CITY OF CHULA VISTA | ANIMAL CARE FACILITY

Dog Barking

dealing with it

Some canine behavior problems, such as house soiling, affect only a dog's owners. However, problems such as escaping and excessive barking can result in neighborhood disputes and violations of animal control ordinances. Therefore, barking dogs can become "people problems." If your dog's barking has created neighborhood tension, it's a good idea to discuss the problem with your neighbors. It is perfectly normal and reasonable for dogs to bark from time to time, just as children make noise when they play outside. However, continual barking for long periods of time is a sign that your dog has a problem that needs to be addressed.

The first thing you need to do is determine when and for how long your dog barks, and what is causing him to bark. You may need to do some detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not home. Ask your neighbors, drive or walk around the block and watch and listen for a while, or start a tape recorder or video camera when you leave for work. Hopefully, you will be able to discover which of the common problems diagramed on the next few pages is the cause of your dog's barking.

Common Problem

Separation Anxiety

WHY

Your dog may be barking due to separation anxiety if:

- The barking occurs only when you're gone and starts as soon as, or shortly after, you leave.
- Your dog displays other behaviors that reflect a strong attachment to you, such as following you from room to room, frantic greetings or reacting anxiously to your preparations to leave.
- Your dog has recently experienced a change in the family's schedule that results in his being left alone more often; a move to a new house; the death or loss of a family member or another family pet; or a period at an animal shelter or boarding kennel.

RECOMMENDATION

Separation anxiety may be resolved using counter-conditioning and desensitization techniques (see our handout "I'll Be Home Soon".

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Common Problem

Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention Seeking

WHY

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

- He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.

- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.

- He's a puppy or adolescent (under 3 years old) and does not have other outlets for his energy.

- He's a particularly active type of dog (like herding or sporting breeds) who needs a "job" to be happy.

Thank you for Adopting a Shelter Animal! We want you to have a happy life together!

RECOMMENDATION

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:

1. Walk your dog daily - it's good exercise for both of you,

2. Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee and practice with him as often as possible.

3, Teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks and practice them every day for five lo 10 minutes.

4. Take an obedience class with your dog.

5. Provide interesting toys to keep your dog busy when you're not home (Kong–type toys filled with treats or busy-box toys). Rotating the toys makes them seem new and interesting (see our handout, "Dog Toys and How to Use Them").

6. If your dog is barking to get your attention, make sure he has sufficient time with you on a daily basis (petting, grooming, playing, exercising), so he doesn't have to resort to misbehaving to get your attention.

7. Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him.

8. Take your dog to work with you every now and then, if possible.

9. If you work very long hours, take him to a doggie day care or have a friend or neighbor walk and/or play with him.

10. Never give your dog attention while he is barking. Ignore him until he stops for at least three seconds, then reward with attention or treats.

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Common Problem

Terriiorial/Protective Behavior

WHY

Your dog may be barking to guard his territory if:

- The barking occurs in the presence of "intruders", which may include the mail carrier, children walking to school and other dogs or neighbors in adjacent yards.

- Your dog's posture while he is barking appears threatening - tail held high and ears up and forward.

- You've encouraged your dog to be responsive to people and noises outside.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Teach your dog a "quiet" command. When he begins to bark at a passer-by, allow two or three barks, then say "quiet" and interrupt his barking by shaking a can filled with pennies or squirting water at his mouth with a spray bottle or squirt gun. This will cause him to stop barking momentarily. While he's quiet, say "good quiet" and pop a tasty treat into his mouth. Remember, the loud noise or squirt isn't meant to punish him; rather it is to startle him into being quiet so you can quickly reward him. If your dog is frightened by the noise or squirt bottle, find an alternative method of interrupting his barking (throw a toy or ball toward him).

2. Desensitize your dog to the stimulus that triggers the barking. Teach him that the people he views as intruders are actually friends and that good things happen to him when these people are around. Ask someone to walk by your yard, starting far enough away so that your dog is not barking, then reward him for quiet behavior as he obeys a "sit" or "down" command. Use a very special food reward such as little pieces of cheese or meat. As the person gradually comes closer, continue to reward his quiet behavior. It may take several sessions before the person can come close without your dog barking. When the person can come very close without your dog barking, have them feed him a treat or throw a toy for him. In order for this technique to work, you'll have to make sure your dog doesn't see people outside between sessions.

3. If your dog barks while inside the house when you're home, call him to you, have him obey a command, such as "sit" or "down", and reward him with praise and a treat.

4. Don't inadvertently encourage this type of barking by enticing your dog to bark at things he hears or sees outside.

5. Have your dog neutered (or spayed if your dog is a female) to decrease territorial behavior.

6. Limit the dog's access to views that might be causing him to bark when you are not home.

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Common Problem

Fears and Phobias

WHY

Your dog's barking may be a response to something he is afraid of if:

- The barking occurs when he's exposed to loud noises, such as thunderstorms, firecrackers or construction equipment.

- Your dog's posture indicates fear - ears back,tail held low

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Identify what is frightening your dog and desensitize him to it.

2. Mute noise from outside by leaving your dog in a basement or windowless bathroom and leave on a television, radio or loud fan. Block off your dog's access to outdoor views that might be causing a fear response, by closing curtains or doors to certain rooms.

Bark Collars

Bark collars are specially designed to deliver an aversive whenever your dog barks. There are several different kinds of bark collars:

Citronella Collar: This collar contains a reservoir of citronella solution that sprays up towards your dog's face every time he barks. A citronella collar is considered humane and does work with dogs that find the citronella smell and spray sound aversive. One possible drawback is that the collar contains a microphone, so the aversive is delivered in response to the sound of the bark. Also, some dogs can tell when the citronella reservoir is empty and will resume barking. You can also purchase a citronella collar that is activated by a handler.

Aversive Sound Collar: This collar emits a high-frequency sound when your dog barks. Some are activated by the noise of the bark, while others are activated by a handler. The rate of success for this type of collar is reported to be quite low.

Electric Shock Collar: ***WE DO NOT RECOMMEND*** an electric shock collar to control your dog's barking. The electric shock is painful to your dog and many dogs will choose to endure the pain and continue barking. These collars are expensive and their success rate is very low. Also, redirected aggression towards people or pets that are around the dog may result.

The main drawback of any bark collar is that it does not address the underlying cause of the barking. You may be able to eliminate the barking, but symptom substitution may occur and your dog may begin digging, escaping or become destructive or even aggressive. The use of a citronella or aversive sound bark collar must be in conjunction with behavior modification based on the reason for the barking, as outlined above. You should never use a bark collar on your dog if his barking is due to separation anxiety, fears or phobias, because punishment always makes fear and anxiety behaviors worse. Never use a bark collar on a senior dog, on a dog 5 months or younger or on a dog with a heart condition. Additionally, bark collars should be a last resort and used under the supervision of a professional.