

Constant Barking Can Be Avoided

Offering guidance to dog owners

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1. Offering guidance to owners of noisy dogs

Although it is possible for action to be taken against the owner of a noisy dog, the threat of it may cause unnecessary stress and antagonism toward the local authority which will interfere with future attempts at resolution. Furthermore, if the complainant is aware of the threat of action it may create additional tension between neighbours, entrenching any dispute between them. Instead, it is preferable to instil a sense of responsibility and consideration so that the owner cooperates and resolves the problem. It is important to remember that the majority of owners want to live in harmony with their neighbours and are able to improve their own situation if provided with the appropriate information. To this end it is advantageous to offer them guidance as to how a resolution of the problem can be achieved without detriment to their relationship with their pet or compromising its welfare.

The subject must be approached sensitively because the majority of owners have a strong emotional bond with the dogs in their care. In some cases this can be comparable to that felt for family members, and threats to it may be detrimental to the owner's welfare. Therefore the duty of care to the owner as well as the complainant must not be underestimated.

It is important to avoid assumptions about the owner's commitment to resolving the problem. Many are unaware that there is one if it only occurs during their absence. The intuitive efforts of owners whose dogs are vocal when they are at home are often fruitless or even counter productive. In many cases owners have good intentions but feel powerless to resolve a problem they perceive to be beyond their immediate control, given that its source is another living being.

Although the owner should be made aware of the statutory requirements upon them in the initial stages, this should be subordinate to recognition that a complaint has been received and the offer of help. Although the 'helping' approach requires some initial investment in time, it will ultimately save time and resources, allowing the authority to focus on those people who will not or are unable to help themselves. The aim of the advice to dog owners in Defra's '*Is your dog barking too much?*' is to help provide the information that will enable owners to understand the problem, gather the relevant information and prepare to resolve the problem using the advice within it or by seeking help where indicated.

2. Why dogs are vocal

Animals that have evolved to live in groups tend to have complex language systems. This is particularly true of the dog because it has evolved from animals that are co-operative hunters and share the rearing of their young. Their vocal communication involves different types of sound as can be seen in the table below. By varying the tone of these sounds dogs can convey different emotional states. Combining sounds further expands the repertoire.

Context	Grunt	Whine/ Whimper	Yelp	Scream	Howl	Growl	Cough	Bark	Tooth- snap	Pant
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Greeting	√	√	√		√	√		√		
Play soliciting		√	√					√	√	√
Submission		√	√	√						
Defence		√	√			√	√	√	√	
Threat						√	√	√	√	
Care/contact seeking	√	√	√					√		
Distress (pain)		√	√	√		√		√		
Contact seeking when alone		√	√		√			√		
Group activity		√			√	√		√		

After Fox 1978

3. The effect of learning

The likelihood of a dog being vocal occurring in any situation is determined by the species' inborn tendencies and breed predisposition, and these are modulated by what the dog learns throughout its life.

Example 1: Barking to deter people from entering the owner's property is related to natural territorial behaviour and may be acceptable to owners as well as neighbours, who may also benefit from the alarm. However, if the dog barks at everyone who walks past in the street the behaviour can become an irritant. A main cause for the behaviour becoming excessive is the fact that most people go away. The dog, unable to realise that they were going to go away again anyway, perceives their departure as the effect of its behaviour, increasing its confidence to perform it and the likelihood of it doing so on future occasions. Learning can also take place if owners try to control their dog's behaviour by shouting at it to stop. As dogs don't understand the meaning of words it may seem that their owners are vocalising at the same thing and bark even louder. Other dogs learn that barking at things outside the property makes their owners give them attention, resulting in them barking at the slightest thing to get them to respond.

Example 2: Barking to get attention can be more direct. Dogs can learn to bark when their owners try to chat to visitors, use the telephone, watch television or interact with each other. Attempts to stop the noise simply

rewards the attention seeking and encourages the dog to recommence as soon as it is ignored again.

