

# Dealing with Excessive Barking

By Sherry Woodard

Dogs bark for different reasons: There's watchdog barking, request barking, "spooky" barking, and boredom barking. Though people find barking annoying, it isn't annoying to dogs. Rather, it's one of a variety of ways that dogs express themselves. To other dogs and some people, each bark has a tone that communicates something specific and significant. Controlling excessive barking with training is more than possible. In fact, it can and should be fun! We'll go through each type of barking and describe how best to keep it to a minimum.



**Watchdog barking.** Many dogs consider it their job to warn you that someone dangerous is at the door. Rather than trying to take your dog's job away, you can teach him to bark just once (with a cue like "bark" or "who's there"), and then leave it for something more fun. Practice by stationing a training helper outside to knock on the door. After one bark comes out of the dog's mouth, give another cue (like "enough" or "okay"), then get him involved in fetching a favorite toy, which you can keep near the door. If your dog does not enjoy retrieving, then use food rewards. Here's how to do it:

1. Give the cue: "Who's there?"
2. Have the person knock on the door.
3. When the dog barks, give the next cue ("enough" or "okay") and show the dog the toy or treat.
4. Start playing with the toy or give the dog the treat.

Repeat many times until the dog knows the game. The toy you pick should be used exclusively for practicing this behavior. Soon, the dog will bark with the cue "Who's there?" (no knock needed) and he will stop on the cue "okay" and wait for you to play or offer a treat. If he starts to bark again after you use the cue "okay," do not reward him. Practice this routine many times to reinforce the desired behavior. Real-life situations, of course, are the real test. You might want to put a note on your door (dog in training!), explaining that you will answer after a short delay.

If your dog starts barking the minute someone pulls into the driveway, use the same sequence as above, except have your training helper drive up in a car (instead of knocking at the door).

**Request barking.** Dogs often bark when they are excited, perhaps anticipating a walk or meal. If you have a dog that does too much of this "request" barking, do not reward the dog by fulfilling his request until after the barking has stopped. Ignore all barking as though you have lost your hearing. Then, after a decent interval when the dog has been quiet, you can come up with a meal or a walk. In so doing, you teach your dog that being quiet has its rewards. To reinforce this behavior, you can give him praise or something to chew on if he is lying down quietly.

**Spooky” barking.** This type of barking is provoked by fear and it normally comes with some body language. To scare off the source of her fear, she may have her hair up and her tail between her legs. She may be very rigid and bounce on her front legs. Your dog may be fearful if she is under-socialized; the solution may be more exposure to the world. A dog training class can be a helpful way to introduce her to new people, places and sounds. Try to make socializing fun – new people can offer treats and trips to town can include treats for being brave. Remember not to reward your dog while she is barking. Reward her only when she has relaxed. This strategy may take some time, but a happy, well-adjusted dog is a joy to be around.

**Boredom barking.** This type of barking is common when dogs are not receiving enough interaction with their family. If your dog is alone all day, every day, she will need a significant amount of attention once you come home. To help relieve her boredom during the day, you can supply her with durable rubber and nylon toys to chew on, like Kongs or Nylabones. Outside dogs who have very little interaction with their families often become boredom barkers. If you have an outside dog, please allow her to be part of your family. Because dogs are social animals, it is stressful for them to be alone all the time. Dogs do not need space as much as they need our time and our love.

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