

IS YOUR DOG BARKING TOO MUCH?

It's normal and natural for dogs to bark. But when barking happens a lot or goes on for a long time, it can be annoying and upsetting for your neighbours. If you're out a lot, or you're just used to the noise you might not realise just how bad it is. This leaflet is designed to help you work with your neighbours to sort out any problems caused by your dog barking without having to involve the authorities. It will also help you to understand why your dog barks, and tell you about some practical steps you can take to stop or cut down the barking.

Research into noise issues shows that problems are most likely to be solved when people discuss things calmly and work out a solution between them. If you can't do this, the council may have to get involved and you could face some serious penalties. These are explained overleaf.

TALKING IT OVER

If the noise your dog is making is upsetting your neighbours, the first step is to talk things over with them. Stay calm and try to see it from their point of view: perhaps they are working shifts, or have got a baby or small children. Bear in mind that they might be worried about whether the dog is OK and remember you might not know how serious the problem is if your dog is barking when you're not at home.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

Ask your neighbours to tell you exactly when your dog is barking, and for how long. If you're out a lot, ask them to note down the times when the barking happens. If you're in, make a note yourself.

Think about using a web cam or video camera to find out what your dog is doing when you're not there, or try a "set-up"- pretend you're going out for the day then wait outside the door to see what your dog does. If it starts barking and howling, go back in and tell it firmly to be quiet. Punishing your dog will only make things worse.

FIRST STEPS

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 the windows, so it won'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 late at night or early morning.

If your dogs barking and you're in a flat or 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 that 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 like company.

TACKLING SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Problem: Our dog is clingy and howls or whines when left at home.

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 may look scared (ears back, tail low), have trouble settling or keep trying to hide.

Solution: If your dog likes 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 is barking to get attention.

Solution: Look at your dog, then look away to show you're not going to respond. Don't give it any attention - or anything else - whilst 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: Your dog guards its 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 a dog warden about behaviour therapy.

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

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

WHAT NOT TO DO

Don't punish your dog, it might mistake it for attention and it could make it more anxious.

Don't use mechanical devices - like anti-bark collars – it could make the dog even more anxious.

Don't get a second dog unless you're sure that this is going to make your dog feel more secure - not less.

Always make sure you keep your neighbours informed about what you're doing to stop the barking.

IF THE PROBLEM DOESN'T GET RESOLVED

If you don't take steps to resolve the problem then the aggrieved neighbour may do one of two things:

They may apply to the Justices of the Peace Court under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 asking the court to place an order on you requiring you to reduce the noise from your dog barking, If when granted you fail to keep your dog quiet you will be liable to a fine on conviction of up to £1000.

They may complain to Environmental Health and the noise may be assessed under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, if justified this may result in an abatement notice being served.

Environmental Health

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ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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