

# BARKING DOGS

DOGS Victoria offers tips on how to ensure that your dog is a welcomed member of your community. Here are a few tips on how to ensure that your dog does not bark continuously and upset your neighbours.

## Why dogs bark

Barking is a perfectly normal and natural canine behaviour. Together with whining and growling and bodily gestures like wagging their tail and licking – it is the way that dogs communicate with each other. If you own a dog, you should expect it to bark occasionally. It is unrealistic to think you can train your dog to stop barking altogether. However, it is not acceptable for your dog to bark continuously all day and all night. You and your neighbours will be much happier if the barking is under control.

## Dogs that bark do so for a variety of reasons:

- Boredom and frustration – to alleviate these problems dogs begin barking, often with the owner running out of the house to scold the dog or yelling at it from inside the house to ‘shut up’. As far as the dog is concerned, it has achieved what it wanted. Some attention even if it is a scolding is better than no attention at all.
- Loneliness – dogs that are socially isolated or confined for long periods of time alone will bark because they need some form of outlet for their pent-up energy. Dogs left alone all day will take up barking as a call for company and before long it becomes a habit.
- Fear and excitement – dogs will bark excitedly when a stranger comes to the door or as an instinctive warning of an intruder or when a dog senses a threat. Barking is their outlet, which helps to release tension for a dog.
- Fun – some dogs will bark just for the sheer fun of it and just like loud music it can be very unpleasant for human neighbours.



## How to stop uncontrolled barking

The first step is recognising that most dogs bark because they are lonely, bored, frustrated, frightened, excited, or alerting us to danger. These are all situations that an owner can alleviate.

If you think you have a dog that may be upsetting the neighbourhood, there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce the problem.

### Some helpful hints to stop uncontrolled barking are:

- A well-exercised happy dog is more likely to sleep all day while its owners are not at home, so spend time playing with the dog. Even if you have a large yard, you still need to give your dog fun things to occupy itself such as a digging pit or a special chew toy.
- If your dog spends most of its time alone in the back yard, it will need 'social exercise' – the opportunity to walk around the neighbourhood, so that it can investigate and identify all the sounds and smells that tantalise the dog when it is in its yard.
- If possible, bring the dog into your house when you are at home. This will help your dog to feel a part of its family or 'pack' and not a distant relation. It is extremely important to get on the floor and have fun with your canine companion.
- Obedience training is great fun for the whole family and is terrific mental exercise for your dog. Most dogs really enjoy rapid play 'trailing' games of 'heel', 'sit', 'down', 'stand', and 'come' for hugs, massage, and a celebration of praise and treats. Never allow training to become dull – always make it fun and interesting.
- Dogs are 'social' animals and need regular companionship. Taking your dog to the park daily or weekly to make doggy friends will make a big difference. Dogs romping and playing together tire rapidly and will sleep happily while they recover. If possible, get another dog to keep your dog company, it doesn't matter what breed, although two dogs of the opposite sex usually make the best companions.

- One of the simplest ways to teach a dog NOT to dog something is to teach the dog to do it on command. In this case, teach the dog to 'bark', 'speak' or 'talk' on command. Once the dog has been taught the meaning of the word, use the command 'no speak' when you want the dog to be quiet.
- Sometimes puppies will bark because they are separated from you (their pack). Pups will eventually settle down if you DO NOT respond to their barking. If you call out or visit them while they are barking, they will be rewarded for barking and continue to do so, so it is important to be strong and not give in.
- If the family dog is barking because it is warning of a possible intruder, acknowledge the dog and say calmly 'oh good dog...go to your kennel now...well done'. After all many people want their dog to be a guard dog and the dog simply wants its pack to be alerted to the danger.

There is no point yelling at the dog to 'shut up' as the dog only thinks its owner is joining in on the alert. Once the danger has been acknowledged, the dog will be satisfied and will usually shut up.

If you continue to have problems, another option is to consult your vet or local obedience training club for some special advice.

Please feel free to contact DOGS Victoria for further advice on what you can do to deal with a problem 'barker'.