Example 3: Some dogs vocalise when left alone in an attempt to call their owner back. Eventually the owner returns and the dog's perception is that vocalising works and will repeat it next time it is left. The cause often lies in the dog's overly dependent relationship with its owner when they are at home, and resultant anxiety when they are absent.

Most of the vocalisations identified above can cause a noise nuisance and in almost all cases the successful resolution of the problem is dependent upon identifying and addressing the cause. Clues as to why they occur include the type of sound, its intonation, contexts in which it occurs and other symptoms of the dog's behaviour, some of which will occur at times other than when the dog is vocal. Unless these facts are established the owner will not be able to address the problem because they will not know what action to take.

4. Why canine vocal behaviour is a nuisance

Loud or excessive barking and other vocalisations can be disturbing for neighbours. This is particularly likely when it occurs at times that are generally antisocial, at night for example. Sometimes, however, the nuisance is not immediately obvious to the owner; for example, when barking that is normally acceptable occurs at times that conflict with someone else's routine. Examples include neighbours who work at night and need to sleep during the day; those with children that need to get to sleep; those that have become unwell and more easily stressed and those whose routines have changed, exposing them to the noise e.g. after retirement.

The nuisance is exacerbated when the vocalisation is intermittent because the listener is not able to predict when it will occur. As a result the listener can become sensitised and find it difficult, if not impossible, to adjust and treat the noise as background noise they can ignore, as they might with traffic noise, for example. Sometimes the nuisance results in a breakdown in neighbourliness between the parties because of the listener's grievance. On other occasions neighbours are not primarily concerned for themselves but for the welfare of the dog because they interpret the dog's vocalisation as symptomatic of the dog's distress.

5. Encouraging owners and complainants to work with the local authority

To encourage the owner to work with the local authority it can be suggested that they:

- Keep a record of everything they do to manage and resolve the problem, thus enabling them to liaise more effectively with the points of contact within the authority who are working with them and monitoring their progress
- A record of the times they leave their dog unattended so that matches and mismatches with complaints can be checked

6. Action plan

Encouraging the owner to create an action plan will help them map out how they are going to address the problem and develop a positive response from them at the time of first contact. The plan should include:

- Determining the scale of the problem
- Introduce 'First-Aid' measures to immediately reduce the impact of the problem
- Determining the causes and treatment options

Determining the scale of the problem

Owners will be aware of the presence or absence of vocal behaviour that occurs when they are at home. Encouraging them to determine for themselves the extent to which there is a problem when they are not at home will help remove suspicion of false or mistaken reporting and, in most cases, motivate them to resolve it. Methods that are practical for this purpose include:

- Tape recorder
- Dictaphone (voice activated)
- Asking a neighbour to keep a diary (this can help by getting them involved and demonstrating the owner's commitment)
- Video camera
- Security camera attached to a domestic video recorder
- Web cam
- Phoning a local friend and leaving the phone off the hook so that the dog can be listened to

Owners should **act immediately** by seeing their veterinary surgeon if:

- Their dog also escapes from the home when it is left
- Their dog causes or is likely to cause damage to itself
- The dog is an older age and has recently become vocal, due to the possibility that the problem is caused by senility

7. First-Aid measures to control the problem

The purpose of giving first-aid advice is:

- Initiate management and reduce the problem
- Give neighbours a break from the noise nuisance, improving or preserving relations while treatment is initiated
- Provide an opportunity to talk with neighbours about the problem at a time when they are not affected by the nuisance and are therefore less stressed and more receptive

Sometimes the first-aid advice it is possible to provide will seem like stating obvious common sense. However, the owner, living with and stressed in response to a complaint, particularly official notice of it, may not be able to step back from their emotional involvement and apply logical steps, and may therefore benefit from guidance and a checklist of actions they can take.

