



TREATING AND MANAGING BARKING DOGS



Step one

Perform a detailed clinical examination and assessment of the dog to make sure there are no medical or behavioural abnormalities contributing to the barking. Ensure the dog is tested for any medical condition that could be contributing to its behaviour.

A normal, healthy dog will learn quickly that barking is no longer worthwhile and managing these dogs is relatively simple.

Step two

Talk to the owner about mental and physical stimulation for the dog to ensure the dog's requirements are fully met. A dog that has inadequate mental or physical stimulation will try and find its own amusement. Barking of course, may be one of these strategies.

Ensure the owner understands how to provide mental and physical stimulation for the dog. Suggest they try taking the dog for a run or walk, throwing a ball, teaching them new tricks or using treat toys.

Step three

Determine why the dog has decided that barking is worthwhile. This can be done by completing the **Barking questionnaire** with the owner.

Once you have completed the questionnaire and determined the reason why the dog believes barking is worthwhile you need to look at ways the owner can manage the situation and environment so that it is no longer worthwhile to the dog to continue the behaviour.



Step four

Remove the reason why the dog thinks barking is worthwhile. For example, if the dog is barking when the owner feeds it, then the situation needs to change so the dog is no longer being fed while it is barking. Commonly, an owner will feed the dog to keep it quiet, so changing the time the dog is fed to an hour earlier before it begins thinking about being hungry or barking, or changing the location where the dog is fed can be useful strategies.

Another way to stop the dog barking is to use distraction techniques and give the dog other things to do.

Step five

Teach the dog to be quiet when requested. One possible method of doing this is to teach the dog to bark only when asked and reward the dog whenever it is quiet. A good trainer can help enormously with this technique to ensure the dog learns what you require it to.

Step six

Help the owner develop the skills to distract the dog when it is in a situation where it is likely to bark. The type of distraction and the timing is critical because if this is not done properly there is a risk of inadvertently rewarding the dog and making the barking worse. This is another area where an experienced trainer can help.

Step seven

Teach the dog to relax. This can be achieved by the owner rewarding the dog every time it is relaxed and being quiet. They can verbally praise the dog by whispering "good dog" whenever it is being quiet and relaxed. An experienced trainer or veterinary behaviour specialist can help the owner to learn how to get the dog to relax when asked.

It is important to remember that if these steps are followed, a normal dog will learn relatively quickly that barking is not worthwhile. However, dogs that have been barking for a long time will take longer to work out it is not a worthwhile behaviour for them anymore.

If, after a comprehensive management plan has been in place for some time, the dog still thinks barking is a worthwhile behaviour, then a full behavioural assessment and comprehensive treatment plan, devised by a veterinary behaviourist or a veterinary behaviour specialist, is required.

This individualised plan covers environmental management, behaviour modification and medication. The earlier this plan is implemented the better the outcome will be for the dog.



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