



# Why Is My Dog Barking?

Why do dogs bark? Unfortunately, there is no single reason that dogs vocalize, which means that there's no across-the-board quick fix to stop your dog from barking. It can be frustrating to live in a home with (or next door to!) a dog that barks because it's tough to prevent barking, and even tougher to stop it once the barking is underway. The first step to curbing a dedicated barker is discovering the motivation behind the behavior then addressing the problem with a customized training solution.

## Common Reasons for Dog Barking

Dogs bark because it works, whether to scare off a perceived intruder, self-soothe, get attention or release frustration. Tackling your dog's barking first requires that you identify the drive behind your dog's vocalization.

### These are the most typical types of canine communication:

- **Attention seeking/demand:**

Barking in the hopes of getting something, whether it's your attention, resources like food or toys, or access to the outdoors.

- **Territorial:**

Barking when someone or something enters an area that the dog considers his or her own.

- **Play barking:**

A dog's running commentary when having a good time.

- **Alarm:**

Barking in response to being startled by something, like a sudden, unexpected noise.

- **Frustration:**

Barking to signal irritation and powerlessness, like when a ball rolls under the couch and the dog can't reach it.

- **Boredom:**

Barking when under-stimulated as way to entertain or self-soothe. This type of bark sounds repetitive.

- **Fear:**

A type of barking that's often misunderstood. While fear-barking sounds menacing, it's a result of a dog trying to put distance between itself and something frightening.

- **Excitement:**

Meal prep, car rides or the sight of a leash can trigger this type of joyful bark.

- **Separation distress:**

Dogs that don't like to be alone engage in this pitiful bark. It is not the same bark made by dogs going through true separation anxiety, as distress is a milder and more manageable form of canine discomfort than true separation anxiety.



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## How To Keep Your Dog From Barking

Customizing a training solution for your dog's specific type of bark will make it much easier to stop, and in some cases, prevent the barking from happening. The following tips are a mix of management solutions, which are easier to implement, as well as training suggestions, which require more time and dedication on your part.

### **Block your dog's view:** *(helpful for alarm barkers and territorial barkers)*

A quick way to get a handle on alarm and territorial barking is cutting off your dog's visual access to whatever is inciting him outside. You can simply close your blinds or install a temporary privacy window film that obscures the view. Place the window film a few inches above your dog's line of sight, then gradually lower it down inch by inch over the course of several weeks once your dog seems less interested in staring out the window.

### **Busy toys:** *(helpful for attention seeking/demand barkers, boredom barkers and separation distress barkers)*

Both boredom barkers and separation distress barkers benefit from having something to do when their people leave the house. Hard rubber toys that dispense treats are a great way to keep them occupied and happy when alone. They're also great for dogs that bark for attention. For example, if your dog barks at you every time you get on the phone, give him a busy toy to keep him occupied while you make calls.

### **White noise machine:** *(helpful for alarm barkers and territorial barkers)*

The machine's steady unchanging sound is an easy way to cover incidental noises from outside like delivery trucks or people passing by that might trigger an alarm barker.

### **Pheromone-based treatment:** *(helpful for fear barkers and separation distress barkers)*

Plug-in diffusers that mimic the "calming chemicals" given off by female dogs can help to soothe dogs that bark due to stress. While you might not see a dramatic shift in behavior – keep in mind that pheromones are different from prescribed medications – the diffusers are an easy and affordable way to take the edge off a stressful situation.

### **Teach "hush":** *(helpful for territorial barkers and alarm barkers, as well as some excitement and play barkers)*

Sometimes we want our dog to bark for a short time to alert us to people at the door, but many of us would like to be able to stop the barking after a few minutes. Teaching your dog the "hush" command can short-circuit a dedicated barker. The next time your dog barks at something, place a treat in your hand, walk up to your dog and put your hand in front of his nose so that he can smell the treat but can't get to it. He should stop barking to sniff at your hand. Once he's quiet and sniffing say "hush" and toss the treat a few steps away from him. Repeat the process until you can just say "hush" without needing the hand prompt in front of his nose, then give him a treat. In time, you should be able to say "hush" and your dog will abandon the barking and come to you for his reward for being quiet.



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## How To Keep Your Dog From Barking (con't.)

### **Ignore barking:** *(helpful for attention-seeking barking, play barking and frustration barking)*

Attention seeking barkers are looking for some sort of acknowledgement from you when they bark. You can take the power out of your dog's demanding barking by completely tuning him out when he barks at you with an agenda. Turn away, walk out of the room or do anything but look at your dog when he engages in attention-seeking barking. The same goes for frustration barking. If your dog is barking because his ball rolled under the couch and you fetch it for him, you've just taught him that being pushy gets him what he wants. Visualize attention-seeking barking and frustration barking like a child having a tantrum; if you give in to the demands, you'll soon be a slave to them. Wait for a moment of quiet, or a calm sit, *then* give your dog attention or fetch his ball. If you're consistent, your dog will soon realize that barking doesn't work to get him what he wants, and he'll abandon the strategy.

### **More exercise:** *(helpful for all barkers)*

Nearly every dog can benefit from more exercise, both mental and physical. A dog that has had a good workout will be less likely to be on alert for perceived interlopers or feel the need to pester you for attention. Take the time to wear your dog out every day with a rousing game of fetch or tug and get his brain activated by introducing mind-teasers like "find the toy" and hide-and-seek. Remember, a tired dog is a good dog!

### **Reward the absence of barking:** *(helpful for all barkers)*

When your dog opts not to bark in a typically triggering situation, make a big deal of it. Most of us are used to tuning into our dogs only when we want to correct the bad behavior and we forget to acknowledge the good. If your dog sees someone out the window and looks to you instead of barking, give him a treat. If he dashes around the yard with his best dog pal without offering commentary, praise him. If his ball rolls under the couch and he chooses to sit and wait for you to get it instead of demanding immediate help, give him a pat and fetch that ball! Even though barking is a deeply rewarding behavior for dogs, it's possible to get a handle on it with time and patience.