



PAW PRINTS PET TRAINING
PO BOX 516
FLOREAT 6014
enquiries@pawprintspettraining.com.au

Help! My Dog Barks!

The principles outlined in this handout are intended as a general guide only and should be applied under the supervision of an Accredited CGC™ Instructor.

This is not a program for aggressive dogs. If your dog has shown aggressive behaviour toward you, your family, or other people, you should speak with the Instructor listed at the top of this handout.

So, you have a dog that barks? Barking dogs are high on the list of complaints received by local councils and are often the cause of major disputes between neighbours. Some people are more tolerant than others, however generally speaking a dog that barks a lot is a source of annoyance and frustration to everyone.

Does my dog bark just to annoy me?

No! Your dog (let's call him Deefer) doesn't bark just to annoy you - even if it sometimes seems that way!

Barking is a natural behaviour for dogs, with certain breeds of dogs and some individuals being more inclined to bark than others. Domestication and life in today's society have provided Deefer with more reasons to bark than his wild wolf ancestors had.



In the wild, barking more than necessary would have alerted other animals to the pack's location and driven prey away, so was mostly kept to a minimum. Today however, Deefer's meals are usually provided for him so he has fewer concerns about his survival and is therefore willing to bark more.

Humans have also created breeds designed to bark more, alerting them to the presence of intruders, or to the presence of pests such as rodents, so we are actually responsible for the barking problem!

So, why does Deefer bark?

Deefer usually barks as a response to something that has excited him or caused him to become anxious. He also learns that barking can be rewarding in a variety of ways.

Understanding the reasons why Deefer barks, and why he finds it rewarding, will help in finding solutions. Some of the more common reasons for barking are:

- 🐾 Territorial/Protection
- 🐾 Boredom
- 🐾 Attention Seeking
- 🐾 Anxiety
- 🐾 Playtime Enthusiasm
- 🐾 Health Problems
- 🐾 Hunger/Thirst/Shelter

In most cases Deeper is not a "problem" dog. There is usually a problem with his environment or relationships. Let's have a look at each of the above reasons for barking and explore ideas for alleviating the problem.

Territorial/Protection:

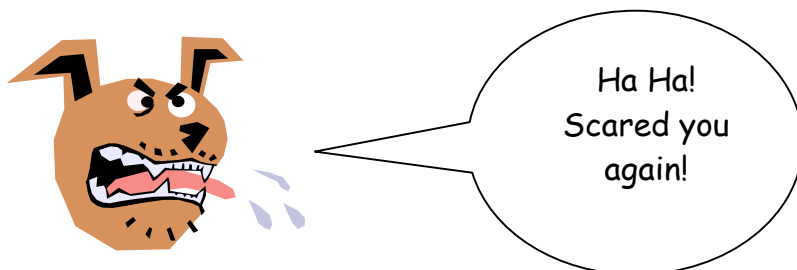
Does Deeper bark when other people or animals come close to the boundaries of your property? Does he bark when visitors arrive? If the answer to these questions is "Yes", then it could be that Deeper is barking to proclaim and protect what he sees as his.

Deeper is by nature a social animal and is happiest when living with a social group which he sees as being "his" group. This social group is generally made up of whoever normally inhabits your house and may include human members, another dog and a cat or two, *etc.*

Deeper will also see the family home and yard or property as being part of the group's territory and will therefore feel he has a right to defend it.

Deeper's survival instincts tell him that he must protect the members of his group, and his territory, from invasion by others. So when people or animals outside his social group come close to or invade his territory, or come close to the other members of his group, he may react by barking. He is barking to warn them that they are trespassing on his territory, or possibly threatening his group.

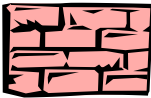
Deeper has discovered that if he barks, most dogs and other animals will quickly depart from his territory. Humans too will think twice about entering the house or yard and may react by retreating. So Deeper is rewarded for the barking behaviour because the intruders retreat and are no longer threatening.



Management ideas for Territorial/Protection:

- 🐾 Deeper needs to learn that he is not in charge of his social group. Read the Delta handout called Help! My Dog Needs Better Manners! for ideas to reinforce your leadership. Once Deeper realises he is not responsible for the welfare of his group he may bark less when

visitors arrive. It should also be easier for you to request that he stop barking, as he will see you as his leader.

