



Barking – the bored dog

HALL VETERINARY SURGERY BEHAVIOUR ADVICE

Boredom is one of the most common factors predisposing dogs to behaviour problems being reported. The typical suburban pet dog doesn't work; is not allowed to roam and spends long periods by itself. The ways it adapts to this lack of stimulation vary with temperament and opportunities for action—some dogs will turn to barking. There are other causes for barking, but boredom is a very common cause. Other behaviours resulting from boredom include: digging, pulling on the lead, compulsive licking, pulling washing off the line, mounting people's legs, coprophagy, eating other unusual items, and stereotypies, for example tail-chasing and repeatedly running around the back yard in a set pattern. Boredom is caused by the dog's environment not providing enough stimuli for the dog to feel comfortable, and can give rise to arousal of the dog and greater general excitability.

FACTORS INFLUENCING BOREDOM

AGE. From 3 months to 3 years dogs have higher stimulus needs than at other times.

BREED. Excitability and general activity levels have been good indicators of predisposition to boredom.

WORK: Dogs who have jobs to do like stock dogs, guide dogs, police dogs, or dogs with daily obedience-training do not normally show signs of boredom.

FRIENDS: Dogs with companions are generally happier and less bored.

LEARNING: Dogs can be trained to be quiet in certain places, like in their bed.

DENNING: Many dogs will lay quietly in a small, dark, quiet area, which has the features of a nest.

ENERGY: Dogs which are fatigued are less likely to show signs of boredom.

SOLUTIONS

OBEDIENCE TRAINING. The two main benefits of obedience work are that it gives the dog 'work therapy' and it brings them under better control.

DAILY WALKS. At least once a day, preferably twice, provide exercise outside of your property. This provides enough stimulation for dogs to help satisfy them. Play sessions with other dogs and with people are a good idea, too.

TOYS. Ice cream containers (the dogs' footy), suspended thick ropes or tyres, and other toys are good for keeping a dog occupied when it is on its own.

A VIEW. Some dogs will be content to watch the world pass by whilst watching from a comfortable position, so you may want to experiment with open fencing, or enlarging the dog's enclosure to include a view. On the other hand, a quiet den may give a dog an opportunity to settle down.

CHEWIES. Most dogs, especially puppies, like to chew. Rawhide chews and stuffed Kongs are good to chew.

PHEROMONES: Some dogs bark due to anxiety rather than boredom. Adaptil® pheromone collars or diffusers can be helpful to reduce anxiety related barking in conjunction with a veterinary behaviour consultation

CASTRATION. Some owners have said that it worked for their dogs, others have reported no change.

CONCLUSION

There are many factors that influence a dog's internal state of boredom. Each dog has a different need for stimuli. It attempts to adapt to a deficiency in ways which are often unacceptable to owners and neighbours. The domestic dog can be expected to cause problems unless it receives sufficient stimuli to replace that which it would receive in the wild. Talk to our staff about strategies to prevent your dog from becoming a boredom barker.

