

## Barking dog, what to do... Ask a Trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

Dear Trainer,

Recently my dog barks a lot. My dog has started barking when he hears the other dogs bark in the neighborhood. My dog is a neutered, 2-year-old shepherd/corgi mix that I've had since he was 10 weeks.

By the way, the barking started when we had a neighbor with two dogs that live outside all the time, move in about 8 months ago. The neighbor dogs bark at every little thing and are allowed to bark well into the night. I think it stresses my dog out.

A friend told me to use a squirt bottle on my dog, which I tried, but it only stops him for a second or two, and I don't want to carry a squirt bottle around forever. I would appreciate any suggestions you can give me.

Signed,

*I live in the Barking Lot!*

Dear Barking,

Thank you for wanting to help your dog with his barking problem, as it sounds like you might be right; your dog is suffering from stress due to the neighbor dogs. Since your dog's barking began when the new neighbors moved in, that would be a good indicator.

Barking can be an annoying problem for everyone that has to experience the noise, or see how distressed a dog becomes during the barking. While barking is annoying for the humans, it is the product of many potential emotional stressors for your dog. With that in mind, I'm glad you are looking for positive methods to help your dog. Using punishment can add more stress to already anxious dogs, and it often has fallout effects that range from compulsive behaviors to aggression since dogs don't understand why they are being punished. After all, they are just doing what they believe is the right thing to do when they bark.

Some common reasons for barking are boredom, frustration, fear barking, and attention seeking, as in the case of your neighbor's dogs, and somewhat with your own.

As you have noted, the squirt bottle only works for a second or two, so it is time to put the squirt bottle away. Using things like squirt bottles and penny cans may stop the behavior temporarily, but does not address the underlying problem, and that is where you need to look to help your dog.

### **Determine why your dog is barking**

Since you have narrowed down the possible reasons your dog is barking, it will be easier to minimize the problem. Notice, however that I said minimize, not “cure” the barking. Dogs are dogs and they do bark, so don’t expect that your dog will never bark again after you work on the problem.

Since your dog appears to be barking when other dogs are barking you might look for things that typically trigger dogs into expressing themselves. These would include UPS trucks, letter carriers, trash trucks, children playing, gardeners, and meter readers, to name a few of the top reasons that spur dogs to bark.

Is your dog barking on specific days, such as trash day, or when neighbors have a gardener? If you think this might be the case, you can be prepared to distract him by adding environmental enrichments during those times to keep his mind busy. Think about some of the following to help ease stressors:

- Use a Foobler. These are food puzzles that have a timer to release food at different intervals. Food puzzles provide mental stimulation and keep your dog busy. (Great if you are not there when the barking starts)
- Provide raw, meaty bones for your dog to chew—these provide wonderful recreational chewing that can last for hours. Do, however learn how your dog chews before leaving him without supervision.
- Do more training with your dog so you can call your dog away when he feels the need to bark.
- Use other food carrier toys, such as Buster Cubes or Treat Balls to feed your dog his morning meal so he has to work hard to get his breakfast. These things will tire him and give him more reason to sleep rather than bark.
- Use white noise such as music (classical is best) to mask some of the outside stimulus. Also, look into Canine Lullabies at [www.caninelullabies.com](http://www.caninelullabies.com) or <http://throughadogsear.com> for wonderful calming effects on dogs.
- Take your dog to doggie daycare if you can identify the days when he is barking more, or to just to add some variety to your dog’s day. You or a dog walker can also take your dog out for some exercise on days when you think it might be more difficult for him.
- Block any visual or auditory stimulation that might be causing the barking, such as pulling the blinds, or keeping your dog away from the side of the house where the other dogs are barking.
- Be sure that you are feeding your dog to behavioral health by feeding a super premium food that is grain-free and without corn, wheat, or soy.

You might also look into using some calming herbal products to help take the edge off and help your dog ignore some of the outside noises. Zylkene is an over the counter product that has shown very good results for anxiety in dogs.



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Working with a positive reinforcement trainer that has had experience with barking dogs is still another way to help with the problem.

Finally, go to your neighbor and explain your situation. Your neighbor might be willing to do something on his or her end. You might take this column to your neighbor and suggest all the same things for their dogs to help them be calmer and exhibit less barking.

Good luck,  
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