



Neighbour Disputes over Barking Dogs

Private home visits and cries for help are high on the list when it comes to frustrated owners and upset neighbours who experience continual barking noise issues. Often it's the last straw that dreaded council visit that prompts an owner to reach out for help.

So why do dogs bark? Yes it's a form of communication and dogs like other animals and people do communicate verbally. After all we have bred certain breeds to bark more to alert us to dangers such as intruders or hunting dogs who alert owners to prey. The bark is usually a response to a stimulus, something that has excited or caused the animal to become anxious. This can be the mower man next door, the children down the street or the koala in the tree. Dogs bark to protect territory or out of boredom, are anxious, perhaps are unwell, in play, or are looking for attention.

We as humans expect our dogs to hang around in the backyard all day with very little mental stimulation or environmental enrichment to keep them happy. That's when dogs learn that barking can be self rewarding. (Running up and down the fence line barking at the postman is a self rewarding act).

Let's ask ourselves a question, could you sit in your backyard all day with nothing to do? Very few people can, so why on earth do we expect our animals to do the same. Like us they need mental and physical stimulation inside and outside their backyards. They need environmental enrichment toys to keep them occupied throughout the day. They need to socialise on a regular basis with their own kind, meet and greet different people in other environments such as the beach and be able to stay at home and not feel anxious or stressed while mum and dad are at work.

Often neighbours are reluctant to go and talk to owners about their barking dog. It's a fact that people often feel threatened when confronted by a neighbour and look to pin the blame elsewhere. (Surely it must be the dog next door, can't possibly be mine). Some neighbours may be more easy going and cope with the noise issue better than others. A friendly neighbourly chat can save a lot of heartache, so don't overreact if approached. If you receive a council letter, better late than never to understand that perhaps your pet may be barking and has some issues. Councils are not our worst enemy, they are there as a mediator to resolve an issue, sometimes one you may not have been aware of. Spending money on a noise recorder or video your pet will allow you to hear what time and how often your dog may bark throughout the day.

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What ever you do, DON'T PUNISH THE DOG. It is not their fault. As a responsible owner it is up to you to manage your dog. Management tools include regular outings to a dog park, morning and evening walks, environmental enrichment programs, YOU educating yourself about canine behaviour and working on forming a strong bond with your pet, having a safe den they can get into, leaving on a radio softly and learning when to reward your dog and when to ignore behaviour.

Positive reward based training helps build a strong bond between you and your pet.

Anti barking collars are NOT an answer to a problem, they are a poor cruel substitute for an owner who wants a quick fix and is not interested in understanding or resolving their pet's issues in a humane way

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