

Constant Barking Can Be Avoided!



Introduction.

Why dogs bark.

Dogs have evolved to live in social groups and because of this they have developed complex methods of visual and vocal communication. The sounds they make include grunting, whining, yelping, screaming, howling, growling and barking. Listening to the tone of these sounds can sometimes reveal something about the emotions of the dogs.

Barking can be a nuisance.

Loud and excessive barking, howling and other dog sounds can be disturbing to neighbours. The level of disturbance can be increased by the fact that these noises are intermittent, which makes them difficult to adjust to. Of course, like many other noises, there are times when a dog's vocal behaviour may be generally antisocial, such as late at night. However the owner is sometimes unaware that seemingly acceptable levels of barking and other dog noises can also be a problem at other times. For example, when barking occurs at times that conflict with other people's routines. Owners may also be unaware that there is problem if the noise only occurs when their dog is left on its own.

Sometimes the noise made by dogs results in neighbours asking for the noise to stop or be reduced to an acceptable level. Often complainants are not concerned for themselves but for the welfare of the dog because they interpret the sound as an indicator of distress. When a complaint about noise nuisance is received, the local authority has a duty to investigate. Formal action can be taken, but this is usually seen as an option of last resort where a statutory noise nuisance exists, is likely to occur or recur, and all other efforts have proved unsuccessful. The aim of this leaflet is to help the owners of noisy dogs to understand why their dogs might be making a noise and to enable them to use this knowledge to help resolve the problems through better management.

Owner's action plan.

Stage 1 - Determine the scale of the problem.

Stage 2 - Introduce 'First-Aid' to immediately reduce the problem.

Stage 3 - Determine the causes and treatment options.

Stage 1 - Determine the scale of the problem.

You will be aware of the extent of your dog's vocal behaviour when you are at home but you also need to establish how much it occurs when there is no one at home and what sort of noise your dog makes in both cases.

Ways you can do this include:

- ⊙ Leave in the normal way then sneak back and listen outside.
- ⊙ Video camera (position where your dog can't damage it).
- ⊙ Security camera attached to a domestic video machine.
- ⊙ Web cam.
- ⊙ Tape recorder/Dictaphone (voice activated).
- ⊙ Ask a neighbour to keep a diary.

Stage 2 - Introduce 'First-Aid' to immediately reduce the problem.

'First-Aid' action can ease the problem and help reduce disturbance to neighbours, giving them a break from the noise to improve or preserve relations while you introduce the necessary treatment, and provide space to enable you to discuss the problem at a time when they are not affected by the noise and are more receptive.

Although intended to be short-term, some first-aid can also be used long-term. Your options include:

- **Improved management.**
- **Lodge you dog with friends, relatives or professional pet sitters.**
- **Take your dog with you.**
- **Boarding.**
- **Management at strategic times.**
- **Visit your dog during the day.**

- **Improved management.**

Simple measures can often be used to reduce noise nuisance:

 - ✿ If barking is directed to things beyond the boundary of your property avoid letting your dog into your garden or yard unsupervised at times when it is likely to bark.
 - ✿ Try and occupy your dog when the problem is likely to occur, such as when people are going to and from school, or work. Alternatively your dog could be walked at these times.
 - ✿ Keep your dog away from windows that allow it to view people and animals passing your property. Keeping it off furniture or closing curtains may help. Keeping a dog away from the boundary fences of larger properties can also help.
 - ✿ Avoid triggering vocal behaviour associated with excitement for example, prior to walks or feeding and during play at unsociable times.
 - ✿ Keep your dog in areas of the house that will reduce noise nuisance at times when barking is likely to occur for example, away from partition walls.
 - ✿ Don't leave your dog outside if it barks to be let in. If you have visitors don't leave your dog in your garden or yard if it will bark at them through glass doors or windows.
- **Lodge you dog with friends, neighbours, relatives or professional pet sitters.**
 - ✿ These may be able to look after your dog when you are away from home.
- **Take your dog with you.**
 - ✿ If possible avoid leaving your dog unattended. Consider taking it to work with you if this is an option.