Although intended to be for short-term use, some first-aid may be adopted for long-term resolution of the problem. The options include:

- Improved management
- Friends, neighbours, relatives, professional pet sitters
- The owner taking the dog with them
- Taking the dog to work
- Leaving the dog in the owner's car [not suitable on hot days]
- Leaving the dog once it has settled
- Temporary management by boarding
- Management at strategic times

7.1 Improved management

Simple measures can often be used to reduce noise nuisance:

If barking is directed to stimuli beyond the boundary of the owner's property they can avoid letting their dog into their garden or yard unsupervised at times when it is likely to bark.

Owners might be able to occupy their dog when the problem is likely to occur, such as when people are going to and from work or school. Alternatively their dog could be taken for a walk at these times.

Dogs can be kept away from windows that allow them to view people and animals passing the property. In some cases denying them the opportunity to stand on items of furniture in order to look out of a window will be effective.

Owners can sometimes reduce exposure to triggering stimuli by keeping curtains closed and, where relevant, by keeping the dog away from boundary fences.

Owners can avoid triggering vocal behaviour associated with excitement at unsociable times, e.g. that which occurs prior to a walk or feeding and during play.

The owner can be encouraged to keep their dog in areas of the house that will reduce noise nuisance at times when barking is likely to occur, e.g. away from partition walls.

If the dog barks at visitors it should not be left in the garden or yard when they are in the house if it will bark at them through glass doors or windows.

7.2 Friends, neighbours, relatives, professional pet sitters

The use of friends, neighbours, relatives or a professional pet sitter to mind the dog for a period of time or while the owners are away from home, such as when the owners are at work.

7.3 The owner taking the dog with them

Where possible, owners can take their dog with them when they are away from home.

7.4 Taking the dog to work

Some owners will find that it is possible for them to take their dog to work with them.

7.5 Leaving the dog in the owner's car [not suitable on hot days]

Many dogs will settle if left in their owner's car, but before this can be suggested it is important that the dog's recent history of being left in the owner's car is positive e.g. it is not destructive. In addition to ensuring that the dog is not left in a hot or unventilated car, it is also important to point out that the owner must take care where they park their car, so that the dog will not become agitated by passers-by or other dogs, which might compound an existing problem.

In general, advising that an owner uses their car as a means of coping with the problem requires so many caveats relevant to the dog's safety and welfare that the subject should not be introduced to any conversation lightly, and it is not included in the leaflet *'Is your dog barking too much'* for this reason. However, the matter can be given some consideration if the warnings and limitations are discussed with the owner and backed up in writing. Examples of acceptable use include during the owner's shopping trips, and as a place to put the dog if it barks aggressively at visitors to the owner's household and at the owner's place of work if they are able to monitor it.

7.6 Leaving the dog once it has settled

To improve the dog's welfare and to allow it better access to a toilet area during the day, it may be helpful for the owner to return home to check on the dog. Alternatively the owner might arrange for someone else to visit the dog. However, some dogs are unsettled by these visits and will become vocal immediately after the person leaves. In these cases it can be beneficial to consider the use of a dog flap or other form of access to the garden so that the dog has control over its own toileting arrangements. This will avoid unsettling the dog by someone coming to the house and leaving again.

Some owners may have genuine concerns about:

- The safety of their property if the size of their dog means that a large dog flap would have to be used
- The safety of their dog if they live in an area where there is a realistic chance of it being stolen or abused

- The safety of their dog, other people or animals if their property is not sufficiently secure
- Their dog becoming vocal for other reasons or increased disturbance when it is left because it can be vocal outside

7.7 Temporary management by boarding

This is best considered if the dog has previously been boarded without suffering stress. Daytime-only boarding might be considered for dogs that only display problems when the owners are absent from home e.g. while they are at work.

7.8 Management at strategic times

It may transpire that to remove the neighbour's complaint it is only necessary to manage the dog's behaviour at strategic times e.g. if the neighbours are shift workers and need to sleep in the morning.

