



Animal Management - Barking Dogs

Nearly all dogs bark. It is a natural response to many factors in a dog's environment, but excessive barking may become a real neighbourhood nuisance. It may greatly reduce the quality of life of neighbours by disrupting sleep and interfering with daily activities. Council understands the value of enjoying a peaceful neighbourhood and appreciates that resolving noise nuisance complaints can sometimes be confronting or difficult. The information provided in this booklet is to assist in understanding the roles of the aggrieved party, Council and the dog owner.

Barking is an extremely common dog behaviour problem and the most common community problem reported to Council. Having barking dogs in the community significantly reduces the quality of life for those affected by barking.

Barking is considered a nuisance if a dog barks continually when:

- Left alone for extended periods
- Immediately after you leave home
- People pass by your property
- Attention seeking

You know you have a problem when:

- Your neighbours confront you about the issue
- Council receives a complaint about the issue
- The barking annoys you
- The barking continues to disrupt the daily activities of people within your neighbourhood

So why do dogs bark?

Barking and howling are their natural means of communication. So what is your dog trying to tell you? The dog is generally barking for a reason. Excessive barking is an indication that something is wrong with the dog's living situation.

If you wish to reduce your dog's barking, you need to understand why he or she is barking. People are consistently inconsistent and often

confuse their dog, sometimes the dog is allowed to bark, sometimes the dog is encouraged to bark yet other times it is severely punished for barking. Sometimes we reward the barking dog when we don't mean to.

What prompts a dog to bark?

BOREDOM – a big backyard is not the answer to reducing a dog's boredom. Being alone with very little to do for extended periods of time can lead to boredom, frustration and loneliness for dogs. Dogs have a great deal of energy and most breeds were bred for a specific purpose, such as hunting, guarding and working. Bored dogs also show other anti-social behaviours, like trying to escape, being destructive, and chewing and digging.

ANXIETY – Dogs are 'pack' animals, which means they enjoy living in groups. The dog regards its owners and family as its pack, and will bark in an attempt to communicate with the missing members of its pack. When dogs are left alone they may fret and become anxious, often barking for extended periods of time. Dogs may also become fearful or anxious of people or objects, like the postman or the neighbour's lawnmower. When dogs bark because of fear or anxiety, it is very important to work on reducing anxiety levels as early as possible. This will benefit your dog and the community.

How can you contact us?

 online, visit www.banana.qld.gov.au
click on 'Contact us'

 email enquiries@banana.qld.gov.au

 mail, post to Banana Shire Council
PO Box 412, Biloela Qld 4715

DISTURBANCES – Barking episodes can be set off when people come to the door or walk past your property (like the postman). The dog's behaviour is then reinforced as the perceived "intruder" leaves – the dog believes his barking has sent this unwanted guest away! Some dogs bark and act aggressively through the fence at passers-by. This may not only cause a noise nuisance, but also become frightening for strangers outside the house.

DISCOMFORT – Pain and discomfort, illness or even being restricted to a small area may be a cause of barking. Dogs left chained or tied up may find it difficult to get exercise or water to drink. If your usually quiet dog suddenly starts to bark excessively, check its environment and perhaps take a trip to the vet.

EXCITEMENT – Anticipating a walk, playing games, playing with children, seeing people in swimming pools, and hearing their owners come home, often excite a dog. This uncontrolled barking is fairly easy to fix by removing the source of excitement from the dog and not rewarding the barking behaviour.

FIND OUT WHY YOUR DOG IS BARKING

If you are unsure why your dog is barking, take the time to determine the following:

- Time of day – Does your dog bark at certain times of the day? What is happening in your neighbourhood at that time? Is the postman delivering mail? Is your rubbish being collected? Are children coming home from school and walking past your property? Are straying cats or possums in your yard at night?
- What are you doing? – Are you leaving to go to work when your dog starts barking? Are you away for extended periods of time, resulting in your dog's boredom? Are you rewarding unwanted behaviour by reacting to it?
- What is your dog doing? – Is your dog stressed, excited, bored or lonely? Is your dog trying to get to you – its 'pack'? Most owners ignore their dogs when they are well behaved. Good behaviour may be taken for granted, for example, resting and playing quietly. Then, the owner encourages bad behaviour by paying attention to the dog when it barks. It's easy to understand why dogs learn that the only way they can get the owner's attention is by barking.

