



Barking

If you have ears or nerve endings, you might have some “sensitivities” to barking. Whether the barking dog belongs to you or a neighbor, it helps to take a look at why dogs bark, howl, bay and whine, and identify options to treat the behavior.

Clearly, dogs use vocalizing as a way to communicate. It is not abnormal behavior.

Dogs are pack animals, and if left alone for long stretches of time may bark incessantly to be back with their “family”. These dogs need more social interaction and stimulation.

Make sure your dog has sufficient time with you. Bring him indoors, take him for a walk each day, play fetch, arrange play dates with friends, take him to a training class.

If you need to be away, have someone come by to walk and play with him, or take him to doggie daycare.

Place his crate in an area where he can see you. Let him sleep in your bedroom--this is a wonderful time to bond and all you have to do is snooze!

Dogs need mental stimulation so provide him with some fun toys. Rotate them to keep them interesting. Kong is a company that makes a dispenser that

holds several rubber toys with treats released for your dog at timed intervals during the day.

Territorial/Protective barking is a dog's response to "intruders". His definition of things that are unacceptable can include squirrels, other dogs, kids on skateboards, the mail carrier, and people knocking at the door.

To reduce this type of barking, teach your dog "Quiet" so you can get his attention, help him calm down and defer to you. Creating a visual barrier like closing the curtains can extinguish the noise.

If you've worked with your dog and he is still barking excessively, consider using a citronella anti-bark collar. This nylon collar holds a device that contains water-based citronella, microphone, battery and on-off switch. The dog's bark triggers a spray of citronella. The dog is startled by the spray--which is perfectly safe--and the behavior is interrupted. Most dogs won't tolerate the smell of more citronella and will stop barking.

The collar is a great training tool because the second the barking is interrupted, the owner can say "Quiet" in a calm, normal voice, give a treat and praise. The dog was quiet in that instant and can't bark with a treat in his mouth, so he was successful in performing the command. The owner can then focus the dog's attention on something else.

Once your dog associates the collar with the aversive citronella, you can use it with the switch off, or can just show him the collar to help him monitor his own barking.

My dog has learned just how much noise she can make before the collar sprays. So, she still vocalizes at the window moaning like a guard Holstein (also black, white and large). But compared to her blast-you-off-the-couch bark, that's music to our ears.

Research on the citronella collar conducted at Cornell University and published in the Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association in 1996 showed it to be twice as effective as the electric shock collar (88.9% vs 44.4%). Barking was evaluated for frequency, duration and intensity on eight different breeds.

What's more, remote or voice activated shock collars do cause pain and are considered inhumane. In fact, they are illegal in Australia and Europe.

Finally, if a dog associates a shock with what he is seeing or doing at the time, he can believe that person, dog, etc. caused the pain and become aggressive toward it. The dog may not bark, but he might attack and bite.

Sometimes barking can be a sign of serious anxiety or fear. In this case, your best choice is to work with a trainer or animal behaviorist.