

BARKING – HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

It is normal and natural for a dog to bark from time to time. However, noise from barking dogs is a common source of disturbance and stress to neighbours and owners have a responsibility to make sure their dog doesn't bark too much. So how much is too much?

Depending on where you live, it is likely that your neighbours will be able to clearly hear the noise of your dog barking, particularly if it barks outside or you live in an attached property.

One way to judge whether the amount of barking is too much is to try to put yourself in your neighbours shoes. If they were making a noise that you found disturbing, such as playing music or hammering something, how long would it take before you found it unpleasant?

Most people accept that dogs bark a certain amount such as when the postman is delivering mail or when guests arrive. Problems arise when dog barking becomes excessive and unreasonable. Even if you can put up with excessive barking it is not reasonable to expect your neighbours to do likewise.

Examples of excessive barking can include: frequent intermittent barking over lengthy periods; sustained barking over more than a minute or two; barking early in the morning or late at night.

BARKING AND THE LAW

Some neighbours will be willing to approach you about noise that is disturbing them. If they do, this is the time to carefully consider whether your dog is barking too much. If you are out at work you may not realise there is a problem. Neighbours don't generally like to make a fuss so any approach should be taken seriously.

If a neighbour complains to the Council we will investigate. It is not illegal for your dog to bark, but you must ensure that barking does not cause neighbours unreasonable disturbance. If it does then this could amount to a Statutory Nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Should the Council obtain evidence that a statutory nuisance is occurring we will serve an Abatement Notice on you requiring you to stop the nuisance.

See also "*Noise Complaints*" leaflet.

WHY DOGS BARK

Dogs are not by nature solitary creatures. They need the security of a family group. Pet dogs regard their owners as a substitute family and it is quite common for a dog to become distressed and exhibit bad behaviour if left alone for lengthy periods.

With a family to manage or a high pressure job to balance it can be all too easy to forget the needs of the family dog. If a dog is left alone at home while you are out at work you may not realise that it is unhappy, distressed or anxious.

Some of the common causes of barking include:

Dislikes being left alone
Frustration
Guarding instinct
Attention seeking
Frightened
Boredom
Excitement

TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL

The importance of training cannot be over emphasised. Your dog needs to learn not to bark at just anything that moves. A well-trained dog should be able to tell between people allowed into the house and people who are intruders.

Good training combined with affection and companionship should help ensure that your dog does not develop bad habits. Start young and start as you mean to go on.

Anti-barking collars that release a harmless spray can be helpful in training to reduce barking but always seek advice before use.

Some other things to try:

- ✓ Exercise your dog with a walk and playtime games at least 30 minutes before leaving to give enough time to settle down.
- ✓ Teach dogs to tolerate short planned absences from an early age.
- ✓ Leave things to amuse him such as toys that will keep him occupied.
- ✓ Reward quiet behaviour.

- ✓ Feed him a small meal so he is more likely to feel sleepy when left. Make sure he has access to sufficient water.
- ✓ If some noises frighten him, try putting a radio on quietly, to mask the noise.
- ✓ If he barks for attention, try ignoring him for at least half an hour before you go out and don't make a fuss of him on leaving or returning.
- ✓ Try putting your dog on his own in another room for a few minutes at first and then gradually longer.
- ✓ Leave your dog somewhere he is familiar with. Close curtains or keep him away from windows if sights and sounds set him off.
- ✓ Ask someone the dog trusts to take him out for a walk if leaving him for more than a couple of hours.
- ✓ Some dogs are comforted by the smell of an old jumper or similar.
- ✓ Try to leave your dog somewhere that barking is less likely to disturb neighbours.

What not to do!

- ✗ Never punish your dog when you return home as he will not understand why.
- ✗ Getting another dog to keep him company is not recommended.
- ✗ Do not allow your dog to follow you from room to room around the house as this can increase separation anxiety.
- ✗ Try not to leave your dog alone for more than a couple of hours at a time.
- ✗ Don't allow a dog to sleep in your bedroom as it is more likely to create separation problems.

PLEASE NOTE

This leaflet is intended to provide general advice only. If you have serious concerns over your dog's behaviour or health please seek advice from a specialist such as your local vet.

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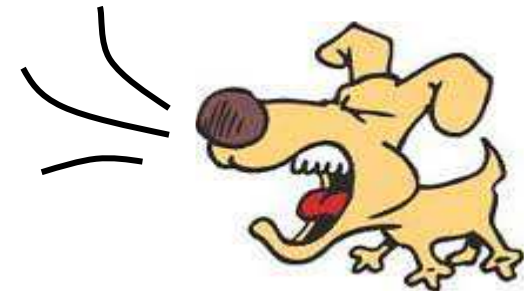
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**If you require any assistance in understanding this leaflet, please ring
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BARKING DOGS ADVICE FOR DOG OWNERS



**ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND
PUBLIC PROTECTION**