



# Solving Barking Problems

## BEHAVIOR SERIES

**IF YOU EVER WONDER** if your dog's bark is worse than his proverbial bite, the answer may lie no further than your next-door neighbor. Some canine behavior problems, such as house soiling, affect only a dog's family. But problems such as escaping and excessive barking can result in neighborhood disputes and violations of animal control ordinances, and that means problems with your pet can soon become "people problems."

## Learn Why Your Dog Barks

If your dog's "talkative nature" has created tension with your neighbors, then it's a good idea to discuss the problem with them. It's perfectly normal and reasonable for dogs to bark from time to time, just as children make noise when they play outside. But continual barking for long periods of time is a symptom of a problem that needs addressing—from the perspectives of your neighbors *and* your dog.

First, determine when and for how long your dog barks and what causes him to bark. You may need to do some clever detective work to obtain this information, especially if the barking occurs when you're not home. Ask your neighbors what they see and hear, drive or walk around the block and watch and listen for a while, or start a tape recorder or video camera when you leave for work. With a little effort you should be able to find out which of the common problems discussed below is the cause of your dog's barking.

### Social Isolation/Frustration/Attention-Seeking

Your dog may be barking out of boredom and loneliness if:

- He's left alone for long periods of time without opportunities to interact with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without companions or toys.
- He's a puppy or adolescent (under three years old) and doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog (like the herding or sporting breeds) who needs to be occupied to be happy.

### Recommendations

Expand your dog's world and increase his "people time" in the following ways:

- Walk your dog at least twice daily—it's good exercise, both mentally and physically. Walks should be more than just "potty breaks."
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or Frisbee® and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands or tricks and practice them every day for five to 10 minutes.
- Take a dog training class with your dog. This allows you and your dog to work together toward a common goal.
- To help fill the hours that you're not home, provide safe, interesting toys to keep your dog busy, such as Kong®-type toys filled with treats or busy-box toys. Rotating the toys will make them seem new and interesting.
- If your dog is barking to get your attention, make sure he has sufficient time with you on a daily basis (petting, grooming, playing, exercising).
- Keep your dog inside when you're unable to supervise him.
- Let your neighbors know that you are actively working on the problem.
- If your dog is well socialized and you have your employer's permission, take your dog to work with you every now and then.
- When you have to leave your dog for extended periods of time, take him to a "doggie day care center," hire a pet sitter or dog walker, or have a trusted friend or neighbor walk and play with him.

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Beartooth Humane Alliance  
PO Box 853  
Red Lodge, MT 59068  
(406)672-6960  
[info@beartoothhumane.org](mailto:info@beartoothhumane.org)  
[www.beartoothhumane.org](http://www.beartoothhumane.org)