

NUISANCE DOGS

Information for Dog Owners

The Shire of Bridgetown has rules for the management and control of dogs within its boundaries; these rules are consistent with the Dog Act 1976, other relevant legislation and are designed to encourage responsible pet ownership. The following information is provided to address FAQ's and common issues.



WHY DOES MY DOG BARK?

Barking, whimpering, whining, growling, howling, yelping and moaning are normal sounds dogs use for communication. When any of these are made excessively by one or two dogs in close proximity to neighbours the constant noise can become a problem. Dogs do not bark without a reason. Barking can occur when the dog is excited, when it's threatened, seeks its owner's attention or is responding to a distant sound or signal.

To stop a dog from barking excessively, its owner needs to first find out when and why the dog is barking. The problem should then be treated in the early stages, as prolonged and habitual barking is very difficult and time consuming to correct.

EXCESSIVE BARKING MAY BE DUE TO:

Breeding: Barking is a natural behaviour that may occur more in some breeds or individual dogs than others because of their breeding or temperament. Some are more excitable, whilst others are more likely to react to confinement or isolation by barking. Prospective owners need to carefully select a dog suitable for their lifestyle and home environment.

Confinement: Dogs will bark at any noises or movements they can see, hear and smell but are not able to investigate or reach. People or dogs passing by, birds flying overhead, a lawnmower, the telephone ringing, a knock on the door, livestock in adjacent paddocks or the sound of other dogs may trigger a bout of barking. A well socialised dog that has been given a variety of experiences when young is less likely to overreact to outside distractions.

Isolation: Dogs are social animals and will actively seek the company of other dogs and people. When left alone in backyards all day they may bark for attention. Most dogs will adapt to being left on their own if conditioned to do so from an early age. Leaving the dog alone for short periods at first and then gradually increasing the time to the maximum period it will regularly spend on its own will help the dog to adjust. Owners can also assist by establishing a routine so that the dog receives attention when they are home.

Fence-line distractions: A dog should not be kept near a walkway, hostile neighbours, or where children can tease it. The location of the dog's kennel or run may need to be changed if it is too close to a neighbour or other distraction. Neighbours who have dogs that growl and bark at each other should restrict each of the dogs access to the fence-line. A high solid fence or confining the dog to the rear of a property can prevent a dog from growling, barking or lunging at passers-by.

Visitors: A dog will often bark at visitors arriving, whether they are strangers or friends, especially if it is behind a barrier. If a dog is introduced to visitors, it won't be so vocal when they arrive.

Anxiety: Many dogs are anxious or insecure when their owners are absent and may cope with the stress of separation by barking, digging or chewing. Plastic or hide bones should be given to the dog before its owner leaves home as these can provide an outlet for the dog's anxiety. Minimal attention should be given to the dog before its owner departs.

Excitement: Excitable dogs will bark when overstimulated. This frequently occurs during play or when the dog is chasing a ball or birds in the garden.

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Changes in the Dogs life: A major change in a dog's lifestyle or environment may cause excessive barking. If an owner starts working longer hours, a marriage breaks up, a new baby arrives or a family shifts house, the amount and type of attention the dog receives or its status in the household may change. Instead of ignoring the dog, the owner should establish a new routine that includes exercise, training and play.

Discomfort: Dogs that are hot, wet, cold or without shelter may bark, as will dogs that are sick or in pain, hungry, thirsty or entangled in their chain. Before leaving home, the owner must ensure that their dog has access to bedding, food, water and familiar toys throughout the day. Dogs that are kept inside should have access to the outside when their owners are absent.

Teaching the dog to bark: If a dog is taken for a walk, brought into the house or comforted because it's barking too loud and prolonged, then the barking will always be loud and prolonged. The dog soon learns that barking can be rewarding. If a dog is brought inside the house because of its barking it must be done so on a permanent basis. A part of the house can be sectioned off for its use.

CORRECTING EXCESSIVE BARKING

Physical punishment: Yelling at or hitting a barking dog does not achieve anything except to reward the dog by giving it the attention it was seeking. Whether the attention is good or bad it does not matter to a dog that seeks this. Physical punishment will increase the likelihood of future barking by making the dog more anxious and may also cause it to bite when threatened in the future.

Exercise: Exercise alone will not stop a dog from barking, but it may provide an active release for its energy. Exercise should be varied with 15-20 minutes daily spent walking, training and playing with the dog. If the dog is to be left alone all day, it is preferable for the owner to exercise it before leaving for work. Riding a bicycle with the dog running alongside is dangerous. Too often a dog is distracted by another dog and pulls its owner off the bicycle and into traffic, or the dog itself gets injured in the moving wheels.