8. Keeping/getting neighbours on side

First-aid must also apply to the relationship between neighbours.

Where appropriate owners can be:

- Advised not to take complaints personally
- Encouraged to take complaints seriously and think about other people's point of view
- Encouraged to maintain a dialogue with their neighbours
- Encouraged to keep neighbours informed about what they are doing to resolve the problem
- Encouraged to involve their neighbours in treatment and monitoring progress

Where appropriate complainants can be:

- Advised that their complaint has been taken seriously
- Advised that the animal is not neglected or uncared for
- With the owner's consent, advised of the treatment being undertaken
- Encouraged to become involved in treatment and monitoring progress
- Encouraged to maintain a dialogue with the owner
- Advised that determining and treating the underlying causes of the problem may take a little time (case dependent)

Both parties should be encouraged to remain in liaison with the local authority and develop a team approach to achieving a resolution.

9. Determining the motivation for vocal behaviour and treatment options

As has been discussed, dogs vocalise for a variety of reasons. Many cases involve more than one motivation and the cause for each of them involves a number of factors. Attempts to inhibit the vocalisation in isolation of treating the cause are likely to be detrimental to the animal's welfare and are ineffective in the long-term resolution of the problem. Resolution requires identification of motivation and the introduction of specific treatments or training.

The methods discussed above as a means of determining the scale of the problem can be used to assess the nature of the dog's vocal behaviour. For example, the type of bark the dog displays towards the postman is likely to be the same as that displayed if vocalisation that occurs when the owner is absent is territorial behaviour.

The nature of the vocal behaviour must be considered in conjunction with other symptoms that occur when the owner is at home and when the dog is on its own.

10. Possible reasons for nuisance noise

- Over dependence upon an owner resulting in separation anxiety
- Fear or phobic reaction to sights or sounds outside or inside the home
- Territorial
- Attention seeking
- Social (e.g. calling to other dogs in the district)
- Barking in play or aggression (e.g. two or more dogs living together)
- Predatory/chase behaviour
- Frustration (e.g. because the dog did not expect to be left behind)
- Senility

10.1 Over-dependence upon an owner resulting in separation anxiety

When a particular person is at home does the dog?

- Immediately follow them from room to room
- Need to settle in close proximity to them
- Need and demand a high level of attention from them
- Stay close to them on walks away from home
- Seem to settle when it is unlikely it will be left, e.g. late evening

When separated from the person or they have left the home does the dog do one or more of the following?

- Howl/whine/bark repeatedly in a way that sounds distressed

- Damage doors or windows that would allow it to get to them
- Lose toilet control
- Drool/salivate
- Pant
- Pace
- Become sick
- Appear anxious or depressed as they prepare to leave
- Show a higher level of distress in the first 1/2 hour after being left (assessed by video, tape, neighbour's diary)
- Show excessive excitement on their return
- Ignore food or chews that have been left behind as a distraction

Separation anxiety occurs when a dog becomes anxious when separated from an owner due to treating them as a mother substitute.

Action to take

The owner should consult their veterinary surgeon to identify or exclude medical causes of anxiety and seek the introduction of behaviour therapy through referral to a behaviour counsellor. Treatment is likely to involve gradually reducing the dog's dependence on the person and developing its capacity to spend time on its own without distress.

Development of over-dependence on one or more people

Whereas separation anxiety occurs because a dog does not learn to be independent, a dog can learn to become dependent upon one or more people in later life. The symptoms and action to take are the same as for separation anxiety but can involve more than one person. Dependence can develop due to greater availability, such as where someone has had time off work, or other things in the environment the dog associates with a sense of security are removed (after moving house, for example). It can also occur because of increased need, such as if the dog becomes fearful of something in the environment. Fireworks are a common example of this.

10.2 Fear or phobic reaction to sights or sounds outside or inside the home (e.g. of noise)

When one or more people are at home does the dog?

