

## **Larimer Humane Society**

### **Barking Dog Handout**

A dog who barks a lot can be frustrating to owners and neighbors alike. While dogs bark for different reasons, the solutions are much the same. While barking is a natural behavior for dogs, excessive or ongoing barking can be a sign of distress or boredom. Try the suggestions below to help reduce or eliminate the problem. If you are not successful or have questions about your dog's barking or other behaviors, contact the behavior department at Larimer Humane Society for additional help, at [behaviorhelp@larimerhumane.org](mailto:behaviorhelp@larimerhumane.org) or 970-226-3647 x513.

#### **Address Their Needs**

The first step to reducing barking is to ensure your dog has all their needs provided for – not just food, water and shelter, but appropriate mental and physical enrichment too.

- Offer plenty of opportunities to exercise and play – this could be long walks with lots of time to sniff along the way, sessions of fetch with a tennis ball or maybe swimming (there are even [indoor dog pools](#) in northern Colorado if the weather is too cold).
- Add mental enrichment to your dog's day – this could be training sessions, games, or other activities your dog finds enjoyable. Enrichment doesn't need to be difficult or expensive; a cardboard box with treats and toys inside can be a fun challenge. Check out [these ideas](#) for keeping your dog's brain busy.
- Make sure they are somewhere they feel safe and comfortable. Dogs who are stressed about their environment may bark as a result. If you leave your dog in a backyard or kennel run, they may bark from boredom, fear, or protectiveness. Even a dog that was previously okay outside can become distressed, sometimes after an incident we may not realize has happened, such as fireworks exploding nearby or the wind blowing through something. The safest place for your dog to stay is indoors, but if that isn't an option, make sure your dog has shelter to hide in (and keep out of the rain, snow and sun). If your dog barks at people or dogs walking by, do what you can do reduce the dog's vision of them, possibly by putting up a screen or relocating your dog to another area of the property.

#### **Try Crate Training**

A solution that works for many owners is crate training. Dogs typically feel safe and secure in a crate, and owners can work on making it a comfortable space that helps keep their dog calm and quiet.

- Pick the appropriate size crate for your dog and consider the type of crate too. While wire crates are often cheap and easy to come by, some dogs prefer the security of a plastic Varikennel style crate.
- Introduce the crate positively and gradually. See Larimer Humane Society's [Guide to Crate Training](#) for more pointers and detailed steps.
- Make the crate a fun place by using treats to lure your dog in, feeding their meals inside the crate and consider adding an old t-shirt or blanket that smells like you to keep them feeling connected when you are gone.
- Provide some background noise to drown out sounds that might cause your dog to bark. Leaving a radio or TV on, or even just a box fan for some white noise can help cover up other sounds and

can become another cue to your dog that it's time to relax and be quiet. Partly covering the crate with a light towel or blanket can also help (always ensure there is still adequate ventilation).

### **Don't Accidentally Reinforce Barking**

Dogs, like all animals, repeat what they find rewarding. This means if you pay attention to your dog every time they bark, they will learn that barking gets their owner's attention.

- Even negative attention is attention – much like kids, many dogs are good with any form of attention, even if it is an owner that is upset with them. Plus, the more you yell when your dog is barking the more it seems like you are joining the game – now everyone is barking!
- Try to catch your dog *before* they make a mistake. If your dog tends to bark when they want to come inside, supervise them and call your dog in *before* they get bored and start making noise.
- Make rules consistent – if you find your dog's barking funny and cute in one situation, but not in another, the dog will have trouble understanding what you want from them. Don't encourage barking one moment and discourage it the next.

### **Condition to a Stimulus**

If your dog is barking at something in particular (like strangers walking by or a dog next door) you can condition them to have a quiet, positive response instead. This takes consistency and some well planned training, but can be very effective.

- Start with the stimulus (thing your dog barks at) far enough away that your dog isn't tempted to bark. This might be down the driveway or down the block – it depends on your dog's reaction.
- The instant that your dog acknowledges the stimulus (looks at it, ears perk up, etc.) start feeding your dog lots of small, high value treats (small pieces of cooked chicken or cheese can work well).
- When the stimulus is gone, stop feeding treats.
- Gradually work on this until your dog can be closer to the stimulus without barking.
- Prevent exposure to the stimulus when you can't be training. For example, if your dog barks every time the mail carrier walks up to the door, cover windows with shades or plastic window film to keep your dog from making a mistake. If your dog is uncomfortable with the mail carrier and barks, then every day the mail is delivered your dog "wins" – in their mind "I barked and the mail carrier left; that worked!" It doesn't occur to your dog that the mail carrier left because they dropped off the mail!
- Allow progress at your dog's pace. Conditioning your dog to have a different response to a stimulus has a lot of variables. Each dog learns differently and there's no rushing the process. If you are stuck or not seeing the success you hoped for, contact Larimer Humane Society's [Behavior Department](#) to get more help.

Dogs bark for many reasons, but with a few changes and some training, you and your neighbors can enjoy more peace and quiet. Your dog will be happier too! For additional help on barking or any behavior concern with your pets, the Behavior Department at Larimer Humane Society is available for free consultations by phone or email. Reach them at [behaviorhelp@larimerhumane.org](mailto:behaviorhelp@larimerhumane.org) or 970-226-3647 x513.