



DEALING WITH A BARKING DOG



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Introduction

Barking is a normal behaviour for dogs and there are many reasons why they bark. It could be a warning of an intruder or a sign of excitement, affection or unhappiness. However, when dogs bark excessively it can become a concern to others.

While dogs are an important part of our local community, dogs that bark excessively can become a source of irritation, distress or discomfort for residents in the local community. Our best friend can, if it barks continually, become an intrusion and create friction between neighbours.

City of Yarra receives numerous complaints regarding nuisance caused by barking dogs and takes these complaints seriously, however there are lots of things to consider when reporting a dog barking complaint.

Approaching the dog's owner in a friendly manner and discussing your concerns with them, can sometimes easily resolve this type of complaint as the dog's owner may not realise that their pet is barking and causing an annoyance to other people.

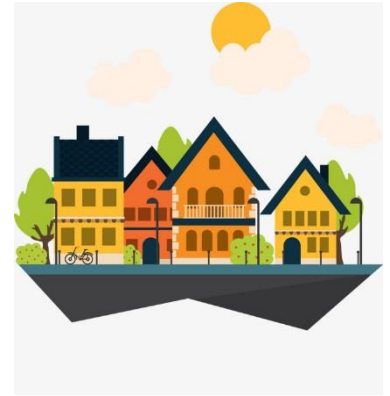
For instance, the dog may only bark excessively when the owner is not home. The owner may not hear the barking from various areas within the house. The owner may be a sound sleeper and not get disturbed when the dog barks. There may be anxiety related issues for the dog or other relevant factors that the owner may be unsure of how to manage.

Whilst it is acceptable for a dog to bark to warn its owner of an intruder, it is the owner's responsibility to train the dog not to bark at "normal" occurrences such as the postman, possums, cats, birds or other daily happenings.



Why dogs bark

Dogs bark for many reasons, and even though they "appear to be barking for no reason" they are in fact trying to communicate something to their owner or anyone who is willing to pay attention.



The following list provides some of the main reasons why dog bark.

1. Lack of exercise
2. Inadequate yard space
3. Boredom
4. Not enough human companionship
5. Inadequate shelter from weather conditions
6. Hungry or thirsty
7. Medical condition
8. Provocation
9. Disturbances
10. Change to family structure
11. Change to territory



Of course dogs also bark to alert their owners of trouble such as an intruder entering the property or perhaps fire. Remember, a "dog's idea of an intruder" may differ to that of the owner. It could include cats, possums, other dogs, or even birds flying across the property as "intruders".

Barking at "normal" movement / noises from adjoining properties should be considered to be unacceptable behaviour, however excessive barking needs to be further investigated.

Neighbourhood Communication

Neighbours can help each other to resolve barking problems by communicating their concerns. They can assist by identifying the reasons for excessive barking and noting what is happening in the area when the dog is barking.

Don't forget, the owner of the problematic dog may not know their animal is causing a nuisance and in most cases will appreciate a friendly approach.

You may wish to try the following steps to attempt to resolve the issue in a neighbourly manner:

1. Approach the dog's owner when the problem arises and inform them of your concerns in a friendly manner. If the dog owner is unapproachable or you are not comfortable approaching them, you could try placing the "*Dear Neighbour*" letter, available in this booklet, into their letterbox.
2. If the neighbour takes no action or does not agree that a problem exists, you could contact the Neighbourhood Justice Centre which provides a mediation service for people who find themselves in a situation of dispute or conflict with another person.
3. Report your concerns to the City of Yarra and an Animal Management Officer will investigate the barking nuisance.

Neighbourhood Justice Centre – 241 Wellington St, Collingwood

Phone: (03) 9948 8777

Email: njc@justice.vic.gov.au

Opening hours: 9am - 5pm Monday – Friday

<https://author.neighbourhoodjustice.vic.gov.au/our-servicesupport/mediation>

This service uses mediation as a way of settling neighbourhood disputes without expensive legal action. It is a private and free service.

In most cases, a happy solution can be found through friendly communication between neighbours.



Dear Neighbour,

You may not be aware but your dog is currently causing a noise nuisance in the neighbourhood by barking excessively.

From advice on the City of Yarra website, it is suggested that as a first step, I express my concern to you, to allow you the opportunity to rectify the situation.

On the back of this letter is some information that may be of assistance to you in resolving the problem.

You may also wish to contact the City of Yarra to seek further advice.

Your assistance with this matter is greatly appreciated.

