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Barking dogs - is your dog barking too much?



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This leaflet provides information and advice on how to be a responsible dog owner, and how to avoid difficulties with dogs barking excessively, and causing a disturbance to their neighbours. This council receives numerous domestic complaints each year and noise from barking dogs is one of the most common.

The law

Under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 noise from premises or land may be considered a Statutory Nuisance and local authorities can take action to stop it. If the barking continues dog owners face the prospect of appearing before a Magistrates' Court, and could be fined up to £5,000. Private individuals can also take action under the act by complaint to a Magistrates' Court.

Dogs at home

Complaints about barking often arise because dogs are left at home alone for most of the day. Dogs will not usually bark when their owners are present, but will start to when they leave. The owners may, therefore, be unaware of the problem until someone complains.

Dogs can sometimes resort to destructive behaviour, continuous barking, or howling when there is no one around to stop them. It is better not to keep a dog at home, unless there is someone there to look after it. Dogs, by nature, are very sociable animals and regard their owners as their substitute family. Some dogs may become very distressed if left alone for long periods.

Barking obviously has its advantages, when drawing attention to intruders, for example. However if the barking is prolonged this can become extremely tiresome and irritating to owners, neighbours, and anyone else within earshot.

First steps to reducing your dog's barking

There are some simple steps you can take straight away to cut down the amount of noise your dog is making. This will help calm the situation between you and your neighbours, and give you time to work out why your dog is barking.



- If your dog barks at things outside your yard or garden, don't let it go outside on its own. Keep it away from windows, or screen gates, etc so it can't see people or other animals.
 - If your dog barks at the same time every day, like when people in the house are going to work or school, try to keep it busy at that time, for example, you could take it for a walk.
 - Try to keep your dog calm. If it barks when it's excited, don't play with it at anti-social times like very late at night.
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- If your dog's barking and you're in a flat or a semi, try to keep it away from any walls you share with your neighbours.
 - Don't leave your dog outside if it's barking to be let in.
 - See if you can get a friend or relative to look after your dog when you go out, or take it with you.
 - Make sure your dog gets some exercise before you go out. A tired dog barks less.

Longer term solutions

Some general rules

Be consistent. Every time your dog is quiet when it would normally have barked, praise it or give it a treat. When it barks, tell it firmly to be quiet. You also need to remember that your dog is part of the family. If it only barks when you leave, bring it inside. Leave some toys or chews, and put the radio on quietly. If your dog is distressed, keep it inside with you whenever you're at home – dogs are pack animals, and they need company.

Tackling specific problems

Problem: Your dog is clingy, and howls or whines when left alone

Solution: A vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden may be able to tell you how to help your dog get used to being on its own.

Problem: Your dog is frightened. It might look scared (ears back, tail low), have trouble settling or keep trying to hide.

Solution: If your dog is hiding, make a den for it. If it's scared of noise, mask it by putting the radio on quietly. If it's frightened of other people or animals, shut the curtains or doors. Think about talking to a vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden.

Problem: Your dog guards his territory by barking at people, animals or cars.

Solution: Keep your dog away from the front of the house or flat. Screen your windows. If it starts barking outside, call it in straight away. You could ask a vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden about behavioural therapy.

Problem: Your dog is barking to get attention.

Solution: Look at your dog, then look away to show you are not going to respond. Don't give it any attention – or anything else while it's barking. Try deliberately ignoring it for 20-30 minutes two or three times a day, and get everyone in the house to do the same. Doing this for 15 minutes before you go out can help stop your dog barking when you leave. A vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden may be able to give you advice.

Problem: You went out without taking your dog for a walk, and it's barking through frustration.

Solution: Wear different clothes for walking your dog. Leave your dogs lead where it can see it. So if you're leaving without taking the lead the dog will know it's not going with you.

Further information

Guidance documents 'Is your dog barking too much?' and 'Constant barking can be avoided'; offer guidance to dog owners and are available from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) at: DEFRA Noble House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P3JR or downloadable in pdf form from www.defra.gov.uk

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