- ✎ Making visitors a rewarding experience for Deeper will also help. To do this you need plenty of treats and toys on hand when visitors arrive. Have the visitors offer Deeper a treat or toy. If he stops barking to sniff the treat, praise him and allow him to take the treats. This way he is being rewarded for being quiet and will learn that visitors are not intruders - they are actually great fun to have around!
- ✎ If Deeper is barking at people or dogs walking past your yard, you could consider restricting Deeper's access to these areas to times when you are present and can "take charge" and request that he stop barking.
- ✎ You could build a more solid barrier, so Deeper cannot see the "intruders". 
- ✎ You could provide something more exciting for Deeper to concentrate on when people walk past, and reward Deeper for ignoring them.

Boredom:

Deeper can suffer from boredom if his environment is lacking in stimulation. Even a big yard can be just a large prison for him; after all, he has all day, every day, to get to know every inch of it.

If Deeper is bored, in effect an "urban prisoner", he can end up quite stressed. He can't change his job, alter his environment, read a book, listen to music, or go for a long walk, as we humans can, to relieve the effect of stress.

Boredom can lead to barking, which Deeper uses to express his dissatisfaction and to relieve some of his pent-up energy.

Management ideas for Boredom:

Boredom means that Deeper is not receiving enough mental or physical stimulation. To address this need you should provide:

- ✎ Some daily training sessions (trick training, agility, obedience, or simply good manners) will exercise Deeper's mind and utilise his physical skills.
- ✎ Exercise in the form of walks (on loose lead and allowed to sniff) and regular play sessions. Some short, intense physical games, such as Frisbee or ball will help expend that physical energy. If you spend most of your day away from him, it is a good idea to provide this exercise before you leave, so he is feeling physically satisfied and content to doze or amuse himself.
- ✎ Time for cuddles and massage when you are home. Deeper is a physical creature and enjoys being made a fuss of.
- ✎ Socialisation with other friendly dogs and regular access to his friends.
- ✎ A morning feed, or divide his daily ration into two, and feed morning and evening. This way he has something to feel contented about when you leave in the morning.
- ✎ Large raw (never cooked) bones to chew or chew-toys such as a "Kong" to keep him occupied.
- ✎ Access to part of the house while you are away. Install a "Doggy Door" and give your house a burglar deterrent from the inside as well.



- 🐾 Regular outings. If you are lucky enough to be able to have Deefer at work with you, take him! If you teach him how to be well-mannered in public he will be more likely to be welcomed at the homes of friends and relatives as well.

Attention Seeking:

As we said earlier, Deefer is generally a social animal. He enjoys company and is not overly content if left alone a lot.

Barking tends to gain attention and Deefer soon learns that if he barks long enough or hard enough someone will interact with him in some way.

Something as simple as sticking your head out the door and telling him to be quiet is seen by Deefer as being successful in having gained your attention.

In Deefer's opinion any attention is better than no attention - especially when you join in by barking back at him! Even punishment is seen by Deefer as being worthwhile - he has gained your attention and you have interacted with him.



Management ideas for Attention Seeking:

- 🐾 The main issue here is to avoid paying attention to Deefer when he barks and pay more attention to him when he is quiet. Try to anticipate those occasions when he normally barks to gain your attention and give him attention before he begins.
- 🐾 If you miss this opportunity and he has already begun to bark, then you should take no notice of him whilst he is barking - do not speak to him, pat him, or even look in his direction! He will see any reaction from you as being a result of his barking, so you need to show no response. As soon as he stops barking respond with praise and attention. For example, if you normally open the back door when Deefer stands there barking, either open it before he has a chance to begin barking, or after he stops.
- 🐾 If Deefer is an outside dog and usually begins to bark in his pen before you let him out in the morning, you either need to go out before he begins to bark (you can gradually get back to your normal timetable once he learns that not barking gets a better result), or resist the urge to yell at him to "Be Quiet!" and wait until he stops barking before going out
- 🐾 Ensure Deefer has daily interaction with you to fulfil his social needs. If he has his mental, physical and emotional needs tended to, he will be less stressed and less inclined to want your constant attention. The section above on management ideas for "Boredom" can help here.


Anxiety:

Do you find that Deefer follows you everywhere when you are at home, possibly even trying to go to the bathroom with you? Does he complain when shut away from you? Allowing Deefer to become very dependent on you can lead to anxiety when you are away. This in turn can cause Deefer to bark because he is anxious about your absence. Even a simple change in your daily routine or household circumstances can become a major issue for him.

This can be a most frustrating problem and it is best you ask your local CGC™ Instructor for a referral to a qualified Veterinary Animal Behaviourist if you feel Deefer has this problem.

