

Electronic Fences and Shock Collars

by **Helping Animals.com**

Electronic training devices such as electronic fences and anti-barking collars rely on painