

# WHY DOGS BARK

Like their human companions, dogs need to communicate. They can do this by barking, whimpering, growling, howling, yelping and moaning. When one or two dogs make any of these sounds excessively in close proximity to neighbours, the constant noise may become a problem.

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

To deter a dog from barking excessively, owners need first to 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.

## Some causes of persistent barking

### Excitement

Dogs that are excitable by nature will bark when over stimulated. This frequently occurs during play or when the dog is chasing something in the garden.

Some breeds of dogs are naturally excitable, whereas some are more likely to react to confinement or isolation. Prospective owners need to carefully select a dog suitable for their lifestyle and home environment.

### Visitors

A dog will often bark at visitors arriving, whether they are strangers or friends, especially if the dog is behind a fence or barrier.



Whenever possible, in situations where owners do not want their dog to bark at specific people, introduce the dog to visitors so that it won't be so vocal when they arrive next time.



### 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.

Ways of overcoming anxiety for dogs before an owner leaves home or during their absence are as follows:

- Provide mental stimulation such as toys or bones to provide a distraction for the dog's anxiety.
- Give minimal attention to the dog before departing, so that the emphasis is not placed on your absence.
- Possibly leave on the radio or television at a low volume near the dog's area for noise consistent with when somebody is at home.
- When arriving home, deter making sudden contact with the dog if the dog is very excitable, instead wait a few minutes until the dog settles down, then the dog can associate praise being given for calmer behaviour.
- Talk to your vet if the anxiety is quite severe, as there may be other alternatives.

## 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, lawnmowers, ringing telephones, a knock on the door, cats or the sounds of other dogs may trigger a bout of barking.

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. A well-socialised dog that has been given a variety of experiences and exposure when young is less likely to overreact to outside distractions.

Most dogs can 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 can help the dog to adjust.

Owners can assist by walking the dog regularly, not only for the dog's own health but also for establishing a routine for the dog. This will give your pet an opportunity to become familiar with its neighbourhood.

## Dogs left inside the house

Some dogs who stay inside the house regardless of whether the owners are home or away may still cause nuisance barking when left on their own. Similar to treating anxiety, a radio, television or music can be left on while the owners are out to comfort the dog.

## Discomfort

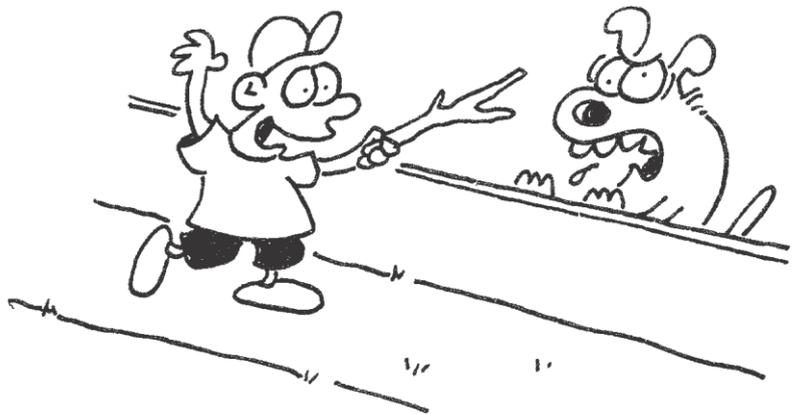
Dogs that are hot, wet, cold or without shelter may bark, as will dogs that are sick or in pain. A dog that is hungry, thirsty or tangled in their chain would experience enough stress that it may bark constantly.

All dog owners must always ensure that their dog has access to shelter, bedding, water, perhaps food, and familiar toys throughout the day.

## Changes in a dog's life

The effect of a major change in a dog's lifestyle or environment varies greatly depending on the dog. Moving house, a new baby at home, working longer hours or family members moving out are some examples of changes that can create stress for dogs.

In most cases, the amount and type of attention given to a dog can vary during these times. Instead of ignoring the dog, owners should establish a new routine that includes exercise, training and play. This will make the transition easier for the dog to cope with during the change.



## Fence-line distractions

Many of the frustrating problems experienced by dog owners living in suburbia are distractions from walkways adjoining properties, hostile neighbours and people teasing or tormenting dogs.

Dog owners should always ensure that the property where the dog is kept has high well-maintained fences. The location of the dog's kennel or run shouldn't be too close to neighbours or the fence-line. In some cases, dog owners may put measures in place to restrict visual distractions for dogs prone to growling, barking or lunging at passersby.

## Rewarding good behaviour

Different training techniques may be required depending on the severity of the barking.

A dog attempting to get their owner's attention by barking should be ignored. The dog will soon realise that this behaviour is ineffective.

With patience and perseverance, dogs rewarded by being silent should begin to anticipate and learn that non-barking behaviour is rewarding. A reward can be anything from giving attention to the dog, praise, treats or taking it for a walk.

## How Council can help

While at times there may be only a vague understanding of why a barking dog is a problem, it is always evident that it is a problem.

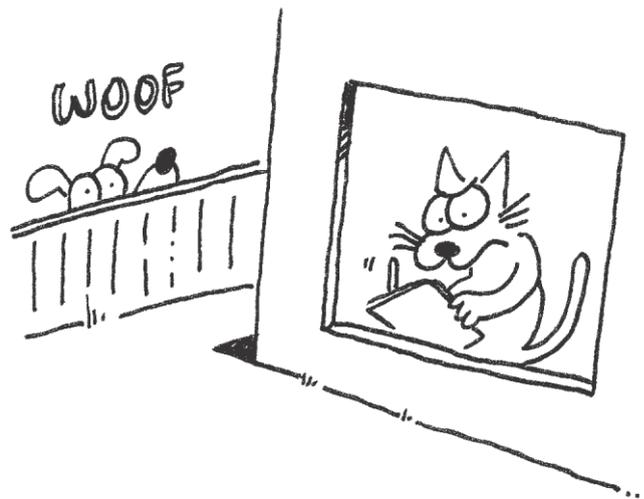
Finding solutions to barking dogs is a process that requires patience and co-operation from both the dog owner and the community. Establishing what triggers the dog to bark excessively can assist in minimising the effect of these triggers.

Sometimes, it may be necessary to turn to professional advice from your veterinarian or a dog behavioural specialist if all other measures have been unsuccessful.

## Anti-barking collars

A citronella anti-barking collar is a device that is attached and worn like a normal dog collar around the dog's neck. As the dog barks, the device releases a spray of citronella the dog finds undesirable. It is effective when the dog can make the association between barking and the offending spray.

Citronella collars are available for hire by contacting the Animal Education Officer on 8935 9977.



## More information

The City of Palmerston produces a range of information sheets to assist responsible dog ownership. These include information about our off-leash area at Marlow Lagoon Pet Park, dogs in thunderstorms, animal management bylaws, and toys for your dog.

The information sheets can be found in the Library, at the Council office, and online at [www.palmerston.nt.gov.au](http://www.palmerston.nt.gov.au) in our publications section. For information, you can also call Regulatory Services on 8935 9977.

This information is provided for advice only.

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