

Behavior FAQ: Barking Problems

By Suzanne Hetts, PhD, CAAB, and Daniel Estep, PhD, CAAB, of Animal Behavior Associates, Inc., reprinted with permission from HelpingFido.com

Barking is normal behavior for dogs and one of the ways they communicate with each other and with people. Barking can also reflect various emotional states, such as excitement, fear, general arousal, anxiety or friendly playfulness. Expecting a dog to always be quiet is like expecting a person to never talk.

When dogs bark excessively, it's not only annoying for people but usually also a sign that things are not good for the dog either. You may be on the receiving end of a barking dog problem, listening to the constant barking of a neighbor's dog. Or, as a dog owner, you may be the one who's received a complaint from your neighbor or animal control. Barking problems often turn into people problems because both neighbors and dog owners end up angry at one another.

There are seldom any "quick fixes" for barking problems. It's not a good idea to just run out and buy a bark collar and snap it on your dog. Bark collars are not the right solution to every barking problem.

Before deciding what action to take, you first have to determine why your dog is barking. There are many reasons for excessive barking. Some dogs are "alarm barkers," showing territorial behavior, barking at other dogs and passersby. Others bark because they are bored, are being left outside too long by themselves, aren't getting their social needs met or are leading a poor-quality life.

Dogs often bark when they are afraid of noises or of being alone. Separation anxiety is a common cause of home-alone barking. Attention-getting behavior can also account for excessive barking, as can frustration, when dogs can't get something they want, such as the squirrel running across the top of the fence.

Before taking action to resolve a barking problem, the reason for the excessive barking must first be determined. Problem resolution procedures for separation anxiety barking will be quite different from those needed to decrease the behavior in a dog that is aggressively barking to defend his territory.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://www.acvb.org), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.iaabc.org) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://www.abn.org). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."