A concerned neighbour

Some simple tips for reducing barking

- ☺ Make sure that you do not reward your dog for barking too much.
- ☺ Don't let the dog inside or give it attention when it barks. Instead, give the dog attention when it is quiet.
- ☺ If the dog is barking at people or noises on the other side of a fence, move the dog to another part of the yard, or put up a barrier to keep the dog away from that area.
- ☺ If the dog barks at regular disturbances such as children walking to school or rubbish trucks, keep the dog inside or in an enclosed area at these times.
- ☺ If the dog races along a path or fence barking at passing distractions, put barriers or obstacles in the dog's way to slow it down.
- ☺ Ensure that the dog has adequate exercise and obedience training.
- ☺ Make sure that the dog has food, water and shelter from the weather.
- ☺ If the dog is barking through gaps and cracks in the fence, fill them in.
- ☺ If the dog is barking at people it can see passing by, try blocking the dog's view.
- ☺ An anti-barking collar may be useful for some, but not all, barking dogs. You can contact the City of Yarra animal management officers on 9205 5166 for further information.
- ☺ Teach the dog to stop barking on command. When the dog is barking give a firm command such as 'cease' and call the dog to you. Praise the dog when it stops barking. If the dog will not listen to you, it will need obedience training.

Remember, dogs bark for many reasons. If these simple tips do not help you, seek further advice.

Myth

It is natural for dogs to bark a lot.

False!

Barking is one of the dog's main ways of communicating. However, it is not normal for a dog to bark at every noise, passer-by, nor to bark for long periods of time.

Simple Tips & Tricks to Help Reduce Dog Barking Solutions

Lack of exercise inadequate yard space - Boredom:

Dogs become bored when they are confined in a back yard. This problem can be compounded if the yard is small, or if the dog is kept on a chain, locked in an enclosure or in a run. Dogs like to explore and enjoy new experiences. This problem may be overcome when the dog is treated as a member of the family, is included on family outings and taken on regular walks.

Loneliness lacking human company:

Dogs are social animals and enjoy the companionship of other dogs and of their human owners. Those that are left for long periods of time without companionship can become discontented or lonely.

Inadequate shelter:

Dogs require shelter from all of the weather elements and may cry for attention if it is uncomfortable due to the hot, cold, windy or wet weather conditions.

Hungry or thirsty:

Dogs require plenty of fresh water and need to be fed well balanced dietary food every day to remain healthy and contented.

A dog will soon let its owner know by barking, howling or whimpering if it has not been fed or has no water to drink.

Medical condition:

An obvious or underlying medical condition can be the cause of howling, whimpering and barking. Flea or worm infestations, skin allergies and some injuries, which are usually easy to detect and treat, can cause a dog to make excessive noise. A veterinarian should be consulted to eliminate any medical condition from being the cause of excessive noise.

Provocation:

Remove the source of provocation or remove the dog. If the source of provocation is a person, discuss and solve the problem with the person or if the person is unapproachable, contact the Dispute Settlement Service.

Disturbances:

Birds: Check reason for barking. Retrain dog not to bark at birds.

Possoms: Check reason for barking. House dog indoors over night when possums are active. Have possums professionally removed. Retrain dog not to bark at possums.

Dogs & Cats: Check reason for barking. Locate owners of intruding dog or cat and discuss problem with owner; request dog/cat owner to confine animal to its own property. Retrain dog not to bark at other dogs or cats.

Neighbour activities: Check reason for barking. Retrain dog not to bark at normal noise and activities taking place on neighbouring properties.

Sirens & Alarms: Some breeds of dogs are susceptible to barking/howling at the sound of sirens/alarms. Dogs have sensitive hearing and the volume or pitch of a siren/alarm may actually aggravate the dog. The dog should be reassured and either taken inside or distracted from the noise and quietened. Some dogs can be desensitised to the sound of sirens/alarms to solve the barking. Uninvited visitors: check reason for barking. Welcome visitor in, reassure dog and socialise visitor with dog to enable dog to learn that visitor is a friend and not an intruder.

Storms & Thunder: The dog should be reassured and either taken inside or quietened.

Change to Family Structure:

Dogs are naturally "pack" animals. When placed in a human family environment, the dog perceives the family as its "pack". A change to the family situation disrupts and upsets the hierarchy of the dog's perception of where/how it fits into the structure of the "pack". These changes can include a reduction in the family such as marital separation, death or family members moving away. Alternatively, the changes may be a result of expansion to the family eg marriage, partner moving in, children returning home, taking in boarders and especially when a new baby arrives in the family.