- Like to check where they are but is happy to settle elsewhere
- Like to be next to them or hide if something, such as fireworks, frightens it
- Look frightened, with ears back, tail and body posture low, pace and pant in response to something in the environment, such as sound
- Seem unable to settle if its attempts to seek comfort or the security of somewhere to hide are unsuccessful
- Bark at things that frighten it

When no one is at home, the dog may

- Howl/whine/bark repeatedly in a way that sounds distressed and as if to call its owners back
- Bark at noises or other things that frighten it in a defensive way. This is likely to be in the manner that it would bark at these noises etc. when people are at home

When they are on their own, many dogs that are frightened of something that happens, or that they anticipate might happen, may additionally or alternatively display their distress and attempt to cope in one or more of the following ways:

- Damage doors or windows that would allow it to follow its owners
- Attempt to hide, including by digging into floors away from doors and furniture
- Attempt to get into rooms where it may feel more secure
- Attempt to get out of rooms associated with something frightening
- Attempt to escape through any door or window
- Tremble
- Drool/ salivate
- Pace
- Pant
- Lose toilet control despite being house trained at other times

The points that are relevant here are that dogs that depend on their owners for a sense of security may become vocal in an attempt to regain contact with them. Other dogs may bark at things that make them fearful.

Action to take

If the dog copes by hiding, the owners can provide a den for it to hide in if it wants to. Sounds can be masked using the radio etc., but not so loudly that this in itself causes a problem for neighbours. Curtains and doors can be closed to prevent the dog being exposed to the sight of things that trigger fear. A pheromone diffuser may help the dog settle when it is alone. The owner should also consult their veterinary surgeon about identification or elimination of medical causes of fear and the introduction of behaviour therapy through referral to a behaviour counsellor. Treatment is likely to involve desensitising the dog to what it is frightened of, and reducing its dependence on family members where appropriate.

10.3 Territorial - can be related to fear (see above) e.g. of people

When someone is at home, does the dog?

- Bark with a threatening and deterrent tone at the sight or sound of people, animals or vehicles approaching or passing close to the property or other location where the dog is secured, and does this stop when they have gone away

When no one is at home, does the dog?

- Display the same behaviour

Action to take

- The dog should not have unsupervised access to locations where it is more likely to bark, such as a front garden or rooms at the front of the home
- Windows should be kept closed so barking is less likely to be triggered
- Owners can consider covering windows with curtains, or the bottom of them with glass-etch spray or stick on frosted plastic
- The dog can be trained to recall, and called indoors if it barks while it is in the garden
- The dog should be kept away from situations that may trigger barking, such as children making their way to and from school, perhaps by walking it
- The boundary should be secure to ensure other peoples' safety
- Deliveries could be moved to a box away from the owner's home
- Owners can leave music on to mask sounds outside, but not so loud that it annoys neighbours
- The dog should be rewarded when it doesn't bark at things outside
- The owner should not shout or rush to investigate the cause of the dog's barking because these will reward the behaviour with attention and add to the dog's excitement
- The owner should consult their veterinary surgeon about behaviour therapy if the dog seems fearful of the things it barks at, or if barking at them also occurs away from home, because this would be indicative of fear.

10.4 Attention seeking

When someone is at home, does the dog?

- Seek a lot of attention in one or a number of ways that may include vocalising, particularly when the owner is preoccupied
- Try harder to get attention when it is ignored
- Seem able to recognise when it will not receive attention and consequently not seek it e.g. when at bedtime, or when the owner is busy with a routine chore
- Show an absence of the other symptoms listed for separation anxiety and fear

When no one is at home, does the dog?

- Bark in a repetitive manner, perhaps with a demanding tone, with pauses that suggest it is listening for a response
- Show an absence of the other symptoms listed for separation anxiety and fear

Barking or other vocalisation as an attention-seeking device may not necessarily occur when the owner is present, but the dog may use these sounds to communicate with other people such as passers-by or neighbours.

