

How to Deal With a Dog's Excessive Barking

A dog's bark can mean any number of things: hello, go away, what was that, pay attention to me, etc. Some dogs have a bark that is as bad as a bite. These are the dogs that are more vocal than we - or our neighbors - think is acceptable. If your dog seems to bark excessively, the first step in stopping her behavior is to identify the reasons for it.

Some dog breeds tend to bark more than others. Beagles and certain toy breeds have a reputation for being "yappy." It is a trait they were bred for; a beagle barks constantly to alert the hunter as to the location of the prey, and toy dogs often served as early "invader alarms." Yet, even within breeds, some individuals are just more "talkative" than others. Some owners unknowingly train their dogs to bark excessively. Anytime you reward your dog for barking, you are encouraging her to repeat the behavior.

The reward doesn't have to be a treat; any attention you give her reinforces the behavior. For example, if your dog goes into a barking fit when you walk in the door, the best thing to do is ignore her. If you bend down and give her attention to quiet her, you have just given her what she wanted. Another common scenario is yelling at your dog to stop barking. You yell, your dog barks again, you yell, dog barks, and on and on. Every time you yell, you are joining the dog in her negative behavior, and therefore encouraging it.

There are many ways to break an excessive barking habit. Anti-bark collars release either a blast of citronella scent (which dogs dislike) or a mild shock when the dog barks. Some people use these collars to break barking that is associated with certain times of day. However, the long-term success of this technique varies. The most humane and effective way to change a dog's negative behavior is through training. Whether you choose to follow a how-to training book or work in person with a professional dog trainer, using positive techniques to break a barking habit is better for your dog and your relationship with her.

Barking to alert her owner to potential danger is what your dog's ancestors were bred to do, and the behavior has been genetically passed to her. It is her instinct to bark at the garbage truck when it pauses in front of your house. Even though the truck comes every week and causes no damage, she still must warn you that something big is outside. However, barking for extended periods of time at every new sound quickly becomes a problem. With patience, training and treats, you can teach your dog when and how much barking is acceptable.

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About the Author

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