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Annoyed With Barking Dogs, Understanding It and Dealing With It

Some owners seem to **want their dogs to stop barking**, period: a good dog is a quiet dog, and the **only time that barking's permitted** is when there's a man in a black balaclava and stripy prison outfit, clutching a haversack marked 'Swag', clambering in through your bedroom window.

Dogs don't see barking in quite the same light. Your dog has a voice, just like you do, and she uses it just how you do too: **to communicate something to the people she cares about.** I don't think that **barking is necessarily a bad thing** – in fact, I think it's encouraging that my dog wants to “talk” to me, enough so that I can overlook the stentorian qualities of his voice (which, in enclosed spaces, is positively overpowering) in favor of **his desire to communicate** with me.

It's the thought that counts (even though I feel better-equipped to stand by this sanctimonious belief when my ears are sheltered safely behind industrial-quality ear-plugs). Unfortunately, **the language barrier between dogs and humans** is pretty well impermeable, which means it's up to us to use the context, **the body language of our dogs**, and the circumstances of the vocalization to **parse meaning from a volley of barks.**

So why do dogs bark? It's not easy to say (it's like trying to answer the question, “Why do humans talk?” in so many words). Let's start off by saying that **dogs bark for many different reasons.** A lot of it **depends on the breed:** some **dogs were bred to bark only when a threat is perceived** (this is true of guarding breeds in particular, like Rottweilers, Dobermans, and German Shepherds); some were **bred to use their voices as a tool** of sorts, to assist their owners in pursuit of a common goal (sporting breeds such as Beagles and Bloodhounds, **trained to 'bay' when they scent the quarry**), and some **dogs just like to hear themselves talk** (take just about any of the **toy breeds** as an example of a readily-articulate dog!).

However, all breed specificities cast aside, there are some circumstances where just about any dog will give voice: * **She's bored** * **She's lonely** * **She's hungry**, or **knows it's time for a meal** * Something is **wrong/someone is near the house** * **She's inviting you to play** * **She sees another animal** * **She needs the toilet.**

If your **dog is barking for any of these reasons**, it's not really realistic for you to try to stop her: after all, she's a dog, and **it's the nature of all dogs to bark at certain times and in certain situations.** Presumably you were aware of this when you adopted your friend (and, if total silence was high on your list of priorities, you'd have bought a pet rock, right?).

Of course, **there are times when barking isn't only unwarranted**, it's downright undesirable. Some **dogs can use their voices** as a means of manipulation. Take this situation as an example: You're lying on the couch reading a book. Your **dog awakes from a nap and decides it's time for a game.** She picks up her ball, comes over, and drops it in your lap. You ignore her and keep on reading. After a second of puzzled silence, she nudges your hand with her nose and barks once, loudly. You look over at her – she assumes the 'play-bow' position (elbows near the floor, bottom in the air, tail waving) and pants enticingly at you. You return to your book. **She barks again, loudly** – and, when no response is elicited, barks again. And this time, she keeps it up. After a minute or so of this, sighing, you put down your book (peace and quiet is evidently not going to be a component of your evening, after all), pick up the ball, and **take her outside for a game of fetch.**

She **stops barking immediately.** I'm sure you know that respect is an essential part of your **relationship with your dog.** You respect her, which you demonstrate by taking good care of her regardless of the convenience of doing so, **feeding her nutritious and tasty food**, and **showing your affection for her** in ways that she understands and enjoys. In order for her to be **worthy of your respect**, she has to respect you, too.

Something that many kind-hearted souls struggle to come to terms with is that **dog ownership is not about equality:** it's **about you being the boss**, and her being the pet. Dogs are not children; they are most comfortable and best-behaved when they know that you are in charge. **A dog has to respect your leadership** to be a happy, well-adjusted, and **well-behaved pet.**

In the situation above, there was **no respect being shown by the dog.** She wasn't inviting her owner to

play; **she was harassing her owner** to play. In fact, I'd **even say bullying**. And even worse, **the behavior was being reinforced by the owner's capitulation** – effectively, **giving in to this behavior taught her that to get what she wants**, she has to make a noise – and **she has to keep it up until her goal is achieved**.

Affection and play-times are obviously necessary aspects of life with a dog, but they have to be doled out on your own terms. If she learns that **she can get what she wants by barking**, then your house is going to become a Noise Pollution Zone (and this is not going to endear you to your neighbors, either). To **prevent this bullying behavior in your dog** from assuming a familiar role in her repertoire of communications, you have to prove to her that **you're not the kind of person that can be manipulated so easily**.

