

MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

EXCESSIVE BARKING

Written by Pet Behavior and Training Services, Inc. for use by the Montgomery County Animal Shelter

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons – they may bark to tell us the doorbell rang, to tell us they want inside, to chase something or someone away from their yard. They may bark to get our attention, because they are bored, or because something has frightened them.

Some breeds bark more than others because it is part of their job description. The job of herding breeds is to keep the flock together. You will often see some herding breeds barking and nipping at the heels of children – the instinct to keep the herd (sheep or children) together is strong. Scent hounds run down raccoons letting the hunter know where they are by barking. Terriers were bred to go down into holes to flush out vermin, they bark to intimidate their prey.

Dogs left outside for long periods often get into watchdog or boredom barking. Correction of this kind of barking should involve the best remedy – prevention. Don't leave the dog outside. Many owners believe dogs need to be outside most of the day "playing in the fresh air". These owners may as well resign themselves to a lifetime of neighbors' complaints as well as holes in the yard and chewed shrubs. Dogs spend little time outside playing without you and lots of time either lying down (he could do that inside), or showing signs of stress by barking, chewing or digging. A barking, chewing, digging dog is not a happy, relaxed dog. He cannot play or rest because he is too busy worrying about cars, bicycles, squirrels and people going by, all out of his reach. Can you just imagine the frustration he must feel?

Perhaps you have more than one dog and they encourage each other to bark. It may help to let them outside one at a time. Maybe your dog barks from the front window whenever a car, person or other dog passes your house. The easy solution may be to block the dog from that area of the house.

If your dog "goes off" at the slightest sound or change in his environment, it might help to get him out more often. He may need a bit more socializing to people, places and things. Make it all fun with praise and treats.

General Tips To Decrease Barking

- Increase your dog's exercise. Games of fetch work well. A tired dog is a better-behaved dog.
- Help your dog to be well socialized. Go for walks in the neighborhood, take him to parks, pet stores, soccer games. Ask one or two of your dog friends if they would like to take turns hosting a dog play group in the backyard or take your dog to a dog park. Join an obedience class.
- Reduce the time the dog spends outside without you. Sometimes it is helpful to provide large, outside toys for him to play with -- a hard plastic ball he can roll with his nose, or a basketball with a little air let out so he can carry it around.
- Instant command response to "come" and "sit" for a treat and praise (learned in obedience class) will often break up barking patterns and fence charging.
- Attractive inside chew toys to enrich the dog's environment and reduce boredom. Some really good ones are Kong toys and sterilized bones. Look for safe, relatively indestructible toys that have holes that you can stuff or rub with cheese, peanut butter, canned dog food or commercial dog treats.

Punishment

Because each situation and dog is unique it is hard to make a blanket statement about the use of punishment for excessive barking. It is certainly not the behavior treatment of first choice. It is far better to address the emotional reason(s) and lower the motivation for excessive barking.

If you need more help in solving this problem, you may call us for an individual appointment at 937-293-5686. If you live outside of the area, ask your veterinarian for the name of a pet behavior specialist.

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A non profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets

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