Management ideas to prevent anxiety:

To prevent Deefer from developing this problem, try the following:


- ✎ When you are away, allow Deefer access to the house and in particular, a bed or den in a safe familiar place with an old jumper that has your scent on it.
- ✎ Prepare a meal for Deefer and give this to him as you leave along with toys and a bone to help distract him.
- ✎ Try leaving a radio or TV on softly in the background to give the impression of company. 
- ✎ Gradually get Deefer used to being separated from you for an increasing length of time while you are at home. Put his bed in a convenient area where he can see you moving from room to room and install a cheap, simple toddler barrier in the doorway to stop him from following you everywhere.
- ✎ Keep arrivals and departures very matter of fact and low key - don't make too much of a fuss at either time.
- ✎ Reward Deefer when he is quiet and relaxed.

Playtime Enthusiasm:

You may find that Deefer tends to bark when he is playing with you. He may simply be excited about the play session, or frustrated that he cannot have unlimited access to the toys that you may possess.

Management ideas for Playtime Enthusiasm:

The key here is to reward Deefer for calm, quiet behaviour and show him that you will not play whilst he is barking.

- ✎ If he usually barks to get you to play a game, either begin play unexpectedly before he barks or wait until he draws breath between barks and begin play then. If he will not stop, put the toy away and try again later.
- ✎ Reward him with a treat when he brings toys back to you and begin playing again before he barks.
- ✎ Keep play sessions low key to prevent escalation of excitement. High intensity play sessions should only last for a short while between calmer activities.
- ✎ Request a good manners behaviour such as "sit" or "drop" before and during play sessions to refocus him.
- ✎ Teach him to settle between throws or tugs. 

Health Problems:

Does Deefer suffer from fleas, a skin allergy, ear irritation/infection, arthritic aches or pains? All these things can contribute to making him irritable and more likely to be annoyed at disturbances.

Management ideas for Health Problems:

Make sure Deefer is in good health. If any of the symptoms mentioned above are present, or if you feel there is anything unusual about his



state of health, make sure he has a Veterinary check-up immediately. These conditions and other health problems can contribute to behaviour problems.

Hunger/Thirst/Shelter:

Check Deefer's living conditions thoroughly. Is he well-fed? Does he have access to plenty of clean, cool water? Is he sheltered from climatic conditions - both hot and cold? He may be trying to tell you that he is uncomfortable. It is your responsibility as his primary carer to make sure he has all the necessities for a comfortable life.

Why shouldn't I physically punish Deefer for barking?

Some people promote various punishments for barking, ranging from yelling at Deefer, to hitting him with rolled up newspapers, or using electronic or chemical collars.

In most cases the punishment does not deter Deefer, as the reason for his barking is not being addressed. He may stop barking in the short term, but will generally begin again before too long.

Most punishments are also cruel and likely to make Deefer anxious and stressed about why he is being punished and can lead to Deefer displaying aggressive behaviour toward people - hardly conducive to a good relationship between you and him!

We believe it is far better to work out why Deefer is barking and remedy the situation so everyone benefits.

Are there other reasons for Deefer's barking?

Yes! We have listed only the most common reasons, but there are many other reasons why Deefer may bark.

He may bark at children coming home from school, shouting and banging the fence. A dog barking further up the road or in the next street may set him off. A neighbour calling out, or starting their car or lawn mower, or a cat teasing from the safety of a neighbouring tree or fence could be the catalyst. If in real desperation, there are always birds, bees and jumbo jets to bark at!

It is up to you to use your initiative to think about the problem and ways to solve it. You could ask for children's co-operation not to tease Deefer. You could allow Deefer continual access to inside the house (via a doggy door) so he is less distracted by what is going on outside.

Another idea that sometimes helps is to teach Deefer to bark on command. If you teach this in a controlled manner you will also be able to teach "Shush". Speak with your local CGC™ Instructor for ideas to teach this.



If Deefer's barking is a problem for your neighbours, it is best to let your neighbours know that you are aware of the issue and that you are working to solve it. Perhaps you could enlist their help and co-operation by asking them to say hello to your dog through the day and give

him a treat (when he is being quiet). Remember to introduce your dog to the neighbours before you do this, so he is happy with them throwing things over the fence!

Barking can be a frustrating behaviour, however if you are observant you can usually discover what makes Deeper bark. Applying the appropriate management ideas from this handout will generally help, however for best results do this under the supervision of your local CGC™ Instructor.

Look for the other Handouts in the Delta "Help!" series:

- 🐕 Help! My Dog Digs!
- 🐕 Help! My Dog Needs Better Manners!
- 🐕 Help! My Dog Thinks He's the Boss!
- 🐕 Help! My Puppy Bites!
- 🐕 Help! How Do I Housetrain My Puppy?
- 🐕 Help! My Dog Jumps!

For more information on Canine Good Citizen™ training for your pet, contact the Instructor listed on the front page of this handout.

For more information on the Delta Society go to www.deltasocietyaustralia.com.au