Action to take

- The owner should stop responding to vocal attention seeking behaviour. They must make it clear that they are aware of what their dog is doing but that they are not going to respond, by making eye contact and then looking away and ignoring further attempts to get them to respond. To make it clear that they are not going to react, they may need to also turn their head away or even walk out of the room
- The dog should be given attention when it seeks it in another way, e.g. by fetching and holding a toy
- The dog should be rewarded with attention for being settled and not seeking interaction with the owner
- The dog should be asked to do something before being given attention. For example, it can be asked to sit. Again, this is best done whilst looking away from the dog, so that attention may be given by turning to the dog once it is sitting. Training dogs to perform an act like this will help to lower its expectation of having attention on demand, and reduce the likelihood of it barking to get a response
- The dog should receive sufficient exercise and mental stimulation so as to make the owner's attention throughout the day less important
- If vocalising to get attention also occurs when the owner is absent from home they can provide things to occupy and settle the dog as they are leaving, such as chew toys or a few pieces of food scattered on the floor for it to find
- The owners should seek treatment advice, especially if their dog is vocal when they are not at home because attention seeking can be symptomatic of a more general disturbance in the dog's emotional state. This should start with the veterinary surgeon because ill health, old age, fear and anxiety can increase dependence upon the owner, the first sign of which is often increased attention seeking
- Owners should ask neighbours not to talk to the dog when it barks for their attention when they are in their garden, for instance

Behavioural treatment is likely to include enlargement of the points discussed above and the detail required to carry them out effectively. It is also likely to include teaching the dog to associate specific clues with not getting attention so that these can be used to increase the likelihood that the dog will remain quiet at key times.

10.5 Social (e.g. calling to other dogs in the district)

Does the dog?

- Only bark when it hears other dogs in the area
- Bark to them in a friendly way rather than with a 'go away' sound

Action to take

- Employ the techniques discussed under **improved management** in the first aid section of this handbook
- Try and locate owners of the dogs involved and discuss management of the times the dogs are allowed into the garden or yard

10.6 Barking in play or aggression

Does the dog?

- Bark when it is playing
- Bark when playing with another dog it lives with

Action to take

- Employ the techniques discussed under **improved management** in the first aid section of this handbook
- If barking in play between dogs occurs when no one is at home they can be separated at these times. If appropriate the use of a child or dog gate will allow them to maintain social contact with reduced likelihood of them engaging in play and vocalisation

10.7 Predatory/chase behaviour

Does the dog?

- Bark at wildlife it sees in the garden
- Chase and bark in frustration at traffic it cannot get at that passes the boundary of the owner's property

Action to take

- Employ the techniques discussed under **improved management** in the first aid section of this handbook

10.8 Frustration (e.g. because the dog did not expect to be left behind)

Does the dog?

- Become excited as the owner leaves in a way that is consistent with the behaviour it displays when they are going to take it for a walk
- Start to bark as soon as the owner leaves it behind
- Have a barking tone that suggests it is frustrated, which will be without a mournful tone and without pauses where the dog might be listening for a response
- Show an absence of the symptoms listed under separation anxiety and fear

Action to take

- The owner should use different clothing when the dog is walked to when they go out on their own

- The dog's lead should be left where it can see it at all times and will not be disturbed by the owner as they leave without the dog. This will help to alter the dog's expectations and reduce the likelihood of frustration.

10.9 Senility

- Is the dog an older dog that has recently developed the problem?

Action to take

- As per the section on the veterinary surgeon on page 19.

