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It's normal and natural for dogs to bark. But when barking happens a lot, or goes on for a long time, it can be annoying and upsetting for your neighbours. If you're out a lot, or you're just used to the noise, you might not realise just how bad it is.

This leaflet is designed to help you work with your neighbours to sort out any problems caused by your dog barking without having to involve the authorities. It will also help you understand why your dog barks, and tell you about some practical steps you can take to stop or cut down the barking.

Research into noise issues shows that problems are most likely to be solved when people discuss things calmly and work out a solution between them. If you can't do this, the council may have to get involved and you could face some serious penalties. These are explained on page seven of this leaflet.

Talking it over

If the noise your dog is making is upsetting your neighbours, the first step is to talk things over with them. Stay calm, and try to see it from their point of view: perhaps they're working shifts, or have got a baby or small children. Bear in mind that they might be worried about whether the dog is OK and remember, you might not know how serious the problem is if your dog is barking more when you're not at home.

Understanding the problem

Ask your neighbours to tell you exactly when your dog is barking, and for how long. If you're out a lot, ask them to note down the times when the barking happens. If you're in, make a note yourself. Think about using a web cam or video camera to find out what your dog is doing when you're not there, or try a 'set-up' – pretend you're going out for the day, then wait outside the door to see what your dog does. If it starts barking and howling, go back in and tell it firmly to be quiet. Punishing your dog will only make things worse.

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First steps

There are some simple steps you can take straight away to cut down the amount of noise your dog is making. This will help calm the situation between you and your neighbours, and give you time to work out why your dog is barking.

- If your dog barks at things outside your yard or garden, don't let it go outside on its own. Keep it away from windows, so it can't see people or other animals.
- If your dog barks at the same time every day, like when people in the house are going to work or school, try to keep it busy at that time. For example, you could take it for a walk.
- Try to keep your dog calm. If it barks when it's excited, don't play with it at anti-social times like very late at night.
- If your dog's barking and you're in a flat or a semi, try to keep it away from any walls you share with your neighbours.
- Don't leave your dog outside if it's barking to be let in.
- See if you can get a friend or relative to look after your dog when you go out, or take it with you.
- Make sure your dog gets some exercise before you go out. A tired dog barks less.

Longer-term solutions

Some general rules

Be consistent. Every time your dog is quiet when it would normally have barked, praise it or give it a treat. When it barks, tell it firmly to be quiet.

You also need to remember that your dog is part of the family. If it only barks when you leave, bring it inside. Leave some toys or chews, and put the radio on quietly. If your dog is distressed, keep it inside with you whenever you're at home – dogs are pack animals, and they need company.

Tackling specific problems

Problem: Your dog is clingy, and howls or whines when left alone.

Solution: A vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden may be able to tell you how to help your dog get used to being on its own.

Problem: Your dog is frightened. It might look scared (ears back, tail low), have trouble settling, or keep trying to hide.

Solution: If your dog likes hiding, make a den for it. If it's scared of noise, mask it by putting the radio on quietly. If it's frightened of other people or animals, shut the curtains or doors. Think about talking to a vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden.

Problem: Your dog guards his territory by barking at people, animals or cars.

Solution: Keep your dog away from the front of the house or flat. Screen your windows. If it starts barking outside, call it in straight away. You could ask a vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden about behaviour therapy.

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Problem: Your dog is barking to get attention.

Solution: Look at your dog, then look away to show you're not going to respond. Don't give it any attention – or anything else – while it's barking. Try deliberately ignoring it for 20-30 minutes two or three times a day, and get everyone in the house to do the same. Doing this for 15 minutes before you go out can help stop your dog barking when you leave. A vet, animal behaviourist or dog warden may be able to give you advice.

Problem: You went out without taking your dog for a walk, and it's barking through frustration.

Solution: Wear different clothes for walking your dog. Leave your dog's lead where it can see it. So if you're leaving without taking the lead the dog will know that its not going with you.

What *not* to do

- Don't punish your dog. It might mistake it for attention, and it could also make it more anxious.
- Don't use mechanical devices – like anti-bark collars – if it could make the dog even more anxious.
- Don't get a second dog unless you're sure it's going to make your dog feel more secure, not less.

Keep your neighbours informed about what you're doing to stop the barking.

If the problem doesn't get resolved

If you don't take steps to solve the problem, and your local authority receives complaints about the noise your dog is making, the authority will investigate the complaint. The local authority may seek to resolve the problem by mediating between you and the complainants, but where it does not do so, or where such mediation is unsuccessful, and the authority is satisfied that the noise amounts to a statutory nuisance, it will serve you with an abatement notice requiring the noise to be reduced to an acceptable level.

If you fail to comply with an abatement notice, you could face prosecution and, if convicted, a fine of up to £5,000 (and possibly further daily fines of up to £500 for each day on which the offence continues after conviction).

For more information and advice about why your dog barks and what you can do about it:

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (APBC)

PO Box 46

Worcester WR8 9YS

Tel: 01386 751151

Web: www.apbc.org.uk

Send an SAE for a list of APBC members.

You may also want to talk to the Environmental Health Practitioner at your local council.

Local Authority:

Name of Environmental Health Practitioner:

Telephone:

Published by the Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs. © Crown Copyright 2005.

Printed on recycled paper containing 80% post consumer
waste and 20% Totally Chlorine Free virgin pulp.

PB 10561 (amended reprint May 05).

