

POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

Indiana Proactive Animal Welfare, Inc.
P.O. Box 729
Carmel, Indiana 46082
(317) 345-6773
www.indiana-paw.com



Is Your Dog's Bark Worse Than His Bite?

Is your dog's barking driving you crazy? Causing tension with neighbors? It's perfectly reasonable for dogs to bark from time to time. But if your dog barks continually for long periods of time, you need to take steps to correct the behavior. This is a two-step process. **First**, you need to determine when and for how long your dog barks, as well as what is causing her to bark. You may need to ask neighbors, walk around the block and listen, or run a tape or video recorder. **Second**, you need to help curb the barking, which you can do by using some of the tips below.

Reasons & Solutions For Obsessive Barking

#1: Territorial Protective Behavior

Reasons



- Dogs live and think in a pack mentality. Your dog may believe his role in the pack is to warn of possible intruders (i.e. mail carriers, children or other dogs).
- Without realizing it, you probably have encouraged your dog's desire to warn by coming in or out to see what the commotion is, or by praising him when he let you know someone was outside.
- Your dog may also be thinking: "Hey! Every time I bark at the UPS truck, it drives away – it WORKS!" It's hard to argue with success! 😊

Solutions

- Teach your dog the "quiet" command. When he begins to bark at a passer-by, allow 2-3 barks, then say "quiet," and interrupt his barking by startling him (e.g., by making a loud noise, squirting water at his mouth, or throwing a toy towards him). When he's quiet, say "good quiet," and immediately give him a treat.
- Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. For example, ask someone to walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog is not barking, then reward him for quiet behavior with a treat. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward his quiet behavior. When the person can come close without your dog barking, have them give him a treat.
- When you leave home, close doors and curtains to limit your dog's view to things that are likely to cause him to bark.
- Neuter or spay your dog to decrease territorial behavior. **Visit www.indiana-paw.com for a list of low-cost spay/neuter clinics, if necessary.**

#2: Social Isolation And/Or Attention-Seeking

Reasons

Your dog may be barking because he's lonely or bored if:

- He's left alone for long periods of time without interaction with you;
- His environment is barren, without playmates or toys;
- He's a puppy/adolescent, and doesn't have other outlets for his energy; and/or
- He's an active breed of dog (i.e., a herding or sporting breed), and needs a "job"

to be happy.

Solutions

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time":

- Walk your dog daily – it's good exercise for both of you;
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee, and practice often;
- Teach your dog commands, and practice them every day for 5-10 minutes;
- Take an obedience class with your dog;
- Provide toys to keep your dog busy when you're not at home (Kong toys filled with treats or busy-box toys);
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him;
- Take your dog to work with you every now and then, if possible;
- If you work long hours, take your dog to a doggie day care center, or have a friend or neighbor walk him; and
- Make sure your dog has plenty of time with you on a daily basis – playing, petting, grooming, exercising – so he doesn't misbehave to get your attention.

#3: Fears & Separation Anxiety

Reasons

The following signs might indicate your dog is barking because he is fearful or suffering from separation anxiety:

- Your dog barks when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers or construction equipment;
- Your dog barks continually whenever you leave the house; and/or
- Your dog's posture – ears back, tail tucked – indicates fear.

Solutions

- Identify what it is that is frightening your dog and begin to desensitize him. For example, mute noise from outside by leaving your dog in a basement or windowless bathroom, and leave soft music or television playing. Block off your dog's access to outdoor views, as discussed previously.
- If you believe your dog is suffering from separation anxiety, consult with your veterinarian. There are anti-anxiety medications that your vet may prescribe while you work on behavior modification.

Bark Collars & Other Resources

Should I Use A Bark Collar?

- **Indiana-PAW strongly recommends that you consult with your veterinarian or an animal behaviorist before using a bark collar.**
- Bark collars are designed to deliver an aversive whenever your dog barks. The primary drawback to using them is that they do **not** address the underlying cause of the barking.
- You should **never** use a bark collar on your dog if his barking is due to separation anxiety, fears or phobias, because punishment increases anxiety.

Sources

- Humane Society of the United States, "Barking"
http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/our_pets_for_life_program/dog_behavior_tip_sheets/barking.html
- Dr. Gary Sampson, DVM & Dick Wolfsie, Dog Dilemmas: Simple Solutions To Everyday Problems (available for purchase on Amazon.com)

Important Note: Indiana-PAW's POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one's veterinarian, and/or a trained behavior specialist.