



Potter's Angels Rescue

Tips for curbing excessive vocalization

Dogs will be dogs, and most dogs will bark, whine and howl at times - it's only natural. Dogs vocalize to communicate with humans and to express themselves. Sometimes we want our dogs to bark in order to warn us about potential danger or protect us from harm. However, excessive dog barking can be considered a behavior problem. What is the solution? Well, your dog needs to understand when to bark and when to be quiet, and it's your job to teach this to them. Start working on problem barking as soon as you can. As with all behavioral issues, the longer you wait, the harder it gets to curb the behavior. It is a good idea to teach your dog the Speak/Quiet Commands. This may be easier said than done. However, with dedication and consistency, you can teach your dog to bark on command AND to be quiet.

It is important to understand that dogs bark for various reasons. They do not bark just to annoy you and your neighbors, nor do they bark for spite or revenge. Dogs don't bark just because they can (though it might seem that way at times). Certain dog breeds bark more than others - some types of dogs were actually bred to be barkers. Then again, the Basenji does not bark at all (though the breed can vocalize in other ways). If you listen closely, you will eventually learn your dog's different barks. Understanding the reason why your dog barks is the first step towards controlling the behavior. In general, dogs will most commonly bark for the following reasons:

- **Warning/Alert:** It is natural for a dog to bark when someone is at the door or when strangers pass the house or car. Many will bark if they sense some type of threat, proclaiming "I'm here protecting this place so don't mess with me." The sound of this bark is usually sharp, loud and authoritative. Honing this instinct with training can help protect your home and family.
- **Anxiety:** Anxious barking often seems to be an act of self-soothing for many dogs. It is often high-pitched and sometimes accompanied by whining. This type of barking is common for dogs with separation anxiety.
- **Playfulness/Excitement:** This type of barking is especially common in puppies and young dogs. Many dogs will bark while playing with people or other dogs. Even the sound of the bark tends to sound upbeat and possibly musical. Some dogs will bark excitedly when they know they are about to go for a walk or car ride.
- **Attention-seeking:** When you hear this bark, you will usually know just what it means. This bark says "Hey! Hey! Look! Here I am!" Other dogs may whine and bark together to get attention.
- **Boredom:** The bark of a bored dog sounds like a dog that barks just to hear her own voice. Though it tends to be annoying, it is also kind of sad. Bored dogs often bark to release excess energy, and sometimes bark out of loneliness. They usually need an activity and perhaps even a companion.
- **Responding to Other Dogs:** This is probably a familiar scenario - one dog down the street starts barking, and one by one the rest of your block joins in.

Prevent and Stop Excessive Barking

Once you determine the cause of your dog's excessive barking, you can begin to control the behavior. The best way to prevent excessive barking in the first place is to try and remove any potential sources of the behavior. You also want to be certain not to inadvertently encourage the barking. Finally, give her better things to do besides barking.

- Make sure your dog gets plenty of exercise so there is not as much pent-up energy to burn by barking.
- Avoid leaving a lonely dog alone for long periods of time if possible. To prevent barking while you're away, leave your dog inside the house, turn the radio on to soft music, and close the drapes and blinds when you leave.
- Never comfort, pet, hug or feed your dog when she is barking for attention or out of anxiety - that would be rewarding the behavior, thus encouraging it.
- Shouting at your dog to stop barking does not help. It may actually cause her to bark even more.
- Avoid punishments like shock collars. They are not only painful and unkind - many dogs will learn to test them and eventually work around them. They now have citronella collars which are painless that emit a spritz of citronella when the dog barks. These have worked for us on many dogs while others don't seem to be bothered by it and will bark until it's empty.
- Don't leave your dog on a chain. Dogs on chains (especially 24/7) have been proven to develop neurotic behaviors including, but not limited to, barking excessively. Bring them in the house where they belong and spend some time with them.
- Try to get her attention with a clap or whistle. *Once she is quiet*, redirect her attention to something productive and rewarding - like a toy or treat.
- Sometimes the spray of a water bottle is an effective way to redirect their attention and curb the unwanted behavior.
- After getting your dog's attention, practice basic commands, like sit and down in order to shift her focus.
- DO NOT let your dog bark constantly outside, regardless of the reason. You can hardly train her to stop barking by yelling at her across the yard. Plus, it is one of the fastest ways to turn neighbors into enemies and send an invitation to your local police.
- Train your dog to Speak and Be Quiet with plenty of yummy treats to reward them with when they stop barking.
- Consult your veterinarian and/or trainer if you continue to face barking issues despite your best efforts.

A Note About De-Barking Surgery

"Debarking," or cordectomy, is an elective surgical procedure involving partial removal of a dog's vocal cords. Debarking does not take away the dog's ability to bark - it just makes it sound quieter and raspy (considered annoying by some). In this dog lover's opinion, debarking surgery is unnecessary and unfair to the dog. Surgery and anesthesia are always risks, so any procedure that is purely for human convenience and does not medically benefit the patient or animal community should be avoided. In addition, excessive barking indicates an underlying issue that is usually behavioral. Surgery takes the noise away, but the anxiety, fear or similar problem remains unaddressed. Rather than debarking your dog, spend your time and money on training and/or visiting a veterinary behaviorist.