

Barking Dogs

Most dogs bark. Some dogs bark more than others, and there are a number of reasons, some acceptable, some not.

Excessive barking causes a lot of bad feeling between neighbors. Here are some tips to prevent this.

Assess the Situation

First, look at the whole situation to determine why the dog is barking. There are several types of barking:

- Alert barking – when the dog sees or hears something out of the ordinary.
- Defensive barking – when they are afraid and want something to go away.
- Attention Barking – when the dog wants attention (play, food, let in or out).
- Frustration barking – when the dog is confused, frustrated or stressed.
- Boredom barking – when the dog has nothing to do.

Excessive barking is often a symptom of another problem such as fear, boredom or stress, and is often self-reinforcing, that is the more the dog barks, the more the dog is likely to continue to bark. If you fix the problem (for example, boredom), the symptom (barking) will likely go away. If the excessive barking is a form of communication (wanting to go out) then teaching the dog a different way to communicate (getting the leash) will reduce the barking.

Is your dog bored? Most dogs were bred to do a job, and need both mental and physical stimulation every day. **Obedience classes**, playing catch, agility, dog play groups, or going for a run can help keep a dog from getting bored. If you don't have the time, consider **doggie day care**, or hire someone to come in and provide exercise. **Food dispensing toys** can also help alleviate boredom and give the dog a mental workout.

Dogs left outside tend to be lonely and bark a lot. An **obedience class** can do wonders for your dog's behavior and **crate training** can help with housebreaking so that your dog can spend time indoors.

Dogs left outside at night are most likely to disturb your neighbors when they bark at other animals or sounds. It's good practice to keep your dog inside at night (see above).

Intact male dogs may bark out of frustration when they can't get to females in heat. **Neutering** will help reduce this frustration as well as provide **health benefits** for your dog (both male and female).

Deaf or seniors dogs are more likely to bark if they get disoriented, and may forget to stop barking. These dogs should be monitored when outside, and should not be left outside for long periods of time.

Separation anxiety can cause dogs to be destructive when left alone, often resulting in dogs being left outdoors when owners are away. A combination of **medication** from your veterinarian along with **crate training** can help with this situation.

Other Suggestions

Reward quiet behavior. If your dog is barking, give the dog a command such as "Quiet" then wait for the dog to stop barking to give them a treat.

Don't reward the barking. If your dog barks to come in, and you let the dog in, you have just rewarded, and reinforced, the barking. Instead, wait for the dog to be quiet, ask for the dog to sit, then let him in. A dog door is another option. Don't respond to barking demands for treats. Again ask for, and reward, good behavior like being quiet and sitting when asked. Yelling at the dog to stop is actually joining in the barking, and is giving the dog the attention that he might be seeking. Dogs that bark at the doorbell are rewarded when you go to the door. Instead of going to the door while the dog is barking, make the dog sit and stay, away from but in sight of the door before you go to open it.

Changing the environment can help reduce a dog barking at passersby. This barking is reinforced every time a dog barks at a person (or vehicle) going by because the dog thinks the barking has cause the person to go away. This can be reduced by keeping curtains closed, putting up a solid fence, or keeping them in a different part of the house or yard, depending on what is triggering the barking. Fence running can be prevented by not allowing the dog to get within 4-6 feet of the fence. This may mean housing the dog in a kennel inside the yard, rather than loose in the yard.

What Might Help

Consult a dog trainer who might be able to give you a specific plan to work on your dog's barking issues.

Bark collars, which come in various forms, are a good tool to help prevent excess barking. They should be used only when needed and are not a substitute for training and exercise. Before buying a collar, research all the options so you purchase one that will work for your particular dog and situation.

What Doesn't Work

Ultrasonic bark collars or devices are usually ignored by dogs.

Mouth closing muzzles – are cruel because the dog is unable to pant or drink. It is dangerous to leave a dog alone wearing a muzzle.

Tying your dog may make barking worse, causes the dog to become aggressive, and is also against the law.

Yelling at your dog.

For more information, please contact:

Chico Animal Control
530-897-4960