

All dogs bark. They bark when they are excited, scared, bored, upset, on guard, or when they need something, like a potty break.

But, sometimes barking is a problem. If a dog barks all day when we're gone, it could upset the neighbors. If a dog barks at other dogs, it makes walks stressful. If they bark at people, it's hard to relax when friends and family visit.



BARKING TRIGGERS

While it may seem like a dog barks for no reason, the reason just isn't clear to us. Barking is always triggered by something: Noises outside, the sight of things from the window, or the doorbell. When we know what triggers the barking, we can create a plan to stop it.

WHAT CAN YOU CHANGE?

Sometimes, we can make a few changes that remove the reason for the barking. For example, if your dog barks at the squirrels in the yard while you're at work, you can keep your dog inside so they don't bark all day. See our handout *Home Alone: Confinement Training* for tips on teaching them to stay inside in a crate, pen, or gated room.

Making changes in your dog's environment that removes, blocks, or avoids trigger(s) is a temporary solution that can stop the barking right away.

WHAT CAN YOU REWARD?

Even though it may seem like your dog barks all the time, there are many times during the day that your dog isn't barking. By rewarding your dog in those moments, you can encourage better behavior. For instance, if your dog sees a cat, but hasn't barked yet, reward them! Dogs do what works, so if being quiet works better than barking, that's what they'll do more often.

You can also change how your dog feels about triggers by following the sight or sound of them with something your dog loves, like a treat or play. Soon, these triggers will predict good things, so your dog doesn't feel the need to bark.

COMMON TYPES OF BARKING

ALARM BARKING

This is the dog who barks whenever there is a noise outside. Some small dog breeds were originally bred to bark at noises, alerting their owners to a possible threat.

For these dogs, reducing how much noise they can hear by using white noise machines, fans, or radio/television can reduce the barking when you're not at home.

You can make good things happen each time your dog hears the noise. So, if the neighbors are talking outside, you can play with your dog or give them treats. Soon, those sounds will mean good things instead of bad, meaning there is no reason to bark.

ATTENTION BARKING

If your dog only barks at you when you sit down to relax, it could be to get your attention. Attention is looking at, talking to, or touching your dog. So, if your dog is barking for attention, and you pet, scold, or tell them to sit or be quiet, you are REWARDING barking!

Instead, reward your dog when they are NOT barking. Have training sessions that look like you're relaxing and reward your dog before the barking starts. You can drop a treat (or use each piece of their dinner) every 10, 20, or 30 seconds that they are quiet, pet them, or play with them. Use what your dog likes most as a reward!

On days that you are tired, sick, or just really want to relax, keep your dog busy during these times with an interactive feeder, a stuffed Kong™, or long-lasting natural chew.

FEAR/ANXIETY/REACTIVITY

Dogs that are fearful or anxious are more likely to see other dogs or people as a possible threat. Barking is how they attempt to keep people or dogs at a distance. This is often called *reactivity*.

See our handouts on *Fearful Dogs* and *Reactivity* for tips on how to help your dog feel more comfortable in these situations.

SEPARATION ANXIETY/DISTRESS

If your dog is barking for long periods of time when alone, or barking and damaging furniture, they may be suffering from separation anxiety. See our handout on *Separation Anxiety* for information on how to help your dog.

In some cases, this problem is so severe it may be necessary to speak with your vet or veterinary behaviorist about anti-anxiety medications that can help.

NOTHING STOPS BARKING COMPLETELY

If the cause is fear or anxiety, adding something unpleasant, scary, or painful each time the dog barks is only going to make the dog feel more anxious or afraid. It's definitely NOT going to make them feel better about those situations. By focusing on what triggers the barking instead of the barking, itself, you will get things under control much faster!

THE SACRAMENTO SPCA ANIMAL BEHAVIOR TEAM IS HERE TO HELP YOU!

BEHAVIOR HELPLINE: (916) 504-2848 OR BEHAVIOR@SSPCA.ORG

SUMMARY

- You can put a pause on barking by avoiding, blocking, or removing common triggers.
- Catch your dog being quiet! Reward them generously for times when they don't bark.
- Not all barking is the same! The right approach will vary, depending on the cause.
- Punishment for barking can make the problem worse – and it doesn't teach your dog what you want them to do, instead.
- Contact the Sacramento SSPCA Behavior Helpline! (916) 504-2848