Assessing your problem

- What makes your dog bark?
- When, where and why does my dog bark (day/night), when I'm not home?
- What happens after my dog barks? Does there appear to be any form of stress release for the dog?
- Is the behaviour normal for my dog?
- Is my dog's behaviour learned or conditioned?
- How long had my dog been barking?
- How did the behaviour problem start? What were the circumstances?
- Look at the length of time this behaviour has been going on; has it been gradual, or is it occasional or progressive?

Once you have assessed yourself, your problem, and your dog, use the information in this booklet to determine what you can do, or who

you can ask for help to prevent your dog barking and becoming a neighbourhood nuisance.

Keep a diary – Some dog owners find it useful to keep a diary or log of their activities and their dog's barking. This may be useful to pinpoint when and why your dog is barking.

Can't find a cause? – Sometimes it is difficult to determine the cause of barking. Your dog may be unpredictable. The barking may just be a bad habit, it may be attention seeking, or in response to something you can't see. An alternative is to seek professional help.

MANAGING YOUR DOGS BARKING

Is your dog barking excessively?

The first step in managing barking in our community is to find out the reason WHY your dog is barking in the first place. Then, and only then, can we suggest strategies to assist you to manage your dog's excessive nuisance barking.

Talk it out with your neighbours

You may want to get your neighbours to help you document the barking for a few days, given that your dog may be barking when you are away or at work. Explain to your neighbours that you are aware of the issue and ask for their help and patience while you try and solve the problem. If you are concerned about speaking with your neighbours you may wish to use the communication card in this booklet. The cards enable your neighbours to give you feedback anonymously.

Things you can do

Investigate and record when your dog barks (what time of day, where it does the barking (e.g. inside or outside), what is around at the time it barks (e.g. children, postman, etc). With this information we will have a better understanding as to what is motivating your dog to bark excessively and how you may train your dog to reduce its barking to an acceptable level.

What not to do

Do not shout at the dog in an attempt to stop it from barking, as this may have the opposite effect and encourage it to bark more. Shouting may stop dogs barking temporarily, but in the long run, many bark because they want attention and they know barking will get it.

Remember

- Barking problems are common. If you have a barking dog problem, you are not alone!
- Behavioural problems can be understood if you learn more about your pet's behaviour.
- Seek professional help if necessary.

If your dog is causing a barking nuisance in your neighbourhood it may be reported to Council. Once Council receives a complaint you may be asked to take action to resolve the problem. Neighbours may be more patient with your dogs barking, if they are aware of the steps you are taking to minimise the barking.

The aim is to control and modify the dog's barking and in turn help prevent boredom and/or separation anxiety in dogs.

Separation anxiety is a behavioural problem that occurs in dogs that become highly attached to their owner, another dog or other family member, and become extremely distressed in their absence. This condition can arise if your dog is left alone for long periods of time, coupled with boredom. Subsequently, this may lead to excessive nuisance barking. Distracting a dog from a loved one's absence may reduce the level of barking. This is often achieved by using food or toys.

Please remember it is not Council's responsibility to resolve the problem for you. As the dog owner you need to firstly accept that your dog may be causing a problem and then take appropriate action to stop your dog barking excessively and these matters are unlikely to be resolved quickly.

Council is obligated to advise you that there are legal ramifications for not abating any noise nuisance.

METHODS OF CONTROL

- Avoid conditioning – do not reward your dog for bad behaviour.
- Companionship – before leaving home, turn on the television or radio, or give your dog an old coat or item of clothing that belongs to you.
- Never call your dog after it stops barking and then punish it.
- Increase physical exercise.
- Regularly walk your dog and change the route you walk.
- Take your dog for a drive.
- Spend FUN time with your dog.
- Avoid routine e.g. carry your keys with you at different times not just the times when you are leaving.
- Access to the house – if you can let the dog inside the house, provide it with a single room that may smell like you (for comfort) in order to relax the dog (the 'denning' principle).
- Obedience training – a dog can be trained to be alone, and bark only on command.
- Avoid stimulus – distract your dog with another form of reward at the time it normally bark at a neighbourhood disturbance.
- Fence design – a fence correctly designed to restrict your dog's

vision of outside stimuli if your dog can see outside.

- Anti-barking devices, used in conjunction with obedience training, can reduce barking.
- Discipline – show your dog that you are the head of the house. Dogs are pack animals and need to be shown where they stand in relation to the family unit.
- Spend the time to work out why your dog is barking.

