

How to deal with Mr. or Miss Barks A. Lot

The following article is taken from Dr. Ian Dunbar's *Barking Behavior Blueprint*.

WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF, WOOF!

Is this your dog? Are their vocalizations driving you – as well as your neighbors -crazy? This can be a serious problem, especially if the noise is bothering your neighbors.

The first thing to determine is if you have a particular breed of dog that is prone to incessant barking by nature. Among these breeds are Beagles, Collies, Shelties, Schnauzers, Jack Russell Terriers and German Shepherds. It is by no means their fault; they were bred that way - you could say it's their job.

Now, if you have one of these breeds and you are in a confined environment, such as an apartment, you may have cause for alarm. Out-of-control barking that interferes with the happiness of others is called disruption of the peace and is an offense that can involve local law enforcement. The best thing to do is nip it in the bud, but if you are already months or years into this problem with your beloved companion, let me see if I can't give you a few quick tips. The best method of behavior modification of this type is to seek the counsel of a professional trainer.



First and foremost, make sure it is not a physical condition that is making your friend bark so much. Since dogs can't communicate the way we do, they may be trying to tell you they are in pain, or have eaten too much, or need something. If you can rule out those maladies, we can move on.

Start making a note of when they bark: Are they barking when you are home? When someone walks in front of your window? Are they barking at a noise? Do they bark to get your attention?

If you are around when they are barking excessively, you can get a better handle on it. Are you leaving them outside for extended periods of time, when they would rather be with you? Remember, dogs are social creatures and are pack oriented. If it's just you and your pal, that makes up their pack. After your dog goes outside to make sure their territory is intact and to have a roll on a nice spring or summer day, they may be ready to join the pack. This is especially true if you were unfortunate enough to get your puppy at too young an age, like before seven weeks.

Your tools will be varied to deal with this if it happens when you are around. If you drink soda pop from a can, save a few cans when you are finished and rinse them out, dry them upside down, put approximately 10-15 pennies in the can and tape up the top. For a lot of dogs, simply shaking the can vigorously when they begin to bark is all it takes. This, however, must be accompanied by a word or short phrase to tell them to stop. Make sure you reward them for stopping.

It is important that you be consistent in not only your timing but also choice of words. "Enough, quit it, no bark, stop it, shut up" are the norm. If you have a breed that thinks the can with pennies is a toy, try a squirt gun with some lemon juice in it and squirt it in their mouth.

Products like Bitter Apple or Bitter Lime may also work. Careful not to get it in their eyes. Again, timing is crucial.

Ninety-seven percent of all dogs bark at some point. It's called alert barking and is a big reason that we have dogs. They let us know that someone is there, danger is approaching, something is wrong, or just for joy because you are home. But that is a few "woof, woof, woofs," not an incessant barking.



If your dog barks at the doorbell on the TV going off, it's probably just to say "Hey someone's here," not a barkfest. You can get them in the habit of an alert bark by investigating what the commotion is. When you hear your dog go off walk to where they are barking, and say "Oh it's so-and-so, or it's just a plastic bag blowing through the front yard. "Thank you, quit it." And they are done barking.

If they don't stop go for the can, or bitters, or boat horn. Yes, boat horn. If none of the others work, a quick blast of that really loud air under pressure can have some startling effects. Doesn't it scare you when someone blows one of those things? Just be sure not to hold it right next to their ear.

Does the barking problem occur when you leave? That's slightly harder to handle, but workable. If the problem is the window and too much to look at, restrict access to the window when you are not around. You should see this when you are home to know it. Is it noise from neighbors upstairs? Or a nearby construction site? Try turning on a radio, or TV, or both. (And the dogs don't care what's on, either, although some dog owners swear by ESPN or Animal Planet on TV, or to play Jazz on the radio). It is simply the noise that matters.

Give them something to play with when you leave, like a Kong. This is a rubber toy that you can put dog biscuits and other treats in so that the dog has to work for a while to get it out. Be creative with what you stuff in it; cheese, hot dogs, ham, cream cheese or peanut butter are some of the favorites. Layer it or stuff it – they'll love it either way.



If it seems to be your leaving that causes the barking, alter your routine in leaving, and never make a fuss. Saying, "It's OK baby, Mommy will be right back, be good, don't bark and you'll get a treat when I get home," isn't going to do it. All this does is set the dog up for your walking out, which is what sets them off in the first place. Just leave!

As a last resort, you can try bark collars, or electronic devices that emit a noise when the dogs barks, called bark breakers. There are three types of collars: those that spray a bitter substance at the dog's nose when triggered by barking, sound emitters, and those that actually shock the dog. They can be effective tools, but should be used in conjunction with behavior modification.

It is pretty hard to give you all the tricks of the trade in just one article. If you have a problem barker, contact a professional trainer. They can usually see things you cannot right away, and give you just the right exercises to fix the problem.