The dog may see new arrivals to the family unit as a threat to the dog's perception of its position and dominance in the "pack" resulting in aggressive behaviour and resentment towards the new family member/s. The dog owner will need to take firm but loving action to deal with any displays of resentment and aggression in the dog so that the dog can understand and learn to accept the family addition and the dog's new position in the "pack".

Moving House:

When families move house, it causes a time of upheaval, stress and insecurity. A period of time is required for the re-adjustment into a new house and new neighbourhood.

Dogs are territorial creatures and when they are removed from their home territory, they can become insecure and stressed resulting in several behavioural problems. The dog may try to jump the fence or dig out in an attempt to find its way back to its own territory.

A dog's territory is based on an area that the dog has claimed as its own by scent-marking landmarks to define the territory. When a family moves home it cannot be assumed that a kennel placed in the back yard will be accepted as the dog's new home.



Lodging a complaint with Council

To lodge a complaint with Council:

- Identify the correct address of the offending dog;
- Contact the Compliance Administration Team to discuss your concerns and lodge a formal complaint
- The Compliance Administration Team can be contacted via the following methods:

Email: info@yarracity.vic.gov.au

Phone: 03 9205 5166

Post: Compliance Administration Team

City of Yarra

PO Box 168 RICHMOND 3121

- Allow a 3 week period for the dog owner to address the dog barking concerns after being contact by Council
- Monitor the dog barking during this 3 week period

If after the initial 3 weeks the barking continues to present a nuisance, you must:

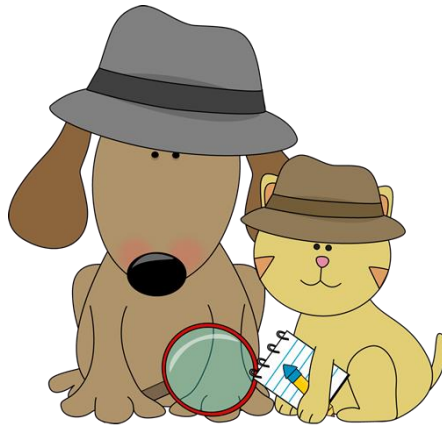
- Inform the Animal Management Officer assigned to the case that the barking continues to be a nuisance
- Complete a formal statement, as requested by the Animal Management Officer, with a view for it to be used as evidence
- Participate in any other investigation requirements, as deemed necessary, this may include completing a dog barking diary.



Council action - *What Council Will Do*

Council Officers:

- Will contact the dog owner and provide them information on how to address the dog barking, allowing a 3 week period for the owner to address the matter
- Will contact you, the complainant, after the 3 week period to review the progress of the dog barking nuisance
- If the officer determines there is a case for investigation, you will be required to complete a formal statement and may require you to complete a dog barking diary
- Will contact other neighbouring properties with a survey regarding the nuisance barking.
- Will continue to work with the dog owner to address the nuisance and provide assistance and information on tips and tricks to help reduce the barking.
- Once an official investigation is commenced, Council has a responsibility to advise the owner which properties are affected by the nuisance barking.



Your Legal Requirements for Court Action



Council can only do what is stated in the Domestic Animals Act 1994, Section 32. The only way for Council to address the nuisance noise through enforcement action is to go to the Magistrate Court and have the matter proven; however there is no guarantee that this will completely resolve the problem as there are numerous factors that cause dogs to bark.

To take a complaint to Court you, as the complainant, are required to provide the information and supporting evidence as it is you and not Council who is affected by the noise. Council will investigate the nuisance and determine if there is sufficient evidence to support the investigation, however it is the complainant's testimony and evidence gathered that will ultimately prove the case.

To do this the complainant must keep a comprehensive diary over a period of time to show the patterns of the dogs barking behaviour. Remember, in a court of law the evidence given may be subjected to cross-examination, including any diaries, statements or logs provided.

Council can only proceed a dog barking nuisance to court if:

- It is fully established that there is a case at law to answer
- There is sufficient evidence available to prove the case "beyond reasonable doubt"
- You are prepared to give evidence in Court

Council will not become involved in any domestic dispute between neighbours. If this appears to be the situation, Council will inform you to pursue your own legal action on this matter through a dispute resolution process such as attending the Neighbourhood Justice Centre and participating in mediation processes.

It is important that you understand as the complainant, you must prove there is a nuisance. If you are unable to provide the necessary evidence and information required, Council will be unable to further investigate your complaint.

