

Barking dogs



Dogs that bark excessively can be a source of great irritation for neighbours.

If you have a problem with a neighbour's dog, or if your own dog is barking too much, this brochure contains information that may help.

Dogs bark for a reason, and there are many ways that excessive barking can be managed.

Visit www.pets.dpi.vic.gov.au
or call 136 186 (for the cost of a local call)

Got a barking dog complaint?

Try talking to the dog's owner about the problem first.

They may not even be aware of the problem if the dog is only barking when they are out. You may be able to help them identify why the dog is barking.

Assist them by giving them this brochure.

The Dispute Settlement Centre provides free advice to help neighbours sort out problems such as barking dogs. Phone 9603 8370, or for STD areas free call 1800 658 528.

You can lodge a complaint with your local council.

Council may ask you to keep a diary for a few weeks, to record how often the dog is barking. This is so they can determine whether the barking is causing an unreasonable disturbance. You may also have to get support for your complaint from another neighbour who is affected by the barking dog.

Council may then issue a warning to the dog's owner, or a formal Notice to Comply to stop the barking. If this is not complied with, council can issue an infringement notice. If the problem still persists, council may proceed with legal action and seek a Court Order.

Do you have a dog that barks?

Barking is a natural behaviour for dogs; it is one way they communicate. But excessive barking is often a sign that something is 'wrong'. The first step in solving the problem is to determine why your dog is barking.

Reasons why your dog may bark:

- It may be bored, lonely or frustrated due to a lack of company, exercise, or mental stimulation. If left in the backyard for long periods, barking may be an enjoyable way for dogs to pass the time. Dogs are also social, pack animals, and may suffer from anxiety when alone.
- To seek attention, especially if they are bored or lonely.
- Even though their barking may result in scolding, dogs may still prefer negative attention to no attention at all.
- To alert or warn you of something it thinks might be a threat. This could include barking at animals, the postman, noises, or the movement of people or vehicles outside the property.
- Some dog breeds may be more inclined to bark.
- Due to fear (eg of thunder, fireworks, or other loud noises).
- Due to medical reasons (eg fleas, allergy, or illness).
- Due to physical reasons (eg if hot, cold, hungry or thirsty).

How to solve the problem

Depending on why your dog is barking, you may need to:

- Take the dog on more frequent walks (once or twice daily) and include it on family outings. Even if you have a large yard, dogs still need to socialise and experience the sounds and smells of walks outside.

Find a designated off leash area to give your dog a free run.

- Make the backyard environment more interesting.
- Provide the dog with toys and a large raw marrow bone to chew. You can also stuff hollow (indestructible) toys with food. Ensure the dog has fresh water, a balanced diet, and adequate shelter from weather extremes. If possible, give the dog access to the house through a dog door.
- Take your dog to obedience classes. Practice what you learn regularly to provide mental stimulation for the dog.
- If the dog is barking at passers-by, block its view of movement outside the property with solid fencing, shade cloth or hedging. Alternatively, if the source of provocation is a human (eg children teasing the dog), try to discuss the problem with them.
- Make sure your dog is in good health, by taking it to the vet for a check up.
- Undertake dog training – the approach taken will depend on the reason for barking.

Training your dog

If you need help with dog training, ask your local council, vet or shelter for advice. They may be able to suggest an obedience club, a dog trainer or an animal behaviour specialist. Or look under 'Dog Training' in the yellow pages.

It is important to remember that training takes time and persistence, and that you should never hit your dog.

Training can teach your dog what is and isn't acceptable to bark at, and there are various techniques available.

You may have to use particular training techniques to treat some problems. For instance, separation anxiety, or desensitising your dog to fears or phobias. Seek professional advice from a dog trainer or behaviourist.

For more advice or information

Call your local council if you have questions about your rights and responsibilities as a cat owner, or if you have lost your cat. Your council will also deal with concerns about wandering or nuisance cats.

Advice is also available from animal welfare shelters, vets and cat clubs. Visit www.pets.dpi.vic.gov.au for contact details for such organisations, or call **136 186** for the cost of a local call.

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