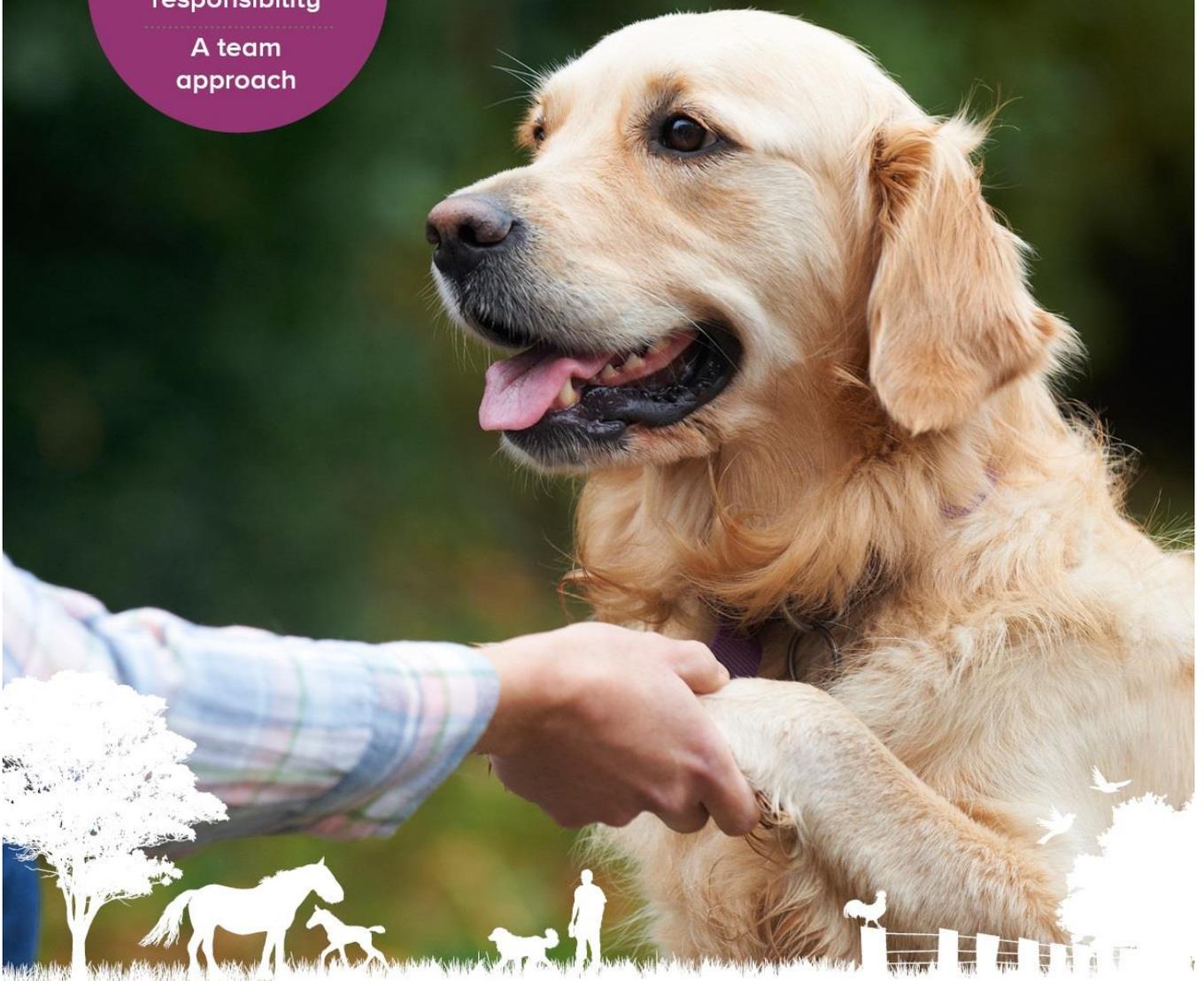


A community
issue

A shared
responsibility

A team
approach



Managing animal noise nuisance in our community:

BARKING DOGS

Information for the dog owner

131 872 | info@tr.qld.gov.au | www@tr.qld.gov.au

 **TOOWOOMBA
REGION**

Why dogs bark

All dogs bark

Barking is an extremely common dog behaviour issue and the most common community problem reported to Council. Having barking dogs in the community significantly reduces the quality of life for those affected by barking.