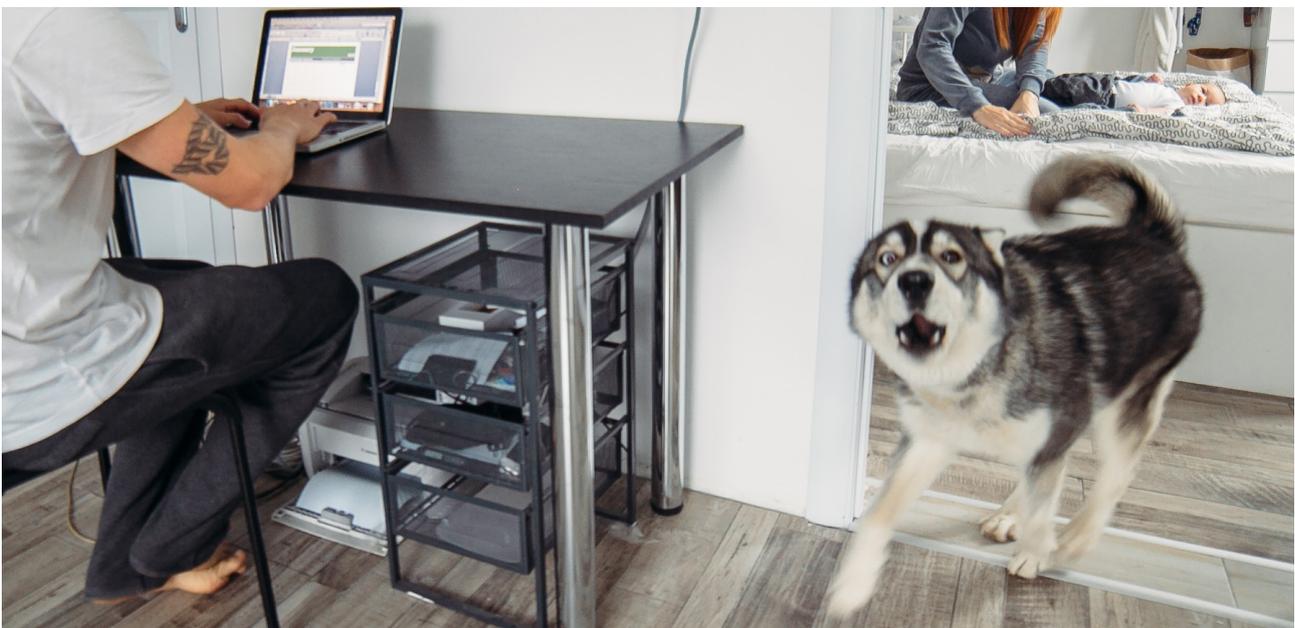
The main cause of barking is boredom.

To avoid boredom you need to give your dog plenty to do when it's alone.

Here are some suggestions:

For the best result, try interactive toys that hide food, such as a "Kong" (a rubber toy) or ones that are designed to require manipulation and work to obtain the food reward. Leave toys, rope chews, rawhides and even bones for a dog to play with and use up time while alone.

- Use old drink bottles or milk containers – remove the lid; cut a few squares in the side and place dry biscuits or ice inside. Your dog will roll them like a toy. They also make good chew toys (when empty)
- There are food reward toys available (e.g. Kongs). Talk to your vet or pet shop.
- Make sure your dog has plenty of water available.
- Give your dog a bone or dog treat (e.g. a pig ear or chew toy) when you leave the house. This will teach your dog that when you leave there is a positive reward – the bone or treat.
- A variety of toys (balls, chew toys, something to climb on) can be left in the yard for your dog to play with. Remember toys need not to be expensive. Be mindful to alternate your dog's toys as they are like kids – they will get bored and ignore them.
- Making fun toys simple – buy a giant tug toy and some heavy duty rope, attach the rope to a big tree and the toy to the end of the rope. Now your dog can play tug while you are away.
- You can also try feeding your dog during the day when you are NOT at home – as this activity alone can keep your dog busily distracted for hours while it 'hunts' for the food you have hidden, fulfilling its natural 'hunting' instinct.



Dear Neighbour,

I believe my dog/s may be barking/howling excessively which is causing some concerns in the neighbourhood. I'm currently trying to address this situation and would like your assistance.

Can you please complete the below and drop this survey back in my letter box at:

Kind Regards

Name _____

Address _____

Your dog/s are not causing me concerns

Your dog/s is causing me concerns

If my dog is causing you concern, please provide details of this noise (i.e. date, time and regularity)

Please include your name and phone number if it's okay for me to contact you about your feedback:

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