

BARKING

The first and most important step is to find out **WHY** your dog is barking. Focusing on trying to stop the barking, without knowing the underlying reason will leave you and your dog frustrated.

REASONS TO BARK

Genetic predisposition to alert to novel things in environment (guarding breeds high on this list—this is what they were bred to do!)

Fear response (barking is a distance increasing behaviour—make the scary thing GO AWAY!)

Excitement (we may shout and cheer for joy—so can our dogs!)

Boredom

Attention-seeking

Discourage strangers from entering property

Stress



WHAT IS REINFORCING THE BARKING BEHAVIOUR?

Barking behaviour may be triggered accidentally, however there are several reinforcers that can maintain the barking behaviour:

Attention from owner (petting, talking, eye contact, scolding—some attention is better than no attention at all!)

Opening door to allow inside/outside

Playing with him

Attention from another animal/person

The 'scary thing' goes away - instant relief "I chased away the scary_____"

ENCOURAGING QUIET

Excitement may lead a dog to bark, and if what immediately follows the barking is reinforcing to the dog, he will likely bark again in a similar context in the future. For instance, when a dog hears you get his leash, he may happily bark in anticipation of a WALK. If you want to eliminate that barking, you must be sure to get a period of calm, quiet behavior before bringing him out for a walk. In other words, quiet and calm behavior leads to walks, while barking causes you to put the leash away and ignore him for a while.



BOREDOM-BARKING

Dogs naturally 'work' during the day—work to hunt for food and work for the job we humans have bred them for! Without a 'job to do' many dogs can become bored in their backyard. Combat boredom barking with daily exercise—physical and mental. Daily walks with lots of opportunity to sniff and explore (great combination of both a physical and mental workout). Working for food instead of being fed out of a bowl—stuffed kongs, treat balls, frozen pupsicles, food puzzles—give the dog a fun and interactive job to do! Look in to what your breed of dog was originally bred to do—are there activities /dog sports available for your dog to do what he was bred for?!

ATTENTION SEEKING BARKING

Make sure you are meeting your dog's basic needs for exercise, companionship, and attention. Reinforce your dog regularly with attention when he is quiet. Always ignore him when he demand-barks. Don't talk to him or scold. Just avert your eyes, or turn your back, and/or walk away. But, most importantly find opportunities each day to reinforce CALM behaviour!



BARKING AT NOVEL STIMULI

Dogs that alert-bark at novel stimuli are often appreciated by their owners. People like to know when something unusual is happening in the area, when a stranger is coming on the property, or when someone comes to their door. However, this behavior can become problematic if the dog alert-barks excessively to innocuous stimuli like a bird chirp, a falling leaf, the same neighbor going through their same routine every day, or if the dog cannot be silenced when his alert-barking is no longer required, (i.e., when you invite a guest into your home but the dog keeps yapping).

For a dog that alert-barks excessively, you'll need to teach him that this level of job responsibility is simply not required of him! Here are a few suggestions.

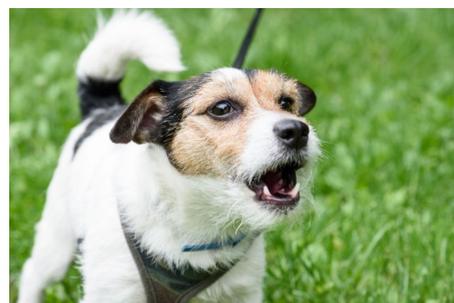
Management options: Initially, you may be able to reduce the barking by blocking the dog's access to his favorite "guard posts," like a window or glass door that lets him view all the mundane goings-on outdoors. Temporarily put up some cardboard or screening to block the views. Use a form of white noise (radio or television) to help block outdoor noises. Supply interesting food puzzles and chews, just before guests are expected to arrive, to keep him quietly occupied.

Training: Consistently and generously reinforce him when he hears something but does not bark. Pay attention to the earliest sign that your dog is alerting to something and reinforce before he ramps up and begins barking. Teach him to bark on one cue and shut his mouth on another cue. Remember to reinforce the dog for only brief silences at first, gradually building up the time he is required to remain silent before getting reinforced. The moment the barking begins, say "quiet" and then try one or more of the following to help the dog achieve silence:

Distract him (with handclap, whistle, etc.) and when he stops barking, calmly praise and reinforce. **EXTRA TIP:** If you scatter a few treats on the floor instead of hand-feeding them, most dogs will go into a quiet "scavenger mode" to find those treats. - Call him away from the area of arousal (i.e., near a door or window). By creating distance from that arousal area, the dog will have an easier time settling down. Reinforce when he is quiet. - Give him an alternative behavior to do such as "down," "go to your mat," "fetch," or "go find your toy." A dog that's carrying a favorite toy in his mouth will have a hard time barking at the same time.

REDUCING FEAR-RELATED BARKING

If a dog is fearful of something that you know is not a threat to him, especially if this person, animal, or thing needs to be a regular part of his life, the best strategy is to desensitize and counter-condition him to these fear-eliciting stimuli. It is extremely important to seek out professional help from a qualified dog trainer or veterinary behaviourist for this type of barking.



For further advice please contact us at

dogtrainingmorleyvetcentre@gmail.com