

THE BARKING DOG

Citronella collars, muzzles, and electric shock collars are basically a quick fix solution. Rather than solving the barking problem, they treat the symptom (barking) of what is an underlying behavioural problem. Problems that will often trigger barking include boredom, loneliness, separation anxiety, attention seeking and territorial guarding. Barking can often be the result of dogs reacting to external stimuli such as possums, cats or other dogs. This means that without treating the problem that is causing the dog to bark, these items tend to be a temporary fix which many dogs will work tirelessly to defeat.

There are many ways in which the citronella collars can be made ineffective. A lot of dogs don't mind the taste of citronella, meaning it is generally only effective on 80% of dogs at best, and isn't effective on dogs with separation anxiety at all. Often dogs get desensitised to the taste or scent over time. Other dogs work out how to bark or howl without triggering the system, or even learn to bark while in motion, thus the spray will miss their mouth. Some dogs know that after barking for a certain amount of time the canister will empty, and will continue to bark in the knowledge that eventually the citronella will cease to spray.

Muzzles are also another ineffective method to harness a barking dog. Muzzles themselves are only supposed to be used for up to 2 hours at a time under direct supervision. In addition, muzzles must also be fitted to allow the dog to be able to pant and lap water as required. Consequently the dog is thus still capable of barking, or alternatively whining with a closed jaw.

Pet City recommends behavioural training for the affected dog, (which is also the more effective course of action for "curing" a barking dog) as opposed to the use of the above items. Through changing certain parts of the lifestyle of the dog, you will create a more livable and enjoyable environment, therefore removing the reason for the barking in the first place.

The methods of training do vary depending on the reason for the barking. Many obedience schools will do home consultations at the owner's convenience. This is advantageous for treating behavioural problems as the dog can be observed in his/her natural environment, thus providing a more effective diagnosis and consequential treatment. Many owners can also benefit from teaching their dog to bark on command, therefore enabling them to teach them a silence command at the same time. Unlike items such as citronella collars, which are a continual drain financially with canister refills and batteries, once training is completed it will last the lifetime of the dog (on the condition that the methods are adhered to).

WHAT TO DO?

WHEN YOU AREN'T HOME...

Generally speaking if barking occurs when no one is at home, or when the household members are occupied elsewhere, it is often linked to boredom, separation anxiety, loneliness, reacting to external stimuli, and/or attention seeking. It is important to explore how long and how often the dog is alone, and also how much exercise the dog receives in proportion to his/her age and breed. Toys such as *Kong's* and *Activity Balls* occupy your dog for longer, and variety in the fillings of the toys themselves will create an interesting diversity. These toys are ideally removed from the dogs environment following consumption to amplify future interest.

Although your dog may have plenty of toys, including *Kong's*, its important to rotate them regularly, as opposed to littering them over the yard. With this done, most dogs will find more amusement in their toys each week, almost as if the toys themselves were new.

WHEN YOU ARE HOME...

If the barking occurs when there are people at home, generally speaking, the dog may be reacting to external stimuli, he/she may be territorially guarding or perhaps just plainly seeking attention from otherwise occupied people. Once again toys and environment enrichment play a vital role, and yes it is still possible to alleviate problems such “my dog barks at cats” and/or “my dog barks at people walking past the fence” through professional training.

Often owners will unknowingly encourage and reinforce the barking habit in their dog. Although the dog may get yelled at following the barking, or have water sprayed at him/her, its important to realise that often these dogs do not associate this as negative attention, but rather as just attention itself. The dog will feel rewarded in hearing or seeing you despite the negative connotations. The most effective reaction is often no reaction at all, as difficult as this is. Though when the dog does cease to bark, even momentarily, immediate reward and praise will encourage further quiet behaviour from your dog.