DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 05

The Barking Fix

The step-by-step plan for calmer doorbells, shorter bouts and a dog who settles. For teenage dogs, adults and rescues.

Reward-based | The Bark Finder | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



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START HERE · 2 MINUTES

You don't need to read this whole guide before the next doorbell.

You need the parts that match your dog. Find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

IF THIS IS YOU…	READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER
The doorbell is the worst part	Ch. 1. That's enough for today. Tomorrow, the Bark Finder (Ch. 2), then Situation 2 for the bell, or Situation 3 for deliveries and the mail carrier.
The window, the yard, other dogs or the car	The Bark Finder (Ch. 2) → the Quiet Zone (Ch. 3) → Situation 1, 5, 6 or 10. Lunging or growling? Part 4, "When to get help", first.
Barks at you: dinner, calls, gates and doors	The Polite Ask (Ch. 7) → Situation 7 for dinner, 8 for calls, 9 for gates and pens. Never pay the bark, starting today.
The neighbor complained	Situation 13 → start the Bark Log (Printable 2) today → the Good Neighbor Kit (Printable 9). General information only, never legal advice.
Barks only when you're out	Situation 14 first. Film your dog and see the vet before you train anything. Never leave a distressed dog to bark it out.
Fear, new barking, or an older dog barking at night	Part 4, "When to get help", before anything else. Vet first. Rescue barking at visitors? Situation 4 has a fear screen.
"He completely ignores me when I say quiet"	Run the Bark Finder (Ch. 2) again: the fix may not match the cause. Then the Quiet Zone (Ch. 3) and the Quiet Ladder (Ch. 6). No progress after 10–20 tries? Part 4.

How this guide is different

- **It finds the why first.** Alert, Ask, Blocked or Bored, plus the red routes that need different help. The Bark Finder (Ch. 2) tells you which.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** Exactly how many seconds of quiet to pay, where to start, and when to move up or back.
- **It has a plan B.** For the dog who barks through "Quiet", the bell that works until a visitor speaks, and the week it gets worse before it gets better.
- **It's kind.** No shouting, no scolding, no holding the mouth shut, no squirt bottles or shaker cans, and no bark collars of any kind.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary hospitals and associations, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Where a rule is our own, we say so. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see guides promising "quiet in 7 days". We won't. No reliable source gives an end date for barking, so we don't invent one. Here's what the sources do say, so you can measure progress against reality instead of a sales pitch.

WHEN	WHAT'S HAPPENING	WHAT'S NORMAL
The first few days of a new plan	Barking stops paying off. Nobody answers it, and the view is blocked	Barking often gets worse before it gets better. Your dog is checking whether the old way still works
The day after a stressful day	Visitors, a storm, a busy street, a vet trip	More barking for 24–48 hours. Keep the next day quiet and skip triggers (Ch. 3)
Changing how a trigger feels	Trigger appears, treats appear (Ch. 5). The recorded doorbell, one session a day	Some dogs show progress after "a few repetitions". Barking at other dogs can take "days or weeks"
Learning "Quiet"	Paying the pause, then stretching it (Ch. 6)	"Several days or more" to learn the cue with treats. No progress after 10–20 tries? Get help (Part 4)
Learning the Mat	A go-to spot away from the door (Ch. 7)	10–20 reps per stage. 10–20 practice visits, and about 90% success before real guests
A habit of months or years	An old habit has paid off many times	Longer habits take longer to change. Progress varies by dog and by cause

These are ranges from the sources, not promises. Barking that is new, sudden or getting worse needs a vet visit before any training.

OUR HONEST ANSWER TO "WILL HE EVER BE QUIET?"

Not completely, and that's fine. Some barking always stays, because barking is how dogs talk. Battersea says you "won't be able to stop them barking completely". The goal is less barking, shorter bouts and a dog who settles. One study found young dogs had much higher odds of nuisance barking than older dogs, and herding types like Biscuit, our Aussie, had higher odds too (one city's survey; association only).

Our standard: "quiet-home"

"Quiet-home" is our own standard, not a vet or charity one. Your dog is quiet-home when, **for 7 days in a row:**

- [ ] your dog's top trigger gets one to a few alert barks and then stops on one calm "Quiet" or a trip to the Mat
- [ ] nobody in the home pays a bark
- [ ] the Bark Log shows shorter bouts than in your first week

Until then, your dog is "in training", even if things look great. Quiet-home doesn't mean silent. It means short, rare and easy to stop.

Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **It gets louder first.** You'll likely see the barking get worse for a few days before it gets better. That's a sign it's working. Warn your neighbors ahead of time (Ch. 7).

2. **A great week, then a bad day.** It's not failure. It's data. Two sessions in a row where your dog barks through the cue means you go back one rung on the Quiet Ladder and climb again (our own rule; Ch. 6).
3. **The bell gets easy, then a visitor speaks.** Skills don't always carry over to a new sound. Practice each one from the easiest step (Situation 2).

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL EMBARRASSED

You're not raising a barker.

Maybe you've said "Quiet!" so often the word means nothing. Maybe a neighbor's note made your stomach drop. Owners say "I sat and cried when I got the letter", and "I feel quite bullied".

You haven't failed, and your dog isn't bad. Here's why.

Barking is how dogs talk

Vets and welfare charities agree: barking is normal dog communication. It isn't misbehavior. Dogs Trust explains that barking does one of two jobs. It gets something good to happen, or it makes something bad go away. Barking that works keeps going.

Your dog barks, and the mail carrier leaves. They were always going to leave. But to your dog, barking just saved the day.

It isn't defiance, and it isn't dominance. Your dog isn't trying to be "the boss". Many alert barkers are a little worried. They're trying to make the scary thing go away. You don't need to win. You need to change what the barking gets.

> NO BARK COLLARS, EVER, AND HERE'S WHY
>
> Bark collars can mask barking for a while in some dogs. They don't change why the dog barks, many dogs get used to them or learn when they're off, and aversive training carries welfare costs that reward-based training doesn't (one study found dogs trained with aversive methods showed more stress signs).

How to start again

1. **Drop anything that adds noise or fear.** Shouting, scolding, a firm "No". Some dogs think you're joining in. Others become afraid of you.
2. **Find the why.** Run the Bark Finder (Ch. 2). The fix depends on the cause.
3. **Stop the practice.** Block the view and mask the sound (Ch. 3). Every bark your dog rehearses strengthens the habit.
4. **Pick one rule for the whole home.** Never pay the bark; pay the quiet (Ch. 7). Everyone, every time.

THIS IS EVERYDAY BARKING

- A few barks at the bell or the window, then it stops
- Barking at you for dinner, play or the door
- Worse on quiet, bored days or after a busy one

GET HELP IF

- Backing away, tail tucked or hiding; lunging or growling at people or dogs
- Barking only when you're out, with pacing, drooling, chewing or accidents
- New, sudden or getting worse, or an older dog barking or pacing at night

Right-hand column? That's not your failure either. It means a vet check first, then the right professional. Ch. 2 shows the difference, and Part 4, "When to get help", says who to call. Any bite history goes straight to a professional.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

It's OK to close the curtains, put the radio on and make a cup of tea. That's not giving up. It's the first step of the plan, and calm owners raise calmer dogs. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

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