

BARKING

Dr. Don McKeown, Dr. Andrew Luescher & Dr. Mary Machum
Department of Population Medicine
Ontario Veterinary College
(519) 823-8800

Barking has many different causes, and because of this, can be an extremely difficult behavior to control. Excessive barking is usually caused by some combination of the following:

Inherited drive - Any inherited behavior is extremely difficult to change.

Learning - Most dogs have learned to bark to get something, and it usually works. For example, each time your dog barks at the mailman, the mailman goes away. Or if the dog spends the afternoon in the yard barking, someone will eventually yell at him to be quiet - and, some attention, bad or good, is better than no attention. Dogs that are taught to speak for food often develop a barking problem.

Territorial defense - Dogs bark when their territory is threatened. This is another inherited component of barking, and therefore is difficult to eliminate. It is seen when the dog barks at strangers (or squirrels) that approach the house or yard.

Play

Stereotypic barking - This occurs when the dog has developed barking as a way of dealing with conflict or stress. The dog then barks whenever it is in conflict, much as a person might bite their fingernails. This type of barking tends to be measured, almost a monotone and repetitive.

Separation Anxiety - The dog barks only when the owner goes out, as a way of relieving the tension and anxiety it feels when left alone.

TREATMENT OF PROBLEM BARKING

1. Train the dog *not* to bark by eliminating any reward the dog might get for barking. You must *totally ignore* the barking - do not look at, speak to or touch the dog while it is barking. If you give in after the dog has barked for 15 minutes and shout at the dog, the barking has been reinforced and will be even more difficult to eliminate. When you start to ignore any behavior that the dog has learned will get him a response, the behavior will *increase in frequency and intensity* before going into extinction (stopping completely). You should reward the dog with touch and food when it is not barking.
2. *Train* the dog to come, sit and stay. Then, issue a command just before the dog starts to bark. Reward the dog, within 1/2 second of the command, for responding to it. If you do this consistently, before the dog has a chance to bark, the barking will eventually stop. Punishment does not work. Shouting at the dog often encourages more barking.
3. Perhaps the easiest way to stop barking is to *change the environment* to reduce or eliminate the dog's exposure to the stimulus which causes it to bark. If the dog barks outside, keep him in. If people walking by cause him to bark, put him in an area where he can't see them.
4. *Debark surgery* is not popular in Canada, but it can be an effective way to eliminate problem

barking, especially if the neighbors are complaining and want the dog put down. After the vocal cords are cut, the dog is still able to make a whispery sound. Over time, the vocal cords will scar over and the dog's bark will get louder. For this reason, it is not a permanent solution; however, it can be repeated in the future if necessary.

5. There are a variety of *debark shock collars* available. They will teach your dog never to bark. The only humane shock collar to use is one with a vibration sensor and a buzzer which goes off before the dog is shocked. The dog will learn quickly not to bark. Human activated shock collars are cruel and must not be used, due to the inconsistency of the shock application. Shock collars are very expensive (\$250 US). If you wish to use one, please discuss it with us.

Barking is an extremely difficult problem to deal with, but with work you can reduce or eliminate your dog's barking. Remember, it took the dog some time to reach the stage he is at, and it will take time to train him not to bark. We are here to help you in whatever way we can, so please call if you have any problems or questions.

CITRONELLA SHOCK COLLAR

- everytime dog barks, puff
of citronella