- **Boarding.**
 - ✳ This is best considered if your dog has previously been boarded without showing signs of stress or after a successful test stay. Consider daytime-only boarding if problems occur when you are at work.
- **Management at strategic times.**
 - ✳ It may only be necessary to manage your dog's behaviour at strategic times for example, if your neighbours are shift workers and need to sleep in the morning.
- **Visit your dog during the day.**

To improve the dog's welfare and to allow it access to a toilet area during the day, it may be helpful for you to return home or for someone to visit it. However, some dogs are unsettled by these regular visits and become vocal when the person leaves. So it can be beneficial to consider the use of a dog flap so that your dog has control over its own toileting arrangements. Consider:

 - ✳ The safety of your property if the size of your dog means that a large dog flap would have to be used.
 - ✳ The safety of others if your dog gets loose.
 - ✳ The safety of your dog if there is a realistic chance of it being at risk.
 - ✳ Whether your boundary is secure.
 - ✳ Whether your dog might create more noise or become vocal for other reasons.

Stage 3 - Determine the causes and treatment options.

To resolve nuisance noise you need to identify the causes and introduce treatment or training to address them. The methods for determining the scale of the problem discussed above can be used to provide clues. Other clues can be found in symptoms that occur both when there is someone at home and when your dog is left alone.

Possible reasons for nuisance noise:

- Separation anxiety.
- Development of over-dependence.
- Fear or phobic reaction to sights or sounds outside or inside the home.
- Territorial.
- Attention seeking.
- Social (for example calling to other dogs in the district).
- Barking in play or aggression (for example two or more dogs living together).
- Predatory/chase behaviour.
- Frustration (for example because the dog did not expect to be left behind).
- Senility.
- Separation anxiety.

When a particular person is at home does your dog:

 - ✳ Immediately follow them from room to room?
 - ✳ Need to settle in close proximity to them?
 - ✳ Need and demand a high level of attention from them?
 - ✳ Stay close to them on walks away from home?
 - ✳ Seem to settle when it is unlikely it will be left, for example late evening?

When separated from the person or they have left the home does your dog do one or more of the following?

- ✳ Howl/whine/ bark repeatedly in a way that sounds distressed?
- ✳ Damage doors or windows that would allow it to get to them?
- ✳ Lose toilet control?
- ✳ Drool/salivate?
- ✳ Pant?
- ✳ Pace?
- ✳ Become sick?

- ✿ Appear anxious or depressed as they prepare to leave?
- ✿ Show a higher level of distress in the first 1/2 hour after being left (assessed by video, tape, neighbour's diary)?
- ✿ Show excessive excitement on their return?
- ✿ Ignore food or chews that have been left behind as a distraction?

Separation anxiety occurs when a dog becomes anxious when separated from an owner due to treating them as a mother substitute and failing to develop independence.

Action to take:

Treatment is likely to involve gradually reducing your dog's dependence on the person and developing its capacity to spend time on its own without distress.

Consult your veterinary surgeon.

It may be advisable to consult your veterinary surgeon; anxiety and fear can be caused or made worse by general ill health and some specific medical conditions, including senile dementia. Your veterinary surgeon will be able to rule out a medical problem and refer you to someone suitably qualified to introduce behaviour therapy. A veterinary surgeon's involvement will also be necessary if your dog requires medication to reduce anxiety or fear as part of the treatment programme.

● **Development of over-dependence.**

- ✿ Dogs can learn to become dependent upon one or more people in later life due to greater availability, such as when someone has time off work, or other things they depend on for a sense of security are removed, after moving house for example.
- ✿ The symptoms and action to take are similar to separation anxiety but can involve more than one person.
- ✿ Dependence can also occur because of increased need, if the dog becomes fearful of something such as fireworks.

● **Fear or phobic reaction to sights or sounds outside or inside the home.**

When one or more people are at home does your dog:

- ✿ Like to check where they are but is happy to settle elsewhere?
- ✿ Like to be next to them or hide if something frightens it?
- ✿ Look frightened, ears back, tail and body posture low, pace, pant in response to something?
- ✿ Seem unable to settle if its attempts to seek comfort and security are unsuccessful?
- ✿ Bark at things that frighten it?

When no-one is at home, does your dog:

- ✿ Howl/whine/ bark repeatedly in a way that sounds distressed and as if to call you back?
- ✿ Bark at the noises or other things it is frightened of in a defensive way?

