



## Barking

Barking is a normal way for dogs to communicate. A bark from a dog can signal many things, such as:

- “Someone’s on my turf!”
- “Stay away from me!”
- “I’m so confused!”
- “Hey! Pet me!”
- “Hey Spot, play with me!”
- “Where’s my owner?”

### Determining the Cause

Defining why your dog barks is the key to managing the situation. Observe your dog’s environment. What is he barking at? Is it directed toward you, another person, another dog or an object? Is your dog backing up and barking, or is he leaning forward? It’s important to determine your dog’s motivation for barking before trying to change the behavior.

### Attention Seeking

If your dog’s barking is directed at you, or if he is outside and barking at the door to get in, chances are he is seeking attention, toys or food from you. First of all, don’t give in. If your dog barks and you immediately reach down to pet him, or if you go to the door and let him in, *you are rewarding him for barking by giving him what he wants*. Instead, when this is his reason for barking, ignore any attempts he makes to get your attention. Ignoring means:

- Don’t pet him.
- Don’t speak to him.
- Don’t punish him.
- Don’t even look at him!

True, it will be a bit loud for a while. Initially he will try to bark louder and longer to get your attention. After all, it always worked before. But eventually he will realize it’s not working this time and stop barking. The **second** he stops barking ask him to come, sit, down, shake or do any trick he knows. *Then*, and only then, pay attention to him and reward him. Soon, he will learn that playtime and petting are on your terms--not his--and that demanding attention does not work.

### Fear Barking

What often starts off as an insecure “woof” to other dogs or people often escalates into a bigger problem when an owner inadvertently rewards their dog for barking. For example, a friend your dog has never seen before comes to your house. Your dog barks and backs up, indicating he is not comfortable with the situation. You reassure him by petting him and saying, “It’s OK.” *You have just praised your dog for being afraid*, which increases the likelihood that he will respond in a similar manner next time, and eventually it will escalate. If your dog is barking because he is afraid or upset, punishing him for barking often does more harm than good.

The goal is to teach your dog, through behavior modification, not to be afraid or upset when confronted with whatever it is that makes him afraid. A qualified Behavior Consultant can often help you determine the cause of your dog's fear and put you both on the right course to developing a quieter household, and a happier pet.

### **Territorial Barking**

Many owners have problems with their dogs barking in the yard; often they receive complaints from their neighbors. If a dog barks when he sees someone walking by the house, and the person keeps walking, the dog thinks he has chased the intruder away. The next time he will bark louder and longer because it worked. The simple answer is to bring the dog in before he starts barking. You cannot fix a problem if you are not present. Other options include teaching a "quiet" command or setting up scenarios with people you know who will walk by and give your dog a treat when he obeys a command. Your dog will soon look forward to an approaching person.

### **The Warning Bark**

Often owners want their dogs to bark to alert them that someone is on their property. The problem is that some dogs don't know when to stop. Typically, a simple "woof" is all it takes to let you know someone is approaching the house. A 20-minute barking session is a problem. A way to solve this problem is by teaching your dog the "quiet" command. That way, when he starts barking all it takes is a command from you and all is peaceful once again.

### **The Quiet Command**

To teach this command, first you have to get your dog to bark. Often the doorbell will do the job. Once he's barking, give the command "quiet." The **second** he stops barking praise him and give him a treat. Practice. Eventually, when he responds to your "quiet" command wait 5 - 10 seconds before giving the treat. Keep increasing the length of quiet time before giving the treat. Then alternate - sometimes give treats for responding to your command and sometimes give praise. Before you know it, you will have a dog who will stop barking on command. It is important to note that teaching the "quiet" command won't work in all situations on all dogs. Remember, identifying *why* your dog barks is the key to quieting him. If you are not sure what is causing the barking, contact a qualified Behavior Consultant for help.

### **Use of Punishment**

Using shock collars and other forms of aversives for barking dogs is often ineffective. Punishing the barking doesn't get to the cause of the problem, so the situation is never resolved. Correction, especially if used on dogs who are fearful, will likely make the problem worse.

For more information about pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at [michiganhumane.org](http://michiganhumane.org)**.