

WHY DOGS BARK:

Dogs bark to communicate. They may be warning off what *they perceive to be* territorial intruders. They may bark during play or when they are afraid, frustrated, lonely, or bored. Barking can also be an effective attention-getting device - even bad attention can be good attention to the bored or lonely dog. In order to discover why your dog barks, you need to look for the following "clues":

When is your dog barking (what time/s of the day)?

How long does your dog bark for?

At what (if anything) is your dog barking at?

What does your dog look like (body posture) when it is barking? (i.e. afraid, aggressive, playful, etc.)

You will need to do some detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking is occurring when you aren't at home. (Ask several of your neighbors to help, if possible. They may appreciate your efforts to resolve the situation and getting them involved in the solution may be the first step to mending bad feelings.) Keep a log and look for consistencies that may provide clues to the causes of your dog's excessive barking.

SEPARATION ANXIETY:

Many dogs become anxious when they are left alone, even if there are other pets around. Sometimes changes in family routine can trigger this problem even if it didn't exist previously. Often seen in combination with other destructive or escape type behaviors (such as digging by a fence line). If excess barking is due to separation anxiety then it will "usually" only occur when the owner is not at home. Barking most commonly starts within 20 to 30 minutes of the owners departure and the dog may appear to be barking at nothing. The dog may look fearful and may be standing near an area through which the owner left or where the dog watched the owner leave from.

FEARS & PHOBIAS:

There are many common noises which could frighten your pet such as cars backfiring, thunder, fireworks, or gunshots. Your dog will bark when they hear the noise but if the dog associates the fright (for example) being in the backyard, they may eventually bark whether the noise is present or not, as the yard itself has now become a frightening place to be. Dogs may not appear to be barking at anything specific and will look afraid as they bark.

TERRITORIAL/PROTECTIVE BARKING:

Dogs will bark at anything *they* perceive to be a threat. This could include children, cats, the mailman, other dogs or even neighbors in adjacent yards. Dogs may be inadvertently rewarded for this behavior by owners who encourage the dog to alert to people and noises and/or by being successful at driving the "threat" away ("I bark, the mailman leaves"), thereby reinforcing or rewarding the barking. The barking will occur in the presence of one of these "intruders" and the dog will appear threatening.

BOREDOM/LONELINESS/FRUSTRATION:

Dogs are social, pack animals. Most dogs will not play with toys by themselves. Even the largest yard will not provide an isolated dog with exercise enough to fulfill their needs. Barking can be an enjoyable way to pass their time. Dogs who spend long time periods without much attention from their owners may discover barking as an attention-getting device. Even negative attention, like scolding, may be preferable to being alone. Dogs who are tied or confined to small areas may be frustrated and may bark excessively.

Written for the Maui Humane Society by Jocelyn Bouchard