

Behavior Solutions: Barking

Has your dog's barking become a nuisance? While you appreciate the notification of visitors, you don't necessarily need to be alerted to every squirrel, bicycle, or delivery person that passes by your home. Barking is a natural behavior in dogs, but when excessive it can quickly become an annoyance to you and your neighbors. Your dog may fill his time by barking, but the experts at Starmark Animal Behavior Center can help you teach him a more desirable and quieter behavior instead.

The Basis of Barking

Domestic dogs inherit barking behaviors from their wild ancestors. They may bark to call pack members (you, your family, and possibly other pets), to alert others of their location, or to get attention when they are left alone. Dogs bark a warning when their territory has been invaded, and to try to make the intruder go away. Keep in mind that, while you understand your territory is your house and yard, your dog may perceive his territory as being much larger and feel the need to ward off potential intruders. Overstimulation by things in the environment, such as activity in neighboring yards or other animals can also trigger barking.

Some breeds of dogs are more prone to barking behavior because of the jobs they have been bred to perform, though there are always exceptions. Some herding breeds, like Australian shepherds and Shetland sheepdogs, bark in order to herd their flock. The

Kuvasz and Great Pyrenees also worked closely with herds, but as guardians keeping would-be predators at bay with their bark. Owning these types of dogs may mean you and your family become the herd under their watch. Terriers bark to tell their handlers of their location in underground tunnels when they find game or need to be dug out. Again, our nonworking pets inherit this working behavior. Look into the breeds you are interested in to see if their needs and traits fit your lifestyle.

To Bark or Not To Bark

Having a dog doesn't mean forfeiting calm and peace. Through prevention and patience your home can remain a quiet haven for you and your best friend. You can start by accustoming your puppy to a wide variety of people, situations, and sounds in a calm, positive way. This will get your puppy used to the various things he will encounter in his environment and reduce alarm barking. Begin obedience training with your dog as soon as you bring him home to establish a clear line of communication and to keep him active and mentally stimulated. Daily exercise will help to burn off energy that might otherwise go into barking.

When you are unable to supervise your dog, keep him in a crate or puppy-proofed area in your home where you can control his surroundings. A lot of traffic or activity going on around him when he is left as an observer can induce frustration and barking. Give your dog an interactive toy, such as a mental stimulation toy from Starmark, to keep him from barking out of boredom or lack of stimulation. Instead of a bowl, use a mental stimulation toy to feed your dog, or make it a special toy he receives only when you leave the house.

He'll have to work hard to extract the small treats or food hidden inside, and he'll be too busy to work barking into his schedule.

Teaching your dog to bark and be quiet on command will clearly tell your dog when it is appropriate to vocalize. The Pro-Training Clicker™ makes teaching your dog the **spea**k and **qui**et commands quick and easy. Have a friend stand outside your front door to listen as you give your dog the **spea**k command. Tell your dog to **spea**k, and then have your friend knock on your door to induce your dog to bark. When he does, immediately click and reward him with a food treat. Then, while he is barking, give the command **qui**et, and hold an especially tasty treat close to his nose. Since he won't be able to eat and bark at the same time, he will stop barking. The instant he is quiet, click and reward him with the treat. Practicing this exercise several times and staying consistent will show your dog when it is acceptable to bark. Reward your dog regularly for being quiet in the house without being told. Visit <http://starmarkacademy.com> for streaming video lessons on these and other training topics.

Barking is sometimes inadvertently reinforced by owners responding to it by yelling at their dogs to be quiet or by calling them into the house. Doing this shows your dog that barking is a means of getting your attention and can encourage nuisance barking.

Several types of collars are available to help deter your dog from excessive barking. Citronella, ultrasonic, and electronic collars pick up either the sound or the throat vibrations of the bark. Citronella collars discharge a small amount of citronella when

your dog barks. Ultrasonic collars emit a high-pitched, uncomfortable tone, which will stop once he is quiet. Electronic collars release an electric stimulation that shuts off when your dog stops barking. Be sure to research each collar carefully to choose the one that will best work for your dog.

Hushed Hounds

Your dog doesn't have to be a cause of headaches in and around your house. At Starmark Academy we believe that a well-behaved and well-trained dog is a happy dog and a better companion. Each dog is unique, and so is each owner. That's why we use a variety of techniques, customizing your dog's training experience to suit his personality and your individual needs. Using our training techniques, which emphasize consistency and patience, you can assure that your canine companion will be a calm and quiet one.

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