

## 5 Tips to Help Stop Dog Barking

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Living with a dog that barks constantly can be quite an irritant. Not just for the dog's human family but potentially for neighbors, dog training classmates, and more. As a Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, I have a confession to make – I have one of those annoying barking [dogs](#)! So, what do you do when your dog engages in this [behavior](#)? The first step is to determine the “why.”

Since dogs don't have “words” like humans do, they use barking to express a variety of emotional states. Understanding what is motivating your dog to bark is very often the key to successfully resolving the problem. Let's examine some of the common reasons behind excessive barking, and learn what you can do in each case:

#### 1. Boredom

Dogs who are understimulated mentally and physically can engage in repetitive barking to alleviate their boredom. Providing your dog with things to do during the day, as well as plenty of [exercise](#), can go a long way toward decreasing this type of barking. Take your dog for long walks (or longer ones if you already walk your dog) and give the dog time during walks to sniff and engage in the environment so that he gets physical AND mental enrichment. When you can't be with your dog, give him a food-stuffed or puzzle-type toy to work on so that he has a more positive activity to engage in than barking.

#### 2. Fear and/or anxiety

Dogs that are fearful, anxious or [stressed](#) can use barking as a way to express their need for the “scary” or stressful thing or situation to go away. Helping the dog learn that whatever he is afraid of is not a threat is the key to solving this type of problem.

#### 3. Alerts

Some dogs, particularly dogs of guarding-type breeds or mixes, will bark to “alert” you of the presence of something new in the environment. In this situation, you want to provide the dog with an alternate behavior. For example, if your dog barks feverishly when the delivery man comes to the door, teach your dog a really strong recall (come) cue and use that to interrupt the barking. Reward the dog for ceasing to bark and coming to you, and gradually you can extend this to a “come and lie down and stay” behavior.

#### 4. Attention

Barking can be a great way for dogs to get attention from humans. Even if you yell at your dog to be quiet, you can be unwittingly reinforcing this behavior because a dog that wants attention will take whatever he can get from you. Just as with the other examples, this can be modified using an alternate, incompatible behavior, such as asking the dog to sit, etc. Or, simply remove the reinforcement – when the dog barks at you for something, ignore him completely and wait for him to be quiet and then heavily reinforce that behavior. In the beginning you may find the dog barking even harder to get your attention (known as an extinction burst) so stay resolved and patient until the dog learns this is no longer a useful behavior (I recommend getting a good set of ear plugs!)

#### 5. Excitement

Many dogs who become overly excited and who lack impulse control can bark to express their “enthusiasm.” My dog Odie is a puppy who came from a deprived background during his critical development period and lacks a lot of impulse control. With these types of dogs, you can work on training some “self control” behaviors, such as a sit or down stay, or even any type of alternate behaviors, such as a trick. The key is that the dog is doing something else that isn't barking. So in Odie's case, I taught him to target my hand with his nose, shake, high five, bow and a variety of other tricks, I also taught “traditional” cues such as sit and down, and when he begins to bark excitedly at home or in a class, I immediately ask him to do one of the behaviors and reward him for it. Training impulse control behaviors such as stays and settle can also be very helpful with these types of dogs.

Another important thing to remember with dogs that

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bark is the influence of [breed](#). Some breeds have a tendency to bark more than others, such as terriers, shepherds and hounds. [Take some time to research your specific breed](#), or breed mix to see what the breed(s) was originally bred for and what behavioral tendencies are common to help you understand the basis for barking behavior.

Always avoid punishing your dog for this behavior – most dogs bark due to an underlying emotional issue and punishment can either increase the barking or lead the dog to expressing their needs with an equally undesirable behavior. If you find you need assistance, particularly if the dog is barking due to a serious behavior concern, contact a professional to guide you. Visit the [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](#), the [Animal Behavior Society](#), and the [IAABC](#) to find a professional near you.

*If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.*