

# The Evolution of Barking, an Intro!

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One of the most common woes from owners is about barking dogs! Barking has been used as a major factor in decisions to surrender dogs to shelters. It is a frequent problem in older, kenneled, adopted or bored dogs.

This column is too short to do an appropriate analysis of the evolution of barking, but I'd like to highlight some points to consider.

Barking developed as an aspect of canine communication. Canines send and interpret various visual, postural, olfactory and auditory messages. Vocalizations are used in situations where other cues (i.e., visual) are less effective. Barking can be used for both close and far range communication.

There are at least 10 distinctive audible canine vocalizations including: barking, grunting, whining, yelping, screaming, howling, growling, tooth-snapping, panting and coughing. They communicate to:

- 🕒 Maintain affiliations
- 🕒 Establish a function social order
- 🕒 Reduce competition
- 🕒 Identify individuals

## WHY DOES THE DOMESTIC DOG BARK?

Barking is less common amongst wild canids (wolves, African hunting dogs, Hyenas, Dingos). Packs would rather not announce their whereabouts thus protecting territory, food and the pack. Conversely, we have engineered our domestic dogs for the opposite: to bark as puppies because it's cute, to bark to alert for strangers and to bark when they are bored!

Evolution has changed many things for our dogs. Although dogs still work for us today, it is in different ways. In brief, their jobs have changed to suit our human needs. They've adapted remarkably well.

Regardless of whether barking was enhanced or not through selective breeding, nearly all experts agree that barking is a typical canine behavior that becomes a problem only

- Out of context or when misunderstood
- Excessive for the context in which it is performed
- When the owner/society sees it as such.

## CLASSIFICATION OF BARKING

Underlying causes of barking require assessment, since intervention, treatment planning and reliable change varies for each owner, dog and lifestyle.

If you have a barking crisis, seldom will it improve if you do not consider doing something differently. Here are some types of barking that we have encountered in our practice:

- Separation Anxiety
- Watchdog Barking
- Under-socialized Barking
- Manipulative Barking
- Frustration Barking (a by-product of manipulative barking)
- Under-stimulation Barking and/or Boredom Barking

- Geriatric Barking
- Medical Condition-Related Barking
- Excited/ Joyful Barking
- Imitative Barking
- Herding & Prey-Drive Barking
- Compulsive Barking

Barking, like any complex behavior, is over-determined which means it is highly likely that multiple causes are present simultaneously. In other words, it's not just about the barking. Many associations or stimulus could be causing or exacerbating barking, including learned behaviors that were reinforced and/or behaviors developed as defense/coping mechanisms for survival and to alleviate boredom.

#### **TONE DOWN THE BARKING**

A typical barking episode can be understood as the interaction of four sequential components.

- Individual Factors (All the features, including the dog's lifestyle, that the dog brings to the barking arena)
- Environmental Factors (antecedent stimulus - the sum total of the environmental events that the dog experiences prior response barking)
- The Barking Response (threshold, intensity, duration, frequency, cycle, topography)
- The Consequential Set of Factors (what happens after the barking response)

#### **BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION**

When we do an assessment for a client, it includes the "whole dog's lifestyle": environment, internal and external criteria, and interactions with family members, friends, children and strangers. Sometimes, as with boredom, it is as simple as juicing up the dog's life a bit with activity & socialization. It can be more complex and include ways that we, as humans, expect support from our dogs that is beyond their means without going neurotic.

Other factors are, but not limited to:

- Breed Selection
- Socialization
- Desensitization
- Medication with a behavior modification plan
- Antecedent Stimulus Manipulation
- Counter-conditioning
- Response Prevention
- Reinforcement
- Extinction

If you have having a "barking" problem, have tried your own remedies and they are not working, contact an expert (*behaviorist and/or veterinarian who has specialized in canine behavior*).

We are having a workshop specifically focusing on "The Evolution of Barking" on July 26<sup>th</sup>. Registration is online at [www.dogtalk.com](http://www.dogtalk.com), click events and link to registrations or give us a call. Rebarkably,

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Enjoy the Journey☺