



Prove that you love me



## The Woof In Your Dog

### Why do people complain about barking dogs?

Owners need to understand that although they may feel their dog is not a nuisance or does not bark more than others in the street, the fact that someone has taken the time to contact Council means that the dog is causing a disturbance to a particular person. The dog may not be barking continually, few dogs do, but it can be the short repeated bursts of barking, or the pitch or tone or the direction that the sound travels that causes a problem. Sometimes it can be the particular time of day or night that the barking occurs that is of annoyance, such as if someone is trying to sleep, study or simply relax after a day at work. Not everyone is disturbed by barking dogs; different sounds annoy different people. Owners must be aware that although they may feel their dog is doing its job by barking at passers-by, this can be a genuine disturbance to neighbours or even to the passers-by themselves.

Owners of dogs that bark excessively may be issued with an infringement notice. (Dog Cause Nuisance By-Law 71(1))

### What can be done to prevent complaints?

Dogs do not bark without reason. Barking can occur when the dog is excited, when it is threatened, warns its owner, seeks its owner's attention or is responding to a distant sound or signal.

The owner needs to find out why and when the dog is barking. Barking is more likely to occur in some breeds than others and this will need special attention, such as providing the dog with interesting alternatives to barking. Dogs will bark at any noises or movements they can see, hear and smell but are not able to investigate or reach. A well socialised dog that has been given a variety of experiences when young is less likely to overreact to outside distractions.

Owners are often surprised to receive a complaint about their barking dog or howling because the dog never does this when they are home. Dogs should be provided with toys, not necessarily expensive, but the type that encourages play. Dogs that have never had toys before often have to be shown what is expected of them. To help relax the dog during the time the owner is absent, it is a good idea to exercise and feed the dog before leaving.

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. 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 and praise it for returning, to reinforce your bond.

Barking is often the only way your dog can let you know something is not quite right, so making sure your dog always has adequate shelter, water and exercise will also prevent problems.

Many breeds kept in Darwin are from the working dog family and require generous daily exercise, such as free running which can be done at an approved dog exercise area. If these breeds do not receive daily exercise and have toys to keep them amused in the owners absence, then they usually run the fence line barking at passers-by. All dogs should have adequate fencing to keep them properly contained. If your dog has to be chained, then a runner wire is preferable.

A major change in an older 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 a dog receives or its status in the household may change. Instead of ignoring the dog, the owners should establish a new routine that includes exercise, training and play.



## What to do when a complaint is received?

Dogs can become bored, insecure or anxious when the owner is not present and may cope with the stress of separation by barking, digging or chewing.

### Suggestions for prevention of separation anxiety in dogs:

- Don't get in the habit of taking the dog with you every time you go out.
- If the dog is usually near you then begin by separating it from you for short periods of time e.g.; put the dog outside or in another room with a bone/toy/music for a few minutes and then extend the time;
- Take the dog for a short walk before leaving alone, especially if the dog is to be left inside or in a pen;
- Get into the habit of having the radio on when you are home and leave it on when you are out;
- Leave an old article of clothing (tee shirt that you have got a sweat up in is ideal) at the area where the dog sleeps. If the dog doesn't have an area, then establish one;
- If you are away most of the day then feed the dog the main daily meal before you leave;
- Don't let the dog see you changing to go out e.g.; putting on your hat, picking up your bag, putting on certain shoes;
- Don't say 'goodbye' or 'be a good boy, Mummy won't be long' to the dog as the tone of voice used usually alerts the dog that something it doesn't like is about to happen;
- Provide toys that occupy the dog; and
- If the dog is the sole pet and is to be alone for long periods, a second dog or cat for company may be beneficial.

Generally preventative methods are the best to use

to control this sort of problem. Correction can only be done when someone is present and separation anxiety does not occur then. This problem is common in small breeds as they are often around their owners and enjoy the company of people.

**Physical punishment:** Yelling at or hitting a barking dog achieves nothing except to reward it by giving it the attention it was seeking. Whether the attention is good or bad it does not matter to a dog that seeks attention.

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.

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

**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.

**Barking dogs left in 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, TV, video or music may 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 answering machine can be installed.

**Barking correction collar:** There are a few different types of anti-bark collars available on the market. These should be used in conjunction with expert advice on your dog's behaviour, as a collar may not



be the best way to control the problem. Should the use of a collar be deemed appropriate, Council has information available on the types available and the retail outlets; call our Animal Education Officer on 89300606.

**Toys to keep your dog amused:** Toys are a great tool to use to modify your dog's behaviour. Playing with a toy can be used as an alternative action to barking. To gain the desired result when first introducing a new toy, it will be necessary to show the dog how to use the toy. Retail outlets have a wide range. The list below gives ideas for the use of many items you may already have around the home.

- Old socks (preferably unwashed) either tied together in knots or stuffed inside one another and tied at the opening.
- Short length of thick rope tied with a knot at each end.
- Empty plant pots.
- Long length of rope tied to a strong tree branch to act as a swing tug toy (Staffordshire Bull Terriers love these).
- If you have two dogs a length of rope with a knot in each end can be used for tug-of-war.
- Various size balls; care should be taken that the ball is not small enough to allow the dog the swallow it. Large (football size) balls are ideal for breeds such as Heelers, Kelpies, Collies, Great Danes, Hounds, Mastiffs and Jack Russell.
- Short length of PVC pipe covered with canvas makes a strong toy for dogs that like to chew, the covering can be replaced as need be.
- Coconut husks make another good activity for those that like to chew and destroy.
- Empty plastic soft drink bottles with the lid removed and a handful of dry dog or cat food inside will keep a dog entertained for hours. You will have to show the dog that to get the reward the bottle must be rolled along the ground. The size of the bottle and type of food used will depend on the dog.

- Various sizes of strong rubber rings such as the type found in plumbers' tool boxes.
- Pieces of fluffy material, these may be rolled and stitched or simply left as a piece. Old lambs wool car seat covers or floor mats are ideal.

## Need more information?

Further advice is available by calling Council's Pet Care Helpline 89300606, and if necessary an appointment can be made for the officer to visit your home.

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