog needs a desensitisation program or in extreme cases veterinarian-prescribe medication.*