If it is frightened of something that happens, or anticipates might happen, when it is on its own your dog **may** also display its distress and attempt to cope in one or more of the following ways:

- ✿ Damage doors or windows that would allow it to follow you?
- ✿ Attempt to hide, including digging into floors and furniture?
- ✿ Attempt to get into rooms where it may feel more secure?
- ✿ Attempt to get out of rooms associated with something frightening?
- ✿ Attempt to escape through any door or window?
- ✿ Tremble?
- ✿ Drool/salivate?
- ✿ Pace?
- ✿ Pant?
- ✿ Lose toilet control despite being house trained at other times?

Action to take:

- ✿ If your dog copes by hiding provide a den for it to hide in if it wants to.
- ✿ Try and mask sounds using the radio etc but not so loudly that this causes a problem for your neighbours.
- ✿ Close curtains or doors to prevent your dog being exposed to the sight of things that trigger fear.
- ✿ A pheromone diffuser may help your dog settle when it is alone.
- ✿ Consult your veterinary surgeon (see above).

- **Territorial** (this can be related to fear (see above) for example of people).

Does your dog:

- ✿ Bark with a threatening tone at the sight or sound of people, animals or vehicles approaching or passing, and stop when they have gone away?

Action to take:

- ✿ Don't give your dog unsupervised access to locations where it is more likely to bark, such as a front garden or rooms at the front of your home.
- ✿ Keep windows closed so barking is less likely to be triggered.
- ✿ Consider covering windows with curtains, or the bottom of them with glass-etch spray or stick on frosted plastic.
- ✿ Train your dog to recall and call it indoors if it barks while it is in the garden.
- ✿ Keep your dog away from situations that may trigger barking, such as children making their way to and from school, perhaps by walking it.
- ✿ Make sure the boundary is secure to ensure other peoples' safety.
- ✿ Consider moving deliveries to a box away from your house.
- ✿ Leave music on to mask sounds outside but not so loud that it annoys neighbours.
- ✿ Reward your dog when it doesn't bark at things outside.
- ✿ Don't shout or rush to investigate the cause of its barking because you will reward the behaviour with attention and add to your dog's excitement.
- ✿ Consult your veterinary surgeon about behaviour therapy (see above).

- **Attention seeking.**

When someone is at home, does your dog:

- ✿ Seek a lot of attention in one or a number of ways that may include barking?
- ✿ Try harder to get attention when it is ignored?
- ✿ Seem able to recognise when it will not receive attention and not seek it for example when it is bedtime, or when you are busy with routine chores?
- ✿ Show an absence of the other symptoms listed for separation anxiety and fear?

When no-one is at home, does your dog:

- ✿ Bark in a repetitive manner, perhaps with a demanding tone, with pauses that suggest it is listening for a response?
- ✿ Show an absence of the other symptoms listed for separation anxiety and fear?

Barking or other vocalisation as an attention-seeking device may not necessarily occur when you are present but your dog may use these sounds to communicate with other people such as passers-by or your neighbours.

Action to take:

- ✿ Stop responding to vocal attention seeking behaviour. Make it clear that you are aware of what your dog is doing by looking at your dog, but then that you are not going to respond by looking away. If you have to make it clearer walk out of the room.
- ✿ Give your dog attention when it seeks attention in another way for example by fetching and holding a toy.
- ✿ Reward your dog with attention when it is settled and not seeking interaction with you.

- ✿ Ask your dog to do something for you, such as sit, before giving it attention. This is best done whilst looking away from your dog, so that attention is given by turning to it once it has sat down. This training will lower its expectation of having attention on demand and reduced the likelihood of it barking to get a response.
- ✿ Give your dog sufficient exercise and mental stimulation so as to make your attention throughout the day less important.
- ✿ If the vocal behaviour also occurs when you are absent from home you can provide things to occupy your dog as you are leaving, such as chew toys or a few pieces of food scattered on the floor for it to find.
- ✿ Ask neighbours not to talk to your dog if it barks for their attention.
- ✿ Attention seeking can be the first symptom of a more general disturbance in a dog's health or emotional state. Seek treatment advice from your veterinary surgeon (see above).