11. Things to avoid

11.1 Advising 'simple things to try'

Although a desire to help may make it tempting to provide owners with advice in the form of simple things to try this is potentially counterproductive. For example, the common suggestion that dogs that become distressed when separated from their owners are gradually accustomed to being left alone for increasing periods of time can result in the dog becoming sensitised by the owner's frequent departures and periods of forced separation, the end result being that the dog becomes more unsettled and anxious when left. Although the owner may be instructed to return only when the dog is quiet, lulls in overt signs of distress, such as barking, are likely to be temporary and are not indicative of the absence of anxiety. Therefore the owner's return will coincide and reinforce the anxious state that is the root cause of the problem. Similarly, suggesting that a dog should be accustomed to being left at different times of day could be counter productive for dogs that can cope with routine departures but become vocal if left unexpectedly.

Owners who receive inaccurate or inadequate advice may become demoralised after finding that it does not resolve the problem. This may result in their ongoing distress because they feel trapped in their situation, as well as ongoing distress for those affected by the noise. Therefore, if the welfare of the people and the animal involved in the situation is not to be adversely affected it is important that any advice given is provided by someone with appropriate training who has the time to take the full case history and discuss the treatment programme in detail.

11.2 Implications of a dog knowing right from wrong

When referring to the behaviour of an owner's dog it is important to avoid terms such as '**misbehaving**', '**bad**' and '**naughty**'. These imply that the dog knows right from wrong, which could lead owners to apportion blame and encourage them to use punitive techniques. Such action will be detrimental to the animal's welfare and could result in the dog learning to be defensive. Some owners are convinced that their dog knows when it has done wrong, but their observation of the dog's body language that led them to this conclusion is the result of the dog anticipating that the owner might be

aggressive towards it, as may occur if they are in the habit of scolding, shouting or becoming physical with their dog in an attempt to stop it from barking. Such actions also have the potential to increase anxiety and reduce the dog's capacity to cope when left unattended and increase the amount of vocal behaviour that occurs. Dogs that have learnt that barking gains their owners attention and do it for this reason will be rewarded even if the owner attempts to be punitive.

11.3 A second dog

Owners should be advised that a second dog will only help reduce the incidence of nuisance vocal behaviour if the dog they presently own is distressed when left unattended because it is dependent on social contact to maintain a sense of security. In the vast majority of these cases the quality of interaction with people is such that another dog is not a substitute. Therefore the introduction of another dog is only likely to help where an attachment to dogs already exists, and even then only if this attachment will generalise rather than remain specific to a particular individual. A common case profile where the introduction of a second dog is occasionally successful involves the death of a canine companion. In some cases providing a second dog may reduce the incidence of vocal behaviour because of the mental stimulation it provides. However, the presence of a second dog may increase the level of barking e.g. if the barking is triggered by stimuli that occur outside the home or through play between the dogs.

11.4 Suppressing symptoms

Elasticated muzzle

The elastic encircles the dog's muzzle and exerts pressure, and webbing ribs limit the amount of expansion that occurs when the dog opens its mouth. The pressure increases if the dog attempts to bark, which is claimed to result in a tiring of the muscles and cessation of barking. It is possible that strengthening of the muscles could also occur. On their website the manufacturers claim that this type of muzzle has been scientifically proven to be humane but they do not provide any references to support this. It is also claimed that dogs can eat and drink while wearing the device. Cronine et al (2003) found that use of the device significantly reduced barking when fitted and found no evidence of stress through the measurement of saliva cortisol. The paper goes on to suggest that further work was necessary to show whether restricted respiration and drinking might cause dehydration in hot conditions.

Although, apart from increased constriction, this device does not control barking by introducing an aversive outcome, there are implications for the animal's welfare due to treatment of symptoms rather than addressing the cause. Furthermore, the device may not reduce other vocalisation, such as whining and howling, which require less freedom of movement, and given that the principle behind its use is that the muscles become tired it does not stop barking entirely.

