

# Barking

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Barking is a natural way for dogs to communicate. Sometimes this communication can be excessive and quite annoying. To be effective in changing this behaviour, take a little time to understand what triggers your puppy's barking. Your puppy may be barking for several different reasons, which may include any of the following:

- He has way too much energy and needs more **exercise** than what he is currently receiving.
- He is **bored** and needs toys for some mental stimulation.
- He is fearful and needs more **socialization** and/or desensitizing opportunities.
- He has been carried around too frequently and needs to experience life with all four paws on the floor to build his confidence.
- He is offering a normal alert bark. This bark is to let you know something is different.

Like any behaviour, you do not want to accidentally reward him by paying too much attention to his barking. When too much attention is given to any behaviour, it will increase in intensity and duration. Since **puppies consider any attention to be a reward**, you may be rewarding a behaviour you are trying to stop, which will increase the behaviour. It is important that you do not try to reason with your puppy. Reasoning takes time, words, and most of all, your attention. **Your attention is the one thing your puppy will always want from you.** The following are some things to think about and consider doing with your puppy to stop excessive barking.

## Exercise

Puppies in general need lots of exercise. If your puppy is not getting enough exercise, then increasing his activities may help rein in his barking behaviour. Taking him for a walk is exercise, but not enough for a young dog. If you have a fenced garden, then playing fetch with him outside is a great exercise. If you have a friend who has a safe dog that is up to date on vaccines, you could invite the other dog over for a playtime with your dog in the backyard. If you live in a flat, a good game of fetch indoors can serve as an exercise opportunity for him as well. Playtime is very important to a young dog. Besides getting exercise, playtime teaches your puppy how to interact with people. Belly rubs, fetch, and puppy-in-the-middle are all games you can play with him while teaching manners at the same time.

## Boredom

If your puppy is bored, offer him new things to figure out on his own. You can purchase a few hard rubber toys that you can put some treats in for him to work for. Make sure it is not something that he can chew up and swallow! Give your puppy one toy a day to play with until he figures out how to get all the treats out of the toy. Then put that toy away and offer a new toy the following day. **Exchange toys frequently** so your puppy does not get bored with the same toy. You can fill these toys with a little canned dog food, treat spreads, treats, or peanut butter. Letting your puppy figure out how to get the treats out of the toy is great

mental stimulation for him. (*Caution: Do not use peanut butter if anyone in your home is allergic to peanuts.*) Most of these toys can be placed in the dishwasher for cleaning, but check the manufacturer's recommendations first. *When puppies have access to all of their toys at the same time, they can quickly become bored with all of them.*

## Socialization

Many puppies who are excessive barkers lack socialization. They bark excessively because they do not understand enough about the world around them and find it a fearful place. If your puppy needs more socialization, take him to different places with you. Slowly introduce him to different people, places, and things.

Socializing your puppy is one of the most important things you can do for him. If there is a **puppy socialization class** you can enrol him in, do so. This is a wonderful opportunity for him to be socialized with other people and puppies. Walks in the park or at a playground can also be a great way to socialize your puppy. Make sure any other animals that your puppy meets prior to completing his vaccines have received all of their vaccines as well. When taking your puppy to any outdoor activity, it is important that you protect him. If a stranger comes up and wants to pet him, let the puppy go to the stranger; do not force your puppy to hold still for a pet from anyone.

Notice if your puppy seems more concerned with one person than another. Is he showing more concern to people with glasses, or hats, children, men, or people in uniform? Whatever the stimulus is for him, *look for a pattern of his concerns*. If you do find something he seems consistently concerned about and barks at, then this is good information to help him become more comfortable with that stimulus in the future. This can be done by desensitizing him to the stimuli he is concerned with. Let us know if this is the case so we can help you desensitize him.

If you are having a challenge getting him to walk on a leash, please let us know that too, and we will be happy to help you teach him how to walk on a leash nicely. If you are carrying your puppy around, put him on the ground and let him start to experience different situations and life on his own. *All four paws on the ground will help build his confidence*. Confident dogs are not excessive barkers. They give alert barks to their family to let them know something is different or has changed. All they want is acknowledgment from you that they have done their job well.

## Excessive Alertness

Some puppies take their protection role in the family a bit too seriously. Once your puppy has barked, alerting you to something, first check out what your puppy is alerting you to. There may actually be something you need to pay attention to. Sometimes, just checking out what your puppy is barking at, saying words such as "Thank you," or "That will do," or "Okay" is all that is needed for him to know he has done his job. When you do give him a cue, say the cue in a soft voice. If you yell or speak too loud, he will think you are joining him in the bark and you too are concerned. Once you let him know in a quiet voice that he has done his job, simply walk away. When you walk away and stop paying attention to him, there is a good chance he will stop barking. This is because *you are no longer giving him*

*attention*. Your lack of concern about his reason for barking may serve as an example of “Oh, that must not be important,” and the barking will stop.

If that is not enough, check out what he is barking at, and then call him over to you in a happy voice. At first, stand only a foot or so away from him. The second he turns to come to you, mark the behaviour and encourage him to come to you with a healthy treat as the reward. You will soon find that when your puppy barks at something and you acknowledge his alert, he will simply stop barking.

### Other Options

You can also interrupt your puppy’s barking pattern by making a short, sharp, and/or unusual sound to distract him. A good example of this sound could be a plastic bottle with some loose change or rocks in it. Give it a single hard shake when your puppy is barking. The second he stops barking, give him a verbal cue, either “Thank you,” “That will do,” “Quiet,” or “Okay.” He will stop to see what the noise was. The second he turns his attention to you, by looking at you, mark the behaviour with a word such as “Yes,” or give a click from your clicker. Then reward him with praise, a pet, or a healthy food treat for looking at you and stopping the excessive barking.

You can also leave the room when the puppy is barking. By leaving the room, you are taking all attention away from him for his inappropriate barking. If he is barking at something outside, you can consider covering the windows where the behaviour is occurring.

### Head Collars

Having your puppy fitted for a head collar and then using the collar to address the barking behaviour is another way to help him understand that you want him to stop barking once an alert has been given and acknowledged by you. Our practice can fit your puppy with a head collar, but please make sure you check the fit frequently as puppies grow quickly and we do not want his collar to become too tight.

Once the puppy is comfortable with the head collar, attach your leash to the collar and stay with him. Create a situation or have a friend create a situation that would normally cause him to start barking excessively. Let him bark a few times, then give him the cue. You may use “Thank you,” “That will do,” “Quiet,” or “Okay,” or any other word(s) you would like, to consistently let him know he has done his job. Once you say the cue, *gently pull the leash to the side to close his mouth*. The second he stops barking, mark the quiet behaviour with a “Yes” or a click from the clicker, and reward him with an ear scratch, a treat, or a pet while releasing the tension on the leash the second he stops barking. If he starts to bark again, repeat the cue and pull on the leash again until he stops barking. You will have to repeat this exercise several times a day over a few weeks until he understands that when you give the cue “Thank you,” “That will do,” “Quiet,” or “Okay,” he is to stop barking.



*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us*