Behavioural treatment is likely to include enlargement of the points discussed above and the detail required to carry them out effectively. It is also likely to include teaching your dog to associate specific clues with not getting attention so that these can be used to increase the likelihood that your dog will remain quiet at key times.

- **Social (for example calling to other dogs in the district).**

Does your dog:

- ✿ Bark to other dogs in a friendly way when it hears them in the area?

Action to take:

- ✿ Employ the techniques discussed under Improved management in the First-Aid section on page 2.

- **Barking in play or aggression (for example two or more dogs living together).**

When someone is at home, does your dog:

- ✿ Bark when it is playing?

Action to take:

- ✿ Employ the techniques discussed under Improved management in the First-Aid section on page 2.
- ✿ If barking in play between dogs occurs when no-one is at home they can be separated. The use of a child or dog gate will allow them to maintain social contact with reduced likelihood of them engaging in play.

- **Predatory/chase behaviour.**

Does your dog:

- ✿ Bark at wildlife it sees in the garden?
- ✿ Chase and bark at traffic or other things that pass your property?

Action to take:

- ✿ Employ the techniques discussed under Improved management in the First-Aid section on page 2.

- **Frustration (for example because your dog did not expect to be left behind).**

Does your dog:

- ✿ Display the same excitement it shows when you are going to walk it when you leave without it?
- ✿ Bark with a tone that suggests that it is frustrated or annoyed as soon as you leave?
- ✿ Show an absence of the symptoms listed under separation anxiety and fear?

Action to take:

- ✿ Use different clothing for walking your dog.
- ✿ Leave your dog's lead where it can see it at all times and it will not be disturbed by you as leave if you are going without your dog. These will help to alter its expectations and reduce the likelihood of frustration.

- **Senility.**

- ✿ Is it an older dog that has recently developed the problem?

Action to take:

- ✿ Contact your veterinary surgeon (see above).

[Click here for more information](#)

Act now if your dog also.....

- Escapes from the house when it is left.
- Causes or is likely to cause damage to itself.
- Is an older dog and has recently become vocal.

See 'Consult your veterinary surgeon' on page 4.

Keep your neighbours on your side!

- Don't take their complaints personally.
- Take their complaints seriously and think about their point of view.
- Involve them in monitoring and treatment.
- Speak to them regularly.
- Keep them informed about what you are doing to try and resolve the problem.
- Adapt to their routines to minimise noise nuisance.

Actions not advised!

- Automatic and mechanical devices should not be used to suppress vocal behaviour if there is any risk that they will increase or cause fear or anxiety.
- Getting a second dog for company as a means of trying to stop your dog from barking may increase it for example if the barking is at things that occur outside your home. A second dog will only help if its presence increases your dog's sense of security - the likelihood of which is dependent upon the level of emotional attachment you're your dog has previously established to other dogs.
- Suitability of these actions must be properly identified under expert guidance.

Punishment

- Do not punish your dog if it has done something you consider to be wrong while you were away from home. Dogs do not have a sense of right and wrong and behaviour you may think looks like guilt is actually fear of what you will do. Even if you only use harsh words your dog may become more anxious and more likely to bark/howl/whine, chew or lose toilet control when left alone.
- Attempts to punish or shout at your dog for making a noise when you are at home may accidentally reward it with attention and make it seem that you are reacting to the same thing. It may see your behaviour as unprovoked aggression and become more anxious generally leading to further problems. It may even learn to be defensive.

See 'Consult your veterinary surgeon' on page 4.

Work with the local authority

Work with local authority officials such as those from environmental health and dog wardens. They are working in everyone's interests and want to help you.

- Seek advice and support as necessary
- Keep a record of everything you do to manage and resolve the problem so they are aware of the steps you have taken, successes and difficulties
- Record the times when you leave your dog unattended so that these can be compared with complaints of noise

[Click here for more information](#)

Further help:

Dog Warden Service at Huntingdonshire District Council (01480 388302) during office hours, Monday to Thursday 09:00 to 17:00 and Friday 09:00 to 16:30.

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC) PO Box 46, Worcester WR8 9YS (enclose SAE for list of members)

Tel: 01386 751151

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Veterinary review by Jon Bowen BVetMed MRCVS DipAS(CABC)

Summary of advice written for DEFRA by
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