

Barking has many different causes, and because of this, can be an extremely difficult behaviour to control. Excessive barking is usually caused by some combination of the following:

- **Inherited drive.** Any inherited behaviour is extremely difficult to change. Certain breeds are predisposed to being more vocal. For example, Beagles/hound breeds, Huskies and Malamutes are the classic “vocal” breeds. If you get a vocal breed of dog you can expect that they’re going to be prone to barking/howling!
- **Learning.** Most dogs have learned to bark to get something, and usually achieve getting what they want. For example, each time your dog barks at the mailman, the mailman goes away. Or if the dog spends the afternoon in the yard barking, someone will eventually yell at him to be quiet -- and, some attention, bad or good, is better than no attention. Dogs that are taught to speak for food, often develop a barking problem.
- **Territorial defense.** Dogs bark when their territory is threatened. This is another inherited component of barking, and therefore is difficult to eliminate. It is seen when the dog barks at automobiles, strangers (or squirrels) that approach the house or yard.
- **Play.**
- **Stereotypic barking.** This occurs when the dog has developed barking as a way of dealing with conflict or stress. The dog then barks whenever it is in conflict, much as a person might bite their fingernails. This type of barking tends to be rhythmic, almost a monotone, and may be performed without an obvious stimulus.
- **Seperation anxiety.** The dog barks only when the owner goes out, as a way of relieving the tension and anxiety it feels when left alone.





TREATMENT OF PROBLEM BARKING

1. Train the dog not to bark by eliminating any reward the dog might get for barking. You must totally ignore the barking – do not look at, speak to, or touch the dog while he is barking. If you give in after the dog has barked for 15 minutes and shout at the dog, the barking has been reinforced and will be even more difficult to eliminate. When you start to ignore any behaviour that the dog has learned will get him a response, the behaviour will increase in frequency and intensity before going into extinction (stopping completely). You should reward the dog with touch and food when he is not barking.
2. Train the dog to come, sit and stay. Then, issue a command just before the dog starts to bark. Reward the dog within 1/2 a second for responding to it. If you do this consistently, before the dog has a chance to bark, the barking will eventually stop. Punishment does not work. Shouting at the dog often encourages more barking.
3. Perhaps the easiest way to stop barking is to change the environment to reduce or eliminate the dog's exposure to the stimulus which causes him to bark. If the dog barks outside, keep him in. If people walking by cause him to bark, put him in an area where he can't see them.
4. Debark surgery is not popular in Canada, but it can be an effective way to eliminate problem barking, especially if the neighbours are complaining and want a whispery sound. Over time, the vocal cords may scar over and the dog's bark may get slightly louder.
5. There are a variety of debark shock collars available, as well as citronella collars. They will teach your dog never to bark. The only humane shock collar to use is one with a vibration sensor and a buzzer which goes off before the dog is shocked. The dog will learn quickly not to bark. Human activated shock collars are cruel and must not be used, due to the inconsistency of the shock application. If you wish to use a shock collar, please discuss it with us, because they must be used properly and according to direction.
6. If the dog barks only when left alone, separation anxiety is the primary cause, and the treatment must be directed at relieving anxiety (there is a separate instruction sheet for this cause).

Barking may be an extremely difficult problem to deal with, but with work you can reduce or eliminate your dog's barking. Remember, it took the dog some time to reach the stage he is at, and it will take time to train him not to bark.