It's simple to do this: all you have to do is ignore her. I'm not talking about passive ignorance, where you pay her no attention and simply continue with whatever it was you were doing – **you need to take more of an active role**. This means **conveying to her through your body language that she is not worthy of your attention when she acts in such an undesirable manner**.

The absolute best and most effective thing for you to do in this case is to **give her the cold shoulder**. When **she starts trying to 'bark you' into doing something for her, turn your back on her straight away**. Get up, avert your eyes and face, and turn around so your back is towards her. **Don't look at her, and don't talk to her – not even a "no"**. She'll probably be confused by this, and will likely bark harder. This is **particularly true if you've given in to her bully-barking in the past** – the more times you've **reinforced the behavior**, the more persistent she's going to be.

In fact, the **barking will almost certainly get a lot worse before it gets better** – after all, it's worked for her the past, so it's understandable that she'll expect it to work again. **As in all aspects of dog training, consistency is very important**. You must ensure that you don't change your mind halfway through and give in to what she wants – because by doing so, you're teaching her to be really, really persistent (**"OK, so I just need to bark for ten minutes instead of five to get a walk," is the message she'll get**).

But what can you do in **other situations where bullying isn't an issue and you just want her to stop the racket?** If you want to get the message across that you'd like her to cease fire and be quiet, the most effective thing you can do is to use your hands. **No, I'm not talking about hitting her**: this is a **perfectly humane, impact- and pain-free method** of conveying that what you require right now is peace and quiet. Here's what you do: **when she's barking, give her a second to 'get it out of her system'** (it's a lot kinder, and a lot more effective, to give her a chance - however brief – to express herself before asking her to be quiet).

If she doesn't calm down under her own steam, **reach out and clasp her muzzle gently, but firmly, in your hand**. She'll try to shake you off, or back away, so you can **place your other hand on her collar to give you greater control**.

This **method is useful** for two reasons: firstly, it **effectively silences the barking** (since no dog, no matter how loud, can bark with her mouth shut!). Secondly, **it reinforces your authority**: you're showing her through direct physical action that you're a benevolent but firm leader who will brook no nonsense, and who won't balk when it comes to **enforcing your guidance**.

Hold onto her muzzle and collar until she's stopped trying to break free: only when she calms down and stops wriggling does it mean that she's **accepted your authority**. When she's still, hold on for one or two more seconds, then **let her go and praise her**. In addition to this short-term fix, there are also a few things you can do to **reduce your dog's need to bark** in the first place.

The number-one cause for unwanted barking (as in, the kind of barking that's repetitive and is directed at nothing) is nervous, agitated energy – the kind she gets from not getting enough exercise. **Most dogs function best with one and a half hours' exercise every day**, which is a considerable time commitment for you. Of course, this **varies from dog to dog, depending on factors like breed, age, and general level of health**.

You may think that **your dog is getting as much exercise as she needs**, or at least as much as you can possibly afford to give her – **but if her barking is coupled with an agitated demeanor** (fidgeting, perhaps acting more aggressively than you'd expect or want, restlessness, [destructive behavior](#)) then she almost definitely needs more.

Fortunately, the fix for this problem is pretty simple: you'll just have to **exercise her more**. Try getting up a half-hour earlier in the morning – it'll make a big difference. If this is absolutely impossible, **consider hiring someone to walk her in the mornings and/or evenings**. And if this is impossible too, then **you'll just have to resign yourself to having a loud, frustrated, and agitated dog** (although whether you can resign her to this state remains to be seen). The **second most common cause of excessive vocalization in dogs is too much 'alone time'**. Dogs are social animals: they need **lots of attention, lots of interaction, and lots of communication**. Without these things, **they become anxious and on edge**.

If you're at home with your dog, you're not paying attention to her, and she's **spending a lot of time barking at what appears to be nothing**, she's probably bored and lonely and **would benefit from a healthy dose of affection and attention**. Recommended reading If you'd like more information on **unwanted behaviors that your dog's exhibiting**, you'll probably be interested in taking a look at **Secrets to Dog Training**. It's a complete, A-Z manual for the responsible dog owner, and **deals with recognizing, preventing, and dealing with just about every problem dog behavior** under the sun. You can check out Secrets to Dog Training by clicking on the link below:

[Secrets of Dog Training](#)

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