Barking becomes an issue if a dog barks:

- when left alone for extended periods
- immediately after you leave home
- excessively when people pass by your property
- when attention seeking

You know you have an issue when:

- your neighbours tell you
- you are reported to Council
- it annoys you

Why do dogs bark?

Most people have a dog for protection and companionship. However, barking dogs may generate conflict between neighbours and are the source of many complaints within the community.

It is important to understand the difference between a dog being a good watchdog and a nuisance barker.

A good watchdog barks only when stimulated by what it thinks is a significant threat such as someone attempting to enter your property or things that may worry it (eg. a snake or another animal in the yard, a house on fire, a bath overflowing).

A nuisance barker is one which over reacts to life's perceived threats or worries and where normal 'events of everyday life' cause excessive and prolonged barking that is 'above and beyond the call of duty'. Such dogs are often poorly trained or bored and some can even be anxious or fearful.

Good barking habits

It is easy to teach dogs good barking habits. So, when your dog barks excessively, you may find neighbours react by believing that you don't care about their needs or the needs of your dog.

Some breeds of dog are more likely to bark at intruders. Small breeds like terriers are often more alert and sharper than many large breeds, but they can also be nuisance yappers.

If you have a young dog or a pup that barks excessively, it is a good indication that it may be developing into a nuisance barker. It could be a sign that you have a fearful or anxious pup.

Basic training tips

There are many successful ways of training your pet at home, but both dog and owner will benefit from attending puppy classes. Classes provide an opportunity to socialise with other people and animals. If you have an older dog, formal training under the guidance of a dog trainer or behaviourist will be invaluable.

To train your dog not to bark, it is important that your target is to reward silence rather than to punish the noise. Punishment is usually not a precise way of changing behaviour and can confuse dogs.

Rewarding a wanted outcome is much more precise than punishment and you then have the choice of rewarding the same outcome several times in quick succession to create a stronger response.

When training a dog, stick to the same sequence of commands and use them over and over again. Don't keep changing the words you are using. Also, use your reward immediately after the barking stops to encourage their good behaviour quickly. Try the 'bad dog – good dog' routine. For example, if the target is for your dog to leave the fence where it is barking, to come to you and to sit, stick to the sequence of commands of QUIET then COME then SIT. The word QUIET should be firm but not too harsh.

If your dog responds, reward it with a 'good dog' happy voice and a pat.

If your dog fails to respond, don't grumble at it. Instead, guide it to COME to you and to SIT and then reward it.

Also, your command sequence will be much more effective if you practice it when your dog is not barking. When your dog is calm, go into the yard and teach it to COME and SIT and reward it. Rehearse the sequence many times to reinforce that knowledge.

What effect does this have on desirable 'watch dog' barking?

It's much easier to turn barking on than to turn it off. So, your first task is to teach your dog the commands needed to turn off the barking. Once your dog has learnt this, you can then choose to allow watch-dog barking when it is needed.

When you are out

Dogs belong to the family Canidae, which includes wolves, jackals and foxes. They are pack animals and can be stressed and begin barking when the pack abandons them (ie. you or your family leaves the house). Some of the reasons for this may include:

Separation anxiety – occurs if your dog usually barks as you are leaving home and continues throughout the day. It is much too exuberant in its greeting when you get home and can exhibit a variety of other behaviours. There are many solutions but keeping it busy with activities during the day will help. Your vet can provide you with further advice.

Boredom – barking is often caused by boredom but your bored dog may also be destructive, dig holes or escape. To help stop this behaviour, fill your dog's day with fun activities and look for the many 'do-it-yourself' dog toys and timer-activated feeding devices that are available. Check your library, pet books and the internet for ideas.

