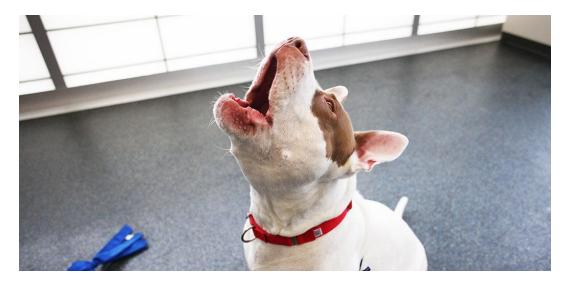# Howling

Howling is one of many forms of vocal communication used by dogs. Dogs howl to attract attention, to make contact with others and to announce their presence. Some dogs also howl in response to high-pitched sounds, such as emergency vehicle sirens or musical instruments. Read on to learn what to do if your dog howls excessively.

Problems to Rule Out First

Separation Anxiety Howling

If your neighbors call you and tell you that your dog is howling when you are at work, your dog's excessive howling might be caused by separation anxiety. Separation anxiety howling only occurs when a dog is left alone or otherwise separated from his owner. This kind of howling is usually accompanied by at least one other symptom of separation anxiety, such as pacing, destruction, elimination, depression or other signs of distress. For more information about this problem, please see our article, Separation Anxiety.

Medical Causes

Dogs sometimes howl when they're hurt or sick. If your dog starts howling or howls more than usual, take him to a veterinarian to rule out illness and injury before doing anything else.

What to Do About Excessive Howling

Howling in Responds to Sounds

If your dog howls in response to some kind of trigger, like another dog howling or a nearby siren, he'll probably stop when the sound stops. This type of howling usually isn't excessive—unless, of course, the triggers occur frequently. If they do, you can

use desensitization and counterconditioning (DSCC) to help your dog learn to be quiet.

Systematic Desensitization and Counterconditioning

When the problem is rooted in how a dog feels about a particular thing, it sometimes isn't enough to just teach him a different behavior—like to fetch a toy instead of howling, for example. Instead, it's most effective to change his motivation and feelings, which are the underlying reasons for the behavior problem in the first place.

Systematic desensitization and counterconditioning are two common treatments for fears, anxiety, phobias and aggression—basically any behavior problem that involves arousal or emotions. It's often most effective to use these two procedures together when trying to resolve animal behavior problems. If you think that a systematic desensitization and counterconditioning plan might help your dog, please find a professional with experience using desensitization and counterconditioning.

If Your Dog Howls, Whines or Barks to Get Your Attention

Some dogs learn that howling can get them attention from people. If your dog howls for this reason, his howling will usually occur in your presence when he wants attention, food or desired objects. If your dog howls to get your attention or "ask" you for things he wants, like food or toys, you need to teach him two things to be successful in curbing his behavior. First of all, he needs to learn that howling doesn't work (even if it did in the past). He also needs to learn that being quiet will work. If your dog realizes that howling always makes him invisible to you and being quiet earns him your attention as well as all the great stuff he wants in life, he'll quickly learn to curb his vocal behavior.

Ignore your dog's attention-seeking howling

- To avoid accidentally rewarding your dog when he howls, totally ignore him as soon as he starts making noise. Don't look at him, touch him or speak to him. Don't try to scold him either. Dogs, like kids, often find any attention rewarding—even if it's negative attention. So scolding your dog might make his howling behavior worse! Just pretend your dog is invisible. If you find it difficult to do this, try folding your arms across your chest and turning away from him completely.

Reward your dog for being quiet

- It's easy to forget to pay attention to your dog when he's being quiet. Often, we only pay attention to our dogs when they're doing something wrong! If you want your dog to learn to stop howling for attention, you'll need to reward quiet behavior. Randomly give your dog treats and attention when he isn't making noise. You should also make and stick to a new rule: Your dog doesn't get anything he wants (food, toys, access to the outdoors, treats, petting, etc.) until

he's been quiet for at least five seconds. If your dog howls in an attempt to get your attention, ignore him until he's quiet, as described above. Then, after five seconds of silence, you can pay attention to him again.

You can also try teaching your dog to be quiet when you ask him to. First, say "Speak!" and try to get your dog to bark or howl. (Knocking on a wall or door usually works well.) Praise your dog when he starts making noise—but DO NOT give him a treat or toy. Then say "Hush" or "Quiet." The moment your dog stops barking or howling for a second or two, quickly say "Good!" and give him a tasty treat. Repeat this sequence over and over, slowly stretching out the time that your dog must be quiet before earning his goodie. At first, one second of silence can earn him a treat. After he's successfully mastered that step, increase the time to three seconds. If he's successful again, increase the time to five seconds, then ten seconds, then 20 seconds, and so on.

Finding Help

Because howling issues can be challenging to work with, don't hesitate to enlist the help of a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT). Many CPDTs offer group or private classes that can give you and your dog lots of help with attention-seeking howling.

Spend Time with Your Dog

Some dogs howl because they're lonely, especially if they're left alone or kept outside for many hours at a time. Dogs, like humans, are very social animals and need regular interaction with their human families. If your dog howls often when by himself, you may need to spend more quality time together. Bring him inside more often, play games and take walks with him. Take him to a fun training class that focuses on rewarding good behavior. When you must leave your dog home alone for more than a few minutes, be sure to give him plenty of toys and attractive chew items to enjoy by himself.

Information taken from ASPCA website