



Dogs bark, it's what they do naturally! However, when barking becomes excessive or persists for long periods, it can indicate that an underlying issue needs to be addressed. Here are some recommendations for addressing your dog's barking.

Why Does My Dog Bark?

To appropriately address your dog's barking, you need to understand the underlying reason. Monitor when the barking starts and stops, who is home, and what might trigger the barking. Using a video device to record your dog's behaviour and vocalizations can be useful if the barking occurs when you are not home.

Frustration or Attention-Seeking

Your dog may be barking out of frustration, or attention-seeking if:

- Your dog is left alone for extended periods
- Your dog's environment does not support their behavioural needs
- Your dog has insufficient outlets for their energy

Recommendations

- Walk your dog at least twice daily and allow them to sniff! It is a good exercise both mentally and physically. Walks should not only be considered merely bathroom breaks. If possible, take your dog off-leash in a safe, enclosed area where they can run, sniff, and explore!
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with your dog daily.
- Teach your dog a new trick or obedience cue and practice it daily. Training is a great way to engage and bond with your dog! You may also wish to take a training class for guidance and support.
- To help fill the hours when you're not home, provide with your dog with toys and rotate them often. Dogs find novelty stimulating. Food puzzle toys, snuffle mats, or freezing nut butter and/or dog treats inside a KONG® toy are good enrichment items.
- Dogs are a highly social species and do not cope with prolonged isolation. Consider hiring a dog walker or bring your dog to a reputable dog daycare during the day. If your dog is well socialized and your workplace has a pet policy, consider taking your dog to work with you.
- Ignore attention (demand) barking and reward calm, quiet behaviour. Your dog has likely learned that barking = attention. It is important to motivate your dog to be calm and not to punish unwanted behaviours.
- Let your neighbors know that you are actively addressing the issue. This saves your neighbours from frustration as they might assume you are ignoring your dog's barking.

Territorial or Defensive

Your dog may be barking to guard their territory (your home) if:

- The barking occurs in the presence of strangers, such as postal workers, people in the neighborhood, joggers, or door-to-door salespersons.
- Your dog's posture appears threatening or an attempt to appear larger, with their tail held high, ears up and forward, and/or hackles up.

Recommendations

- Teach your dog a recall command. When they begin to bark, give your recall command, such as "come!" and reward your dog with high-value treats for returning to you. Check out the EHS Recall resource for more information on recall training.
- A dog that is physically and mentally satisfied is less likely to bark. Regular and sufficient exercise can help alleviate or significantly lessen barking in many dogs.
- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus triggering the barking by teaching your dog that the "intruders" are actually friends, and that good things happen when they are around. It also helps to teach your dog a 'down-stay' cue on a mat. Giving your dog a down-stay cue helps to redirect their attention towards you, instead of the trigger. Consult with a certified trainer to help you with a desensitization and counter-conditioning strategy to ensure your timing and techniques is correct, which is essential for success.

Fear

The intensity of a dog's fear reaction can depend on several factors, including distance, novelty, intensity, duration, and suddenness of the frightening source. To address your dog's fear, the best method involves gradual desensitization with positive reinforcement so that your dog learns to associate something previously frightening, as neutral, or positive.

Your dog's barking might be in response to something they are afraid of if:

- Your dog's posture indicates fear with an attempt to appear smaller, including a crouched position, paw lifting, lip licking, ears back, avoiding eye contact, and the tail held low.
- Fear can escalate to defensive aggression, such as growling, snarling, lunging, or biting.

Recommendations

- Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize them to it gradually. You should seek professional help from a certified dog trainer with the desensitization process. For severe cases, discuss anti-anxiety medications with your veterinarian while you continue working on behaviour modification.
- Anti-anxiety products, such as Adaptil® or a Thundershirt® can help reduce stress in some dogs. Adaptil® and Thundershirt® products are available for purchase at Bingo's Pet Shop at the Edmonton Humane Society. All sales proceeds go directly back to the Edmonton Humane Society to help the animals in our care.

Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety occurs when a dog displays distress behaviours when left alone. It's important to address this behavioural issue, as it can cause chronic stress and result in injury (i.e. broken nails, teeth) if your dog attempts to make a panicked escape attempt.

Your dog may be barking due to separation anxiety if:

- The barking only occurs when you prepare to leave or after you leave home.
- Your dog displays anxiety when you begin to depart the home, such as whining, yawning, pacing, or drooling. Your dog may also perform destructive behaviours, such as scratching doors or damaging furniture.
- Your dog has recently experienced a schedule change, which may involve extended periods alone. Some examples include moving to a new residence, the death or loss of a family member, a new pet in the home, or time spent at a boarding kennel.

Recommendations

- Separation anxiety can be resolved with counterconditioning and desensitization techniques. You should seek professional help from a certified dog trainer with the desensitization process. Successful treatment for some cases may require the use of medication prescribed by your veterinarian.

Excitement

Dogs will also bark when they become excitable. Dogs that are easily aroused are prone to excitement barking. The best way to alleviate this type of barking is to teach your dog more appropriate responses to replace the barking.

Do not give your dog attention, as this may add to your dog's arousal and/or it can reinforce the barking. Remember, attention = reward, in the dog's mind.

Recommendations

- Ignore the barking. When you first begin to do this, the barking may temporarily get worse. Continue to ignore the barking and only provide attention when your dog is quiet, at least for a few seconds. Your dog will start to realize that barking = no attention and being quiet = attention.
- Teach your dog a 'down-sit' cue on a mat. Engaging your dog in an alternative behaviour will help redirect their attention away from what is triggering their excitement. If your dog responds to your 'down-stay' cue, reward them every few seconds to maintain their attention and then gradually increase the time between giving treat rewards. Increasing your dog's physical exercise can help excitement barking. A physically satisfied dog is less likely to become hyper-aroused.

What to AVOID

Here are some things to avoid when addressing barking:

- Using aversive equipment (i.e. shock collars) or coercive methods (i.e. punishment) to control barking. This poses risks to the dog's health and welfare and can negatively impact the human-animal bond.
- Yell at your dog. This can perpetuate barking and contribute further to your dog's high arousal state.

Keeping Your Dog Happy

Identifying the source of your dog's barking is key in developing a behavioural modification strategy. If you are in doubt, consult a certified dog trainer or veterinarian. Keeping your dog physically and mentally satisfied can also significantly reduce barking. Providing your dog ample exercise, social opportunities (with you or other appropriate dogs) and behavioural enrichment (i.e. feed puzzles, treat-dispensing toys) will help satisfy your dog's needs.

Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers private consultations for behavioural issues such as separation anxiety. For more information, visit our website: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/private-consultations/>

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers Brain Busters and Puppy Power! These courses offer fun-filled strategies and games for engaging your dog or puppy, both physically and mentally! For more information, visit our website: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/sessions/brain-busters/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:
askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please [Donate](#).