

Up All Night with Man's Best Friend: Resolving barking dog problems in your neighborhood

When you wake up night after night to a barking dog in your neighborhood, your patience can grow thin. Or maybe the neighbor's dog is left outside in the kennel during the day and is disrupting your peace and enjoyment. People who normally love animals may find themselves growing increasingly angry and intolerant of their neighbor's beloved pet. This brochure is written to provide dog owners and their neighbors with ways to approach and resolve problems associated with barking dogs.



Why does a dog bark?

Barking is an externalized expression over a particular thing or event. Dogs become agitated over stimuli, sometimes internal stimuli and sometimes stimuli from the environment. The barking can be likened to a pot boiling over. When the agitation becomes too great, the dog barks. Remember, the dog may be barking to warn their owner of an invader.

Is your neighbor aware of the barking?

Oftentimes the dog is barking during times when the owner is not at home. Is the dog left outside during the day or left alone for long periods of time? Dogs are pack animals and love company. Barking may also be the dog's way of saying, "I'm lonely!" If you are faced with the repeated annoyance of a barking dog, it's best to talk with your neighbor first.

What are the responsibilities of dog owners?

Most cities and the county have codes that govern a dog owner's responsibilities. Usually the local noise ordinance restricts the level of sustained or intermittent noise. The levels usually vary between day and night. In Bellevue, as well as many other East Side cities, King County Animal Control enforces dog noise ordinances. Also, some cities have codes that regulate the location of kennels in a yard. Check with your local municipality or King County Animal Control for more information.

When you are thinking about getting a puppy...

Dogs are wonderful companions, and puppies are almost irresistible. But the Humane Society cautions people to consider needs of a dog before committing to being an owner. What breed of dog is right for you and your situation? What characteristics are you looking for? Do you have enough time and space to provide the dog with an adequate environment?

Once you have brought your puppy home, consider introducing him to your neighbors. Stop and chat with neighbors while you are walking your dog. Make sure they know your name as well as his. You may want to provide nearby neighbors with your day and evening phone numbers. Ask them if they would be willing to alert you to problems and emergencies. Encourage your neighbors to let you know if they are experiencing problems with your dog. Usually, problems can be solved over a casual conversation.

Preventing the Problem

If you are thinking about becoming a dog owner, talk to a dog trainer about training your puppy. Early crate training can start your dog off right in many ways, and a reduction in barking is only one of the many benefits! Local bookstores and the library will have books that discuss early training.

Correcting the Problem

Because the dog is responding to some sort of stimulation, the dog owner will have to observe the dog and determine what is causing the dog to bark. By reducing the drive or the excitement level over a particular thing or event, the dog will cease to bark. Sometimes it is necessary to correct or suppress the dog.

Dog Trainers

The problem with retraining your dog is that it requires an investment of time and patience. Consistency is the key. These ingrained habits are not always easy to break. You may want to enlist the help of a dog trainer or a dog behaviorist, who will visit your home, observe your dog, and work with him over a period of time to correct the problem. Trainers report excellent success in reducing barking with most dogs, and may be able to help with other behavioral concerns as well.

Anti-Bark Dog Collars

There are several types of anti-barking collars. Some are battery operated and emit a small sensation, which interrupts the dog's chain of thought. Most collars of this type have an adjustable sensation level, and you should start with the lowest setting and work up to a higher setting until the dog reacts and quits barking. Other anti-barking collars spray an odor that is offensive to dogs when they bark, providing a sort of "aversion" therapy. These collars typically cost between \$150.00 and \$200.00.

Anti-bark collars are reported to work well if properly adjusted. Some owners may need to work with the manufacturer to adjust the collar properly.

De-barking Surgery

Many veterinarians provide "de-barking". There are two different types of procedures. During one type of operation, the vet enters the throat through the mouth to remove the vocal chords. This simple surgery is a one day procedure which costs about \$75.00. However, this procedure does not completely silence the dog. The dog will still make noise. In addition, scar tissue may develop and the dog may learn to use the scar tissue to make a barking noise.

A second procedure enters the throat through the skin. The vocal chords are removed. This procedure is more expensive, although probably more lasting. Ask your vet about the pros and cons of each type of surgery.

Note: Some dog trainers and animal rights groups do not recommend anti-barking collars or de-barking surgery.

What if your neighbor's dog is really bothering you? Again, speaking with your neighbor is the best approach. Before you go to talk with your neighbor, think about what is troubling you and ask yourself several questions:

- # What is bothering me most about the barking?
- # What might be affecting your neighbor's dog?
- # What do you need in the situation?
- # What might your neighbor need?

When approaching your neighbor, express your concerns rather than your solutions. State your concern in a non-threatening way. For example, *"I am having difficulty sleeping because of the noise level at night"* is much less threatening than: *"I want you to keep your dog inside at night."*

Next, express your needs: *"I work at home during the day, and it is important to me to be able to concentrate on my work,"* or, *"I wake up early in the morning and need a good night's rest."*

Be prepared to listen to your neighbor's point of view. Realistic and durable solutions accommodate everyone's needs. Ask the other person to tell you about their dog. It may be they are concerned about security and consider the dog's barking protection. Look for a solution that will ensure the problem is permanently solved with no hard feelings.

Ask your neighbor what options they would consider. By engaging the other person in developing options, you will increase the number of ideas to be considered. *"If we could find a solution that afforded you protection and allowed for quiet hours during the night, would you consider it?"*

Try Mediating. If talking directly to your neighbor doesn't result in a solution, contact your neighborhood mediation program. In Bellevue, you can call the Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program at (425)452-4091. With your permission, our staff will call your neighbor and schedule a time for the two of you to meet with a mediator to discuss the situation. During the meeting, you will be guided through a structured discussion that will enable you to understand each other's perspective and develop mutually agreeable solutions. This service is available to residents of Bellevue without a fee. If you live in other areas of King County, contact the King County Dispute Resolution Center at (206)443-9603.

What other resources are available?

There are many excellent books on dog training available at the public library. The East side phone book lists a number of dog trainers who may be able to help. And your family veterinarian is an excellent source of knowledge. In addition you may want to call:

King County Animal Control
(206)296-PETS

Humane Society for Seattle/King County
(425) 641-0080

PAWS
(425)787-0080