Fearful dogs – fearful dogs are often over-reactive to the normal activities of everyday life and will bark excessively to try to 'scare things off'. These behaviours are often worse when you are not home to offer comfort and guidance. Socialising your dog with other dogs will often help but professional guidance with a qualified behaviourist or veterinarian may be needed.

Territorial – a territorial barker is usually bold and confident. Solid fences will often help but we recommend the help of a trained professional to reduce this behaviour.

The following ideas may help to manage excessive barking:

- Choosing a dog that is right for your property (ie. small yard, small dog)
- Restrict the dog's vision through a fence or gate (and/or opaque barrier) between your dog and children, animals, the postman etc – anyone who may provoke barking
- Confine the dog in the back yard, away from 'passing' traffic that can provoke barking
- Consider training. Talk to a reputable trainer or local dog obedience club about ways to discourage bad habits
- Keep your dog inside at night (or in a shed/garage)
- Exercise your dog (dogs are less likely to bark through boredom if they have worked off excess energy during the day/night), and spend plenty of time with your dog
- Take your dog to the vet for a thorough health check to rule out a possible health issue (desexing may be a good option)
- Give your dog a balanced and varied diet, as well as plenty of fresh water
- Provide noise insulation for the kennel
- Leave food treats and interesting toys for your dog to play with when you leave the house for the day (also consider leaving a radio or television on so the dog can hear it)
- Never leave your dog unattended when you go on holidays, consider placing your dog in a boarding kennel
- Obtain a bark control collar as a means of training the dog

Why do dogs bark at the postie?

Dogs often bark at postal workers and junk mail delivery people, and it's not because of their uniform. Most dogs are territorial, and if someone approaches the gate the dog barks. If that person then goes away without coming inside, the dog thinks it has done its job and scared them off.

As the postman delivers around the same time every day, the dog will begin to lay in wait and reinforce this behaviour for all passing traffic. It is important to stop this practice at an early age. Take the time to lead your dog outside to meet these frequent gate-callers and socialise your dog at an early age.

To teach your dog to limit its barking at these gate-callers, use the QUIET – COME – SIT method detailed in the 'basic training tips' section earlier.



Find out why your dog is barking

If you are unsure why your dog is barking, take the time to determine the following:

- **Time of day** – does your dog bark at certain times of the day? What is happening in your neighbourhood at that time? Is the postman delivering mail? Is your rubbish being collected? Are children coming home from school and walking past your property? Are straying cats or possums in your yard at night?
- **What are you doing?** – are you leaving to go to work when your dog starts barking? Are you away for extended periods of time, resulting in your dog's boredom? Are you rewarding the unwanted behaviour by reacting to it?
- **What is your dog doing?** – is your dog stressed, excited, bored or lonely? Is your dog trying to get to you – its 'pack'?



Most owners ignore their dogs when they are well behaved. Good behaviour may be taken for granted, for example, resting and playing quietly. Then, the owner encourages bad behaviour by paying attention to the dog when it barks. It's easy to understand why dogs learn that the only way they can get the owner's attention is by barking.

Assess your problem

- What makes your dog bark?
- When, where and why does my dog bark (day/night), when I'm not at home?
- What happens after my dog barks? Does there appear to be any form of stress release for the dog?
- Is the behaviour normal for my dog?
- Is my dog's behaviour learned or conditioned?
- How long has my dog been barking?
- How did the behaviour problem start? What were the circumstances?
- Look at the length of time this behaviour has been going on; has it been gradual, or is it occasional or progressive?

Once you have assessed yourself, your problem, and your dog, use the information in this kit to determine what you can do, or who you can ask for help to prevent your dog barking and becoming a neighbourhood nuisance.

Keep a diary. Some dog owners find it useful to keep a diary or log of their activities and their dog's barking. This may be useful to pinpoint when and why your dog is barking.

