



FACT SHEET

WHY DOES MY DOG BARK?

Barking can be a normal canine behaviour and makes up part of the way they communicate vocally.

Barking is the second most common complaint made to local councils.



Barking as communication

Barking is a way for dogs to communicate and they use their bark to alert, seek assistance (attention), or ask for other dogs, animals or people to keep away.

Dogs may bark when they are excited, for example, when they are playing or come into contact with other dogs in their social group.

Barking as a mental health concern

Dogs may bark because there is something in their environment that is causing them to feel threatened; they bark to make the threat go away or they may feel they must alert or seek assistance from those who care for them.

Barking can be a problem for dogs and their owners when it goes on for long periods or happens frequently without the dog learning that there is no threat.

A dog experiencing such a situation may have a mental health problem. In other words, the way the dog takes in information and processes it can cause them to feel unsafe in an everyday situation and also unable to learn what to do to escape the pervasive feeling that something bad will occur. Barking is a dog's call for help in such circumstances.

As with any illness, the longer the problem goes without appropriate treatment, the further the condition deteriorates, ultimately impacting the dog's ongoing quality of life.

Such a problem is not due to lack of training, nor is it due to boredom. Owner frustration and bad training techniques can make matters worse, leading to poor welfare for the dog.

Help for barking dogs

Your vet can do a primary assessment and advise you on whether further work up is needed.

The first step is for your vet to assess whether the barking is normal communication, whether there is physical health issue contributing to the behaviour, and/or whether the dog has a primary mental health problem.

If the barking is normal communication, your vet can determine why the dog believes the barking is worthwhile and develop strategies to help you alter the behaviour in ways the dog understands and enjoys.

Behaviour consultation may be required so that a management plan can be discussed and implemented..

The management plan may include the following components:

- Reducing exposure to situations in which barking occurs as much as possible.
- Giving appropriate medication for the individual and the specific mental health problem. Medications help the dog's brain be in a more balanced state so they can process the information they are receiving in a rational way and learn new coping strategies that are beneficial for the dog and result in improved welfare.
- Teaching the dog how to relax using reward-based training techniques.