

How to Silence Your Dog's Obsessive Barking

Some dogs are so loud their owners consider moving to appease the neighbors. But before you go to that extreme, here's the smart, simple and often overlooked way to silence your noisy dog - just follow these 7 words consistently. And finally, you'll have peace with your neighbors.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Puppy barks are beyond cute; adult dog barks, not so much
- Barking is a natural canine behavior, so if you have a dog who likes to bark a lot, the goal is not to punish barking, but to reward silence
- It's best to nip puppy barking early, but even older dogs can be trained not to bark excessively
- Crate training, plenty of exercise, a consistent daily routine and ongoing socialization can also be very beneficial in helping your dog break the barking habit

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Puppies perform many impossibly adorable behaviors, and among them are those endearing little squeaks and yips that pass for barking:

'If You Don't Like a Dog That Barks, Get a Cat'

I'm not sure who coined this phrase, but veterinary behavior expert Dr. Nicholas Dodman, founder of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, uses it often in his writing to make the point that barking is a very normal, natural canine behavior. **Dogs bark as a way to communicate**, and they have different barks for different occasions:

- **Hello barking** — If your dog shows excitement when he encounters other people or dogs, his body is relaxed and he's wagging his tail, the barking he does at those times is his way of being neighborly.
- **Distress barking** — If your dog barks at what seems like everything — every movement or every noise he's not expecting — he's distress barking. His body is probably held stiffly during this activity and he may jump forward a bit with each bark.
- **Territorial barking** — Your pup considers your home, yard, car, his walk route and other places he spends a lot of time, his territory. If your dog barks continuously when a person or another animal approaches his domain, he's communicating that a stranger is invading his turf.

- **Look at me barking** — Some dogs bark simply for attention — from you or another animal. Your dog might also bark in the hopes of getting food, a treat or some playtime. The more you reward the behavior by giving him what seeks, the more likely he'll be to continue to bark for attention.
- **Communal barking** — If your dog answers when he hears other dogs barking, it's a social thing. He hears the barking of nearby dogs, or even dogs at some distance, and he responds in kind. This type of social barking is often heard at animal shelters and boarding facilities.
- **Obsessive barking** — If your dog barks repetitively, perhaps while performing a repetitive movement like running back and forth along the fence in your yard, he's demonstrating a bit of an obsession. You might want to try to find a better outlet for his energy — like a walk or a game of fetch.
- **Let me outta here barking** — If your dog is behind your fence and another dog passes by within view, your pup might bark excessively to signal his frustration that he can't greet his buddy out there on the sidewalk. This type of barking is usually seen in dogs that are confined or tied up to restrict their movement.

As you can see from this list, there are some types of barks (i.e., obsessive and "let me outta here" barks) that require your attention in the form of environment or lifestyle changes that help soothe your dog and reduce or eliminate her need to bark. And then there are the barks that serve no real purpose and require an intervention.

Don't Punish Your Dog for Barking — Reward Him for Silence

"The idea is not to prevent the dog from barking, because barking is a natural behavior and a means of communication for dogs," says Dodman, "but rather to train the dog to stop barking on cue."¹

This training will be easier if you're starting with a puppy, but it can also be done with older dogs. Obviously, if your pet is still a pup, you'll need to train yourself first to ignore his yipping so as not to reinforce the behavior. Keep reminding yourself those cute puppy barks will grow louder and more annoying as he enters adulthood. As Dodman points out, "You don't punish barking, you reward silence." It's an elegantly simple approach, but one many people overlook.

"There are many benign ways of training a dog not to bark," writes Dodman. "Most of them involve utilizing a voice command, such as No bark! Some of them simply entail patience, where you wait until the dog eventually does stop barking and then you reward it with some highly sought after treat ..."

If you're consistent in your response to your dog's barking, she'll start to reduce the length of time she barks. You may be able to speed up the process a bit by immediately following your verbal command to stop barking with words that indicate a treat is in the offing in exchange for her silence. When she starts barking, you say "No bark," followed immediately by "Want a treat?"

Gradually reduce the number of treats she receives until you're rewarding her with food only once in awhile, and be sure to use only tiny pieces of healthy treats. (However, remember to always reward her with verbal praise and petting when she does what you ask her to do.)

Dodman also recognizes some dogs may require negative reinforcement (which is not the same as punishment) through the use of a head halter with a training lead. When your dog barks, apply tension to the training lead to remind him you don't approve of the behavior. The reward for his silence is release of tension on the lead.

"Most owners make the mistake of feeling that they have to chastise or otherwise punish their pup for barking but the commotion and anguish that this causes does little to improve the situation," writes Dodman. "In fact, in yelling at a dog that is barking may seem to it as if you're barking, too."

Additional Tips to Discourage Excessive Barking

- If loud noises set your dog off, a crate of his own that he can go in and out of at will, coupled with soothing music or a television on in the background can help. Tips and tricks for crate training your dog (including fearful dogs).
- If he's barking out of boredom, increase his exercise and playtime, take him on walks, to the dog park, or find other activities that give him both the physical activity and mental stimulation all dogs require to be well-balanced individuals. The best way to create a quiet dog is to exhaust her with exercise.
- Changes in your pet's routine and environment can cause stress, so as much as possible, stick to a consistent daily schedule he can depend on. You might also consider talking with an **animal behavior specialist** about desensitization and counter conditioning exercises for a stressed out pet.

Lifelong socialization and positive training are also essential for your dog's mental and emotional well-being.

Sources and References

[PawCulture](#)

¹ [PetPlace](#)