Can't find a cause? Sometimes it is difficult to determine the cause of barking. Your dog may be unpredictable. The barking may just be a bad habit, it may be attention seeking or in response to something you can't see.

An alternative is to discuss your dog's behaviour with your local vet or veterinary behaviourist, particularly if you feel your dog is anxious.

There are many books and DVDs available through your local library, and information on animal management and local laws are available on Council's website at <http://www.tr.qld.gov.au/>

There are also many technical devices, obedience clubs and animal behaviourists in the Toowoomba Regional Council area, be sure to ask lots of questions and consider what they teach before you join.

Managing your dog's barking

Is your dog barking excessively?

The first step in managing barking in our community is to find out the reason WHY your dog is barking in the first place. Then, and only then, can we suggest strategies to assist you manage your dog's excessive nuisance barking.

Talk with your neighbours

You may want to get your neighbours to help you document the barking for a few days, given that your dog may be barking when you are away or at work. Explain to your neighbours that you are aware of the issue and ask for their help and patience while you try and solve the problem. If you are concerned about speaking with your neighbours you may wish to use the communication card in this package. The cards enable your neighbours to give you feedback anonymously.

Things you can do

Investigate and record when your dog barks (what time of day), where it does the barking (eg. inside or outside), what is around at the time it barks (eg. children, postman etc.) With this information you will have a better understanding as to what is motivating your dog to bark excessively and how you may train your dog to reduce its barking to an acceptable level.

What not to do

In the meantime, do not shout at the dog in an attempt to stop it from barking, as this may have the opposite effect and encourage it to bark more. Shouting may stop dogs barking temporarily, but in the long run, many dogs bark because they want attention and they know barking will get it.

Remember

- Barking issues are common. If you have a barking dog problem, you are not alone!
- Behavioural issues can be understood if you learn more about your pet's behaviour
- Seek professional help if necessary

The aim is to control and modify the dog's barking and in turn help prevent boredom and/or separation anxiety in dogs.

Separation anxiety is a behavioural problem that occurs in dogs that become highly attached to their owner, another dog or other family member, and become extremely distressed in their absence. This condition can arise if your dog is left alone for long periods of time, coupled with boredom. Subsequently, this may lead to excessive nuisance barking. Distracting a dog from a loved one's absence may reduce the level of barking. This is often achieved by using food or toys.

Methods of control

- Avoid conditioning – do not reward your dog for bad behaviour.
- Companionship – before leaving home, turn on the television or radio, or give your dog an old coat or item of clothing that belongs to you.
- Never call your dog after it has stopped barking and then punish it.
- Increase physical exercise.
- Regularly walk your dog and change the route you walk.
- Take your dog for a drive.
- Spend FUN time with your dog.
- Avoid routine e.g. carry your keys with you at different times not just the times you are leaving.
- Access to the house – if you can let the dog inside the house, provide it with a single room that may smell like you (for comfort) in order to relax the dog (the ‘denning’ principle).
- Obedience training – a dog can be trained to be alone, and bark only on command.
- Avoid stimulus – distract your dog with another form of reward at the time it normally barks at a neighbourhood disturbance (eg the postman).
- Fence design – a fence correctly designed to restrict your dog’s vision of outside stimuli if your dog can see outside.
- Anti-barking devices, used in conjunction with obedience training, can reduce barking.
- Discipline – show your dog that you are the head of the house. Dogs are pack animals and need to be shown where they stand in relation to the family unit.
- Spend the time to work out why your dog is barking.

The main cause of barking is boredom. As well as the other methods of control mentioned above, there are also some simple ideas worth a try.

To avoid boredom you need to give your dog plenty to do when it’s alone

Here are some suggestions:

For the best results, try interactive toys that hide food, such as a “Kong” (a rubber toy) or ones that are designed to require manipulation and work to obtain the food reward. Leave toys, rope chews, rawhides and even bones for a dog to play with and use up time while alone. Leaving an article of clothing with the scent of the missed loved one on it can also work well, especially for puppies.



