

Barking Dogs

adapted from an article by **Guy Walters**

1 You can picture the scene. The sun has finally come out, and the weather looks set fair. You plan to spend the day outside, but your peace is shattered. It's the dog next door, and it's barking. Not just a few woofs, but an incessant and high-pitched yapping. Perhaps it will soon stop, you think, but it does not. In fact, it barks for a further four hours until its owner gets home, by which time your day in the sun has been ruined. But what makes it worse is that you know it is going to happen all over again tomorrow, and the day after that.



2 Constant exposure to the sound of barking really can induce extreme physical and psychological distress. The reason for this lies in your autonomic nervous system (ANS), which controls core body functions such as your heart rate and breathing. When you hear a sudden, sharp noise, the sound waves are transmitted to the brain, which interprets them as a potential threat. The brain then sends signals to the ANS, and we start to feel tense – leading, typically, to an increased heart rate and higher blood pressure. If a dog barks once or twice, there is no harm done. Our heart rate and blood pressure return to normal. But if the noise is continual, every time that dog barks, your ANS repeatedly fires up. It is causing you not only to feel anxious, but also immensely angry.

3 Dogs do not bark to make us angry: they are vocal for any number of reasons, but the most common reasons are boredom and loneliness. Dogs are 26 creatures, and if their waking hours are spent without human company, they voice their anxiety. The truth is that more and more of us have working lifestyles which make us unsuitable to be dog owners. It is simply not fair to leave these creatures alone for hours. The overriding reason for their bark is to attract attention. The problem is that, over the centuries, humans have bred a loud bark into domestic pets because it made them better guard dogs.

4 Some people consider buying a second dog to keep the first dog company, but this is not a reliable way to stop dogs barking. Your neighbours may end up having to endure twice the noise if the two set each other off! Rather, if you are a dogowner, consider getting your dog company in the form of a dog walker or a sitter when you are away. Also, make sure that your dog has plenty of exercise and enough to eat. A well-

fed, physically tired dog is much more likely to be a quiet dog. If it's dark, leave a light on – and consider leaving on a TV or radio, as the sound of humans, even recorded voices, is known to make dogs more relaxed.

- 5 Dogs can be trained to be silent. To understand how to do this, you have to get inside the mind of a dog. Most owners shout 'shut up' when dogs bark to get attention – giving them the very attention they crave, and encouraging them to bark even more. The answer is to 28 the dog when it is barking, turn your back on it, walk away and reward it with attention (and a treat) only when it stops. It will eventually learn that barking deprives it of attention.

Daily Mail, 2015