Getting a second dog:

Another dog may help if a dog is barking because of isolation or anxiety. If not, then the resident dog will probably teach the new dog to bark at all the distractions it presently barks at. Owners considering a second dog should first borrow a dog from friends on different occasions, to assess whether company will reduce their dog's barking. Other pets can provide company for the dog. Caged birds can be used, but they must be kept out of the dog's reach.

When owners are home:

Correcting a dog with a firm "No" as soon as it barks at distractions or when visitors arrive may stop a barking problem from developing. After any correction the owners should call the dog to them and praise it for returning. The dog should also be rewarded periodically with attention, praise or a walk if it is silent. Both procedures, correcting when barking and rewarding when silent should be used in conjunction with each other.

When Leaving a Dog on its Own

1. The owner should leave home for 5-10 minutes. Another person can be used to monitor any barking during this period. If the dog does not bark when the owner is absent it must be praised or rewarded with a treat on their return. If barking did occur then the dog is to be ignored and the procedure repeated.
2. Praise should be limited outside of the retraining sessions, so that the dog can associate the reward with being silent.
3. After several days of retraining the dog should begin to anticipate the praise and learn that non-barking behaviour is rewarding.
4. Once the dog is quiet for short periods, the length of its owner's absence may be gradually increased. A tape recorder can be used to monitor any barking.

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A mild tranquilliser may be necessary during the initial retraining period if the dog cannot remain silent for a short period. When a barking problem is being corrected, it is important that the dog is not left in a situation where it can continue to bark. A dog may sometimes have to be taken to work, left with a friend or kept inside for a short period during its initial retraining when the owner is absent.

Training the dog to bark appropriately: Many owners praise their dog when it barks at strangers in the belief that this will make the dog a better watchdog. However, constant barkers rarely frighten intruders, and neighbours will usually dismiss the barking. When training a dog to bark the owner must decide when, at what and for how long they wish the dog to bark for. The command "No" should be used by owners who do not want their dog to bark at all and the command "Cease" for those that want the dog to bark for a short period only. The cease command permits a warning bark which the owners can control. A firm tone of voice should be used to stop the barking and the dog must be praised immediately it ceases.

Barking correction collar: This is a device which can be attached to the dog's collar and emits a noise, shock or spray when it barks. It is effective in dogs that can associate the noise, shock or spray with the barking. However, not all dogs make this association and the noise or shock itself may stimulate further barking.

Barking correction device: This is a device which can be hung in your patio or along a fence line and emits a noise to the dog when it barks. It is effective in dogs that can make the association between the barking and the noise. However, not all dogs make this association and the noise itself may stimulate further barking.

Water and noise: A sprinkler can be used to spray the dog when it barks, or a can containing pebbles thrown near the dog to startle it. When the dog ceases barking it should be recalled and praised for returning. Either method should be used in conjunction with a firm "No" when the dog is barking and praised when it is silent. The procedure can be repeated as often as the opportunity arises, or when the owner can simulate conditions that may cause the dog to bark.

De-barking: The surgical removal of the vocal cords or larynx is an expensive and often unnecessary operation. It is an option that should only be used when other methods of treatment are ineffective or cannot be carried out.

Barking Dogs Kept Inside The House: Curtains should be drawn and the dog's access to windows restricted to prevent it from barking at passers-by. A "do not disturb", or a "do not ring" sign pinned to the door when the owner is absent will decrease the likelihood of the dog barking when someone knocks or rings. Some dogs will relax more if the lighting is dimmed. A radio, T.V., video or music can be left playing when the owner is out. This may comfort the dog by muffling any extraneous sounds and creating conditions similar to when its owners are at home. If the continual ringing of a telephone causes the dog to bark, an answer phone can be installed. This will enable the owner to call home at irregular intervals and use their voice to distract the dog from its barking.

What if my dog is a nuisance barker? There is no quick fix or easy solution to problem barking. Some dogs have behavioural problems such as separation anxiety, which requires specific treatment and behavioural modification. Don't yell at or hit the dog for barking as this may cause other behaviour problems. Instead, for advice on the best approach for your situation, consider approaching your local veterinarian, a dog obedience club, or an animal behaviourist.

Should you require any additional information on this matter, please contact Ranger Services on 9761 0800

