

Tips to address NUISANCE BARKING



Causes of barking

All dogs bark - it's how they communicate with people and other animals.

Dogs bark because they are:

- Bored
- Lonely
- Anxious or frightened
- Hungry or thirsty
- Uncomfortable (too hot or cold, in a cramped area)
- Seeking attention
- Sick or injured
- Feel threatened

What is nuisance barking?

Different people have different tolerance levels for barking. What one person considers a nuisance may not disturb someone else.

Council has therefore defined nuisance barking in its Local Laws to include:

Barking noise that disrupts or inhibits an activity ordinarily carried out on adjoining or nearby residential premises, such as holding a conversation or sleeping.

Under the Local Laws, the keeper of a dog must ensure that the dog does not cause an unreasonable nuisance.

Some of the criteria that Council will consider when deciding whether a nuisance is unreasonable include:

- The number and location of complaints received
- The duration of the noise:
 - a) more than 5 minutes in any 30 minute period between 10pm and 7am the next morning
 - b) more than 10 minutes in any hour between 7am and 10pm that day.

We can only take action once it is established a barking noise is unreasonable.

What you can do

The first step in addressing excessive barking is working out the cause.

If your dog is barking when you are away from home, consider asking your neighbours to keep a diary or make notes as to when your dog is barking. This can help you establish if there is a pattern to your dog's barking or if there are external factors making him bark.

You can also "pretend" to leave home. Follow your normal routine, park your car down the street and quietly walk home. Listen from outside of your property to see if your dog starts barking. Or ask a friend to drop by and see if your pooch is barking.

If you can not identify what is causing your dog to bark, talk to a vet or animal behaviourist, such as a dog trainer, who can help.

Exercise

A tired dog will not bark if it is resting or sleeping.

Regular exercise tires your dog physically - a young, medium-to-large dog needs 40 minutes of exercise a day. And if you add some training activities to your walk, such as sit or drop, at regular intervals during your walk, you will wear him out mentally as well.

If your dog barks during the day, consider walking him in the morning before you leave the house.

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Bored

Give your dog a chew toy containing food just before you leave home. Or create a treasure hunt by hiding food around the yard rather than putting it all in a bowl. Your dog will spend ages trying to get to its breakfast!

Provide some toys, a meaty bone or some treats, such as a doggy ice block made by freezing a bone in a container filled with water. Make sure to change your dog's toys regularly - he needs two or three different distractions each day.

You can also create a digging haven by burying treats. A clam shell pool filled with dirt or sand is great for this.

Lonely

Dogs are pack animals and generally don't like to be alone.

Consider hiring a dog walker to walk your dog during the day or send your pet to doggy daycare. An alternative is to organise a dog "play date" with a friend's dog so the two pets can entertain each other.

Or if you are able, take your dog for a walk during your lunch break.

Anxiety

The most common form of anxiety is separation anxiety and occurs when you leave your dog alone.

Just knowing you are about to leave the house can spark excessive barking. It's therefore important not to make a fuss when you leave or return home. When you make a big deal of leaving or returning it becomes a big deal for your pet.

Dogs pick up on patterns very quickly and can anticipate your movements, so another option is to vary your routine so you don't trigger the anxiety.

You can also try leaving the radio or tv on when you are out or leaving your dog in a small room, like a laundry, with some clothes or other items that have your scent on them.

Training your dog to sit or lie on a mat and not follow you everywhere can help as can getting your dog used to being left outside, even when you are at home.

Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) has been shown to help some dogs. It plugs into a wall socket or can be worn in a collar. Most vets can assist.

Disturbances

If your dog is barking at every disturbance outside your yard, be it people or other animals, some of the following may assist:

Block your dog's view so he can't see beyond the fence. Some black plastic sheeting or matting attached to your fence could work.

Secure your dog inside or in the back yard, away from distractions.

Or den (crate) your dog in a comfortable but secure location. The den or crate becomes your dog's "security blanket". Be sure to follow the RSPCA recommendations.

Training

You can train your dog not to bark.

One way is to take away the "reward" for barking.

For example, if every time your dog barks for attention you get up and walk out of the room, or silently turn your back, your dog will eventually learn that barking is counter-productive. Owners need to be aware that the dog may tend to try even harder to get noticed in the early stages of this training.

Another way is training an "off switch". This is a two-step process.

1: Encourage your dog to bark and then praise him, repeat the word "speak" and offer a reward. Continue to use the "speak" command and praise and reward your pet. Do not praise or reward him if he barks without the command.

2: Now that your dog barks on command, teach him to stop on command. When your dog barks on command introduce the word "stop" or "quiet" then praise and reward him when he stops. Only praise and reward your dog when he responds to the stop or quiet command.

More information

For more information on nuisance barking including training your dog to not to bark is available on Council's website at www.cairns.qld.gov.au/barking.