- Use drink bottles or milk containers – **remove the lid**; cut a few squares in the side and place dry biscuits or ice inside. Your dog will roll them like a toy. They also make good chew toys when empty.
- There are food reward toys available (e.g. Kongs). Talk to your vet or pet shop.
- Make sure your dog has plenty of water available.
- Give your dog a bone or dog treat (e.g. a pig ear or chew toy) when you leave the house. This will teach your dog that when you leave there is a positive reward – the bone or treat.
- A variety of toys (balls, chew toys, something to climb on) can be left in the yard for your dog to play with. Remember toys need not be expensive. Be mindful to alternate your dog’s toys as they are just like kids – they will get bored with the same toys and ignore them.
- You can also try feeding your dog during the day when you are NOT home – as this activity alone can keep your dog busily distracted for hours while it ‘hunts’ for the food you have hidden, fulfilling its natural ‘hunting’ instinct.

Dog obedience and agility training clubs

Toowoomba Dog Obedience Club Inc – Toowoomba	07 4632 7143
Bark Busters Home Dog Training – Toowoomba	1800 067 710
Think Canine Training and Behaviour – Toowoomba	0409 890 906
Sue Bloom Dog Psychology – Toowoomba	0410 698 004
Golden West Dog Training – Withcott	07 4637 4226

Please check your local Yellow Pages for a complete list of Dog Trainers in your area

Kennel clubs

Dogs Queensland	07 3252 2661
Darling Downs Kennel Club	07 4661 4737
Allora Kennel Club	07 4696 6216

Dog breed clubs/associations in Queensland

Afghan Hound	07 3297 6567	Dalmation	07 3390 4801
Airedale	07 3288 9719	Doberman	07 3321 8849
Alaskan Malamute	07 5547 7793	German Shepherd	07 3800 9611
American Staffordshire	07 5546 4776	English Springer Spaniel	07 3879 7342
Australian Shepherd	07 5546 9768	Fox Terrier	07 3818 6464
Australian Silky Terrier	07 3423 8228	German Shorthair Pointer	07 5548 7953
Australian Terrier	07 3390 3168	Great Dane	07 3297 5908
Basenji	07 3801 1054	Hungarian Vizsla	07 3265 1621
Basset Hound	07 3245 1195	Jack Russell Terrier	07 3200 7778
Beagle	07 3287 6131	Labrador	07 3285 1760
Bedlington Terrier	0400 213 617	Golden Retriever	07 3802 1998
Belgian Shepherd	07 4630 5680	Maremma Sheepdog	07 5464 3930
Bernese Mountain Dog	07 4695 0007	Old English Sheepdog	07 3375 4264
Border Collie	07 3879 1986	Rhodesian Ridgeback	07 3321 1252
Borzoi	07 5427 9430	Rottweiler	0500 566 663
Boston Terrier	07 3287 4001	Poodle	07 3286 3023
Boxer	07 3208 0321	Saint Bernard	07 3814 2277
Bull Terrier	07 5546 3003	Schnauzer	07 5543 4306
Bull Mastiff	0413 800 058	Samoyed	07 3893 2205
Cattle Dog & Kelpie	07 5464 4322	Shar Pei	07 5546 3454
Cavalier King Charles	07 5428 6535	Shetland Sheepdog	07 3382 6966
Chihuahua	07 3372 3654	Siberian Husky	07 5546 9547
Chinese Crested	07 3262 6445	Staffordshire Bull Terrier	07 5543 1105
Cocker Spaniel	07 3206 0302	Weimaraner	07 5497 9697
Collie	07 3262 6445	Welsh Corgi	07 5464 2181
Dachshund	07 3209 7321		

Dear resident

I believe my dog/s may be barking/howling excessively which is causing some concerns in the neighbourhood. I'm currently trying to address the issue and would like your assistance.

Can you please complete the below and drop this survey back in my letter box at:

Kind regards

Your dog/s is not causing me concern

Your dog/s is causing me concern

If my dog is causing you concern, please provide details of this noise (i.e. date, time and regularity)



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