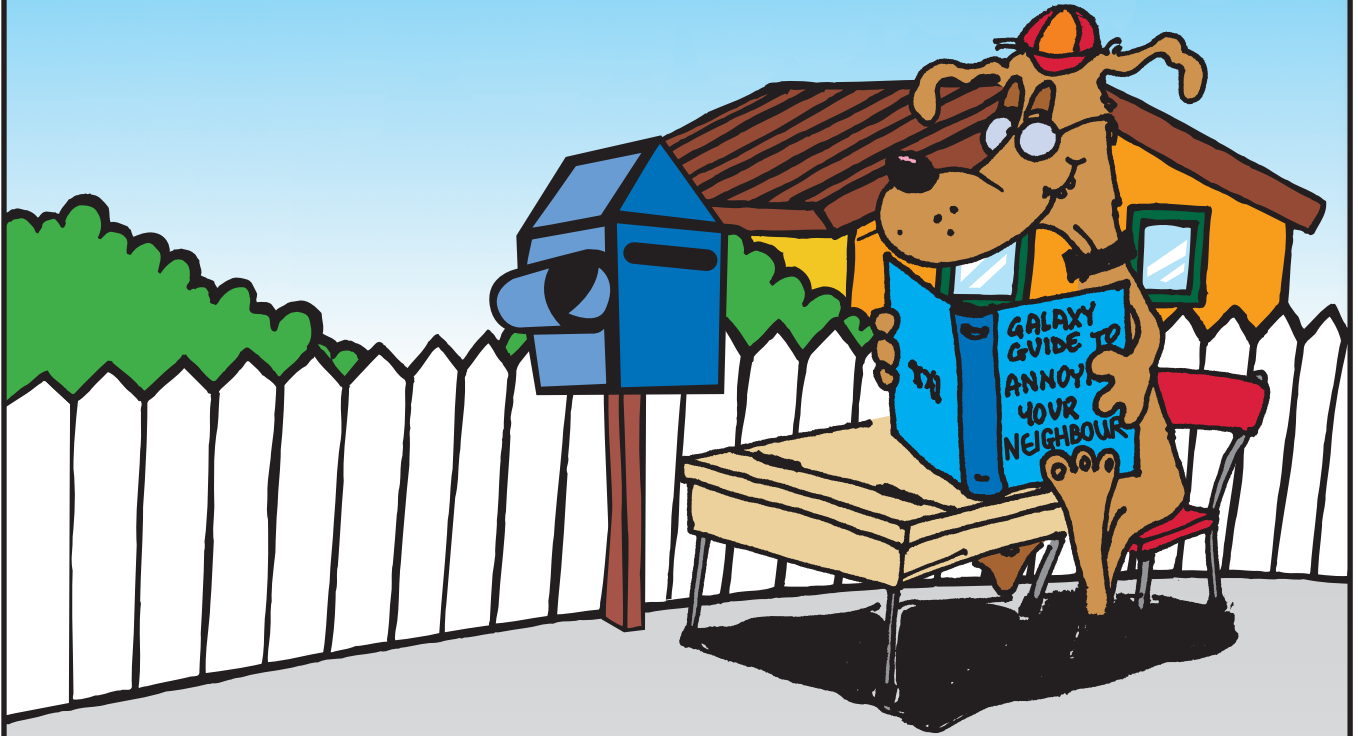


Barking As A Result Of Learned Behaviour



Dogs are social animals. If they learn that the owner makes a fuss over them when they bark then this conditions them to bark more. Even negative attention is better than no attention at all.

Unfortunately the behaviour is often taught the day you bring the puppy home. Those first few nights with a new puppy are tough. The puppy is "fretting" because it is on its own for the first time. If its cries are answered, this will reward its anxiety and condition it to bark. Ensure (before night-time) that the puppy has a place to sleep with an old blanket to snuggle into. The "homesick" behaviour is still likely to happen but the puppy is best left alone. Attend to the puppy only when it is quiet.

Because barking is a natural behaviour, it may be unreasonable to discipline a dog for doing what dogs do naturally.

Suggested treatment methods:

1. In the first instance (i.e. that new puppy) ignore the barking

If you give the puppy any attention in the middle of the night or when it is noisy, even if you get up to tell it off, you reinforce its behaviour by giving it exactly what it wanted, "attention".

2. Create a distraction and then reward the quiet behaviour

Use a high-pitched whistle or turn on the water sprinkler to get the dog's attention. When it has been distracted and hasn't barked for several minutes, praise the dog for being quiet. It is important that the dog does not associate you with having made the distraction otherwise you are simply training the dog not to bark when you are there.

3. Discipline

If your dog responds well to discipline then you can initially reprimand it for barking; however you should reinforce the silence immediately.

4. Anti-barking collar

Although this may eliminate the barking, it may not solve the problem.

Most dogs simply need to be taught when it is appropriate to bark and when it is not.

Discourage barking shown at inappropriate times and reinforce/praise silence.

Talk to your local Animal Control Officers. They have a vast knowledge of dealing with barking dog issues and they will be happy to assist.

Barking Dogs

With the growing population and intensification of housing, we are creating an environment for less tolerance of noisy dogs. Dogs can bark as loud as 100 decibels. That is equivalent to the noise of a printing plant or a jackhammer at 15 metres (Harris Handbook of Noise Control.)

Why do dogs bark?

Barking is a perfectly natural characteristic of the canine species. Right from birth a puppy learns that whining and yelping is a care-seeking noise which attracts the attention of its mother. Over the years we have bred dogs for their ability to bark to ward off intruders or to round up stock, etc. However, the concern arises when the barking becomes excessive and is loud and persistent, creating a nuisance.

It could be:

- **Environmental**

Provide plenty of shade, shelter, food and fresh water. Regularly treat the dog and kennel area for irritating fleas and flies. Ensure that the kennel is a suitable size and kept in a clean condition.

If you suspect that children are teasing your dog you will need to take steps to stop this.

- **Territorial Defence**

Protecting the property from intruders.

- **Attention Seeking**

Dogs are social animals and prefer company.

- **A Learned Behaviour**

A dog may learn that barking causes the owner to make a fuss over it.

- **Excitement**

Vigorous play or the sight and sound of children playing nearby increases the dog's state of arousal.

- **Breed**

Some dogs are bred to bark.

- **Boredom**

An uninteresting environment with no company and a lack of exercise.

- **Self-Stimulation**

An obsessive-compulsive behaviour. This can be the result of excessive stress or boredom.

- **Separation Anxiety**

Some dogs are too dependent on their human owners.

- **Contact Seeking**

Communication with other dogs.

- **Fear or Physical Discomfort**

Always consider a vet check especially if the barking is out of character.

Barking is often the symptom of an underlying problem. The key to resolving the barking is to identify and treat the problem.

By determining the type of barking being expressed (barking, whining, howling, etc.) and by observing the dog's behaviour, you may be able to narrow down the underlying problem. Once you have established this you can then consider the best course of action to take.