



BARKING DOGS

Barking is one way dogs communicate. It is also a normal behaviour, however when it is carried out to excess, at inappropriate places or at inappropriate times it becomes a behaviour problem. Dogs bark for many reasons. It is unlikely to be completely eliminated, but they can be taught when it is appropriate to bark, and for how long. It is probably impossible to stop completely.

There are three main predisposing factors to a behaviour problem:

1. genetics
2. past experience and learning
3. present situation

The genetic make up of a dog can't be changed. Terriers, Beagles, Rottweilers and German Shepherds are more likely to bark than Basset Hounds, Afghans or Basenjis. Some dogs have learnt to bark and have then had years of practice. For example, the dog that barks every day at the postman. He has been rewarded for his behaviour regularly and consistently because every time he barks the postman leaves! Dogs that have experienced many changes of home or owners or spent time in shelters or pounds will be predisposed to anxiety-related problems.

Here are some tips that may help improve your barking problem ...

- Block the dog's view of passing people, dogs and other animals by filling in gaps in the fence.
- Prevent access to areas where there are regular distractions such as children passing on their way home from school, the mailman or milkman (boundary fence, front door). This may only have to be at certain times of the day.
- Provide food, water, adequate aerobic exercise, "thinking" toys and basic obedience training.
- Avoid accidentally "rewarding" the dog for barking by talking, shouting, coming outside, grabbing the collar etc. Instead, reward the dog for NOT barking with food, attention or games when it is quiet.
- Teach the dog a "stop" command and reward the dog when it is obedient with praise, food and attention. A local Canine Good Citizen qualified trainer can help.
- Place a radio between the dog and the barking stimulus. However, not at a volume that may disturb the neighbours!
- Dogs bark for many different reasons and these may be managed in different ways. If problem persists the dog should be examined by a veterinary surgeon.

A dog that barks a lot doesn't necessarily make it a good watch dog because the neighbours will often ignore a dog that barks excessively. Barking is normal for dogs however barking for long periods of time or at every passer by is not. A second dog will rarely cure or prevent a barking problem. Even though your dog doesn't bark when you are at home doesn't mean he isn't barking when you're out.

If your barking problem persists, please make an appointment to see your vet. Your vet will check whether there is an underlying physical or medical problem and discuss whether a full behaviour assessment is required.