

## Excessive Barking when left alone

### Training Tips

**Determine the cause.** The first step is to sleuth out just what's going on after you leave home. You could set up a voice-activated tape recorder or enlist the help of neighbors – they may be eager to assist if they know you're working hard to correct the problem. Ask them to notice what sets the barking off. For example, does your dog bark after seeing something, hearing something, right after you leave, or for no discernible cause? Also, how long does he bark? Is it intermittent or constant?

**Rule out underlying health problems.** Your dog could have some physical discomfort that contributes to his anxiety. Take him to your veterinarian for a thorough exam.

**Increase your dog's exercise time.** Dogs, like people, can experience “cabin fever.” Stuck inside or in a yard all day, some dogs become listless, lonely, and bored. Daily exercise is an outlet for physical and emotional energy and hence will reduce the stress that leads to excessive barking. Play with your dog every day; take him on walks or runs as often as possible. A walk around the neighborhood or to a local dog park provides “social exercise” as well.

**Keep hellos and goodbyes low-key.** The more fuss you make, the more anxious your dog will feel about your departure and the more inclined he'll be to bark. Come and go with as little fanfare as possible. Give him a chew toy or a Kong filled with treats to occupy him while you quietly slip away. Also, if you vary your departure routine, you'll desensitize him to signals that you're about to leave: Switch around the order of when you put on your shoes, pick up your keys, put him outside, and so on. While adjusting your routine, don't give him any additional attention.

**Make him an indoor dog.** Sometimes seeing or hearing cars, birds, squirrels, or other dogs is what sets off barking. Consider making your dog an indoor pet. When the drapes are drawn, sights and sounds won't distract him as much. Another benefit is that he'll be surrounded by your things and comforted by your scent. If you keep him outside because of house soiling, destructive behavior, or other problems, this is a good time to get help resolving these issues as well.

**Hire a pet-sitter or send your dog to daycare.** These can be wonderful alternatives to the monotony of your back yard. Either will provide your dog with exercise, social contact, and variety. To find out about a service in your neighborhood or near your office, check out Petopia's Pet Yellow Pages.

### Training Tools

**Kong toys, Buster Cubes, and chew puzzles.** These toys are great diversions for an anxious or bored barker. Give your dog one to play with while you quietly take your leave.

**Crates.** Create a safe den for your dog – it may become his favorite place to be. Crate training not only helps your dog feel more secure when alone but also can mitigate other undesirable behaviors, such as digging or destroying, that often accompany excessive barking.

**Medication.** If your vet diagnoses separation anxiety, medication may be indicated. Clomicalm is a prescription drug that can be highly effective in conjunction with behavior modification.

**ABS citronella collar.** Use this only as a last resort and after consulting a professional. The collar can control the barking but will do nothing to relieve your dog's frustration and anxiety. If simply prevented from barking, he may vent his stress in other ways, such as digging or destroying things in your home or yard.