12. Providing further help

12.1 Directing owners to sources of information

Information about problematical vocal behaviour is available from various sources, including;

- Leaflets
- Internet
- Books/booklets
- Research papers

In general the information available in **leaflet form** and on the **Internet** is of limited use. These formats, often with the same content, tend to offer alternative explanations for vocal behaviour without providing the reader with the knowledge required to enable them to determine what the problem might be. Therefore there is very little opportunity for them to know how to address it or where best to seek help. Attempts to give treatment advice are inadequate and likely to lead to a failure to resolve the problem leading to owner dissatisfaction, further anxiety and an increased likelihood that the dog will be rehomed, abandoned or put to sleep because the owner feels that they have explored all their options.

Advice given in popular **books** varies in accuracy and quality, but most are of limited use to owners attempting to resolve problems of the type discussed here. Books written for the practitioner and student of applied animal behaviour are comprehensive in the subject of differential causes and treatment but are not generally accessible to the pet owner.

There are a number of **research papers** in this area, most of which are cited in the references and bibliography. In particular there has been extensive research related to separation anxiety, of which vocal behaviour can be symptomatic, much of the funding for which has been provided by interested drug companies. Until relatively recently the term separation anxiety was used generically to describe separation problems. However, there are causes that are unrelated to anxiety, and previous papers and publications have categorised them. In particular McCrave (1991) produced an influential paper that identifies differentials for the motivation of the three most common problem behaviours, including vocalisation. As a consequence of this classification new generic terms were introduced, and it is now common practice to refer to a separation problem followed by a description of the perceived motivation, only one of which is separation anxiety.

12.2 The leaflet '*Is your dog barking too much?*'

The leaflet "***Is your dog barking too much?***" will broaden the reader's understanding of why dogs vocalise, inform them that such problems can be resolved, enable them to manage it in the short term and resolve it in the long term. It provides direction in respect of finding further help because discussion of treatment for every condition is not possible in the space available, and many problems are both complicated to treat and have implications for the animal's welfare.

12.3 Professional involvement

Veterinary surgeon: The involvement of the veterinary surgeon is important in any case involving anxiety or fear, or in which medical disorder may be an underlying component of the behavioural problem. Stress resulting from unresolved anxiety or fear can have serious adverse effects on welfare and general health. Common medical conditions such as senile dementia, endocrine disorder or painful osteoarthritis can cause or exacerbate behavioural problems. The duty of the veterinary surgeon is to diagnose and treat medical problems, or to rule out the presence of medical factors in a behavioural problem case. The veterinary surgeon should then refer the case to a suitably qualified veterinary or non-veterinary behaviour counsellor who will provide behavioural therapy. The involvement of the veterinary surgeon is also necessary if the dog requires medication to reduce anxiety or fear as part of the treatment for the behavioural disorder. Where the associated cost is a necessary concern for the owner, they may be eligible for charitable help, such as that provided by the PDSA (Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals).

Behaviour Counsellor: In the treatment of behaviour problems in dogs and other companion animals, it takes time to establish cause and develop treatment plans that are suitable for the specifics of the case and the owner's circumstances. Experienced and suitably qualified behaviour counsellors are able to offer the time and expertise necessary to achieve these objectives. The professional behaviour counsellor will understand and be able to resolve the emotional components of problem behaviour.

Dog trainer: The aim of most pet dog training is to teach basic commands such as sit, heel, come, lie-down, stay and fetch. This is useful for the resolution of noise related problems that occur in the presence of the owner, and that simply require the owner to control the dog's behaviour. For example, to be able to call their dog indoors so that it stops barking at people, dogs or other stimuli. Some very advanced trainers may teach owners how to train their dogs to bark on command so that it is possible to train the dog to be quiet at another signal. Conditions that may be resolved in this way are, unfortunately, very rare. The dog trainer should not stray into attempting to identify or resolve underlying emotional factors, as a failure to approach this aspect of the problem correctly may seriously impact the health and welfare of the animal and the potential for the problem to be resolved.

13. Further help

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors
PO Box 46, Worcester, WR8 9YS
(Send SAE for clinic list)
Tel: 01386 751151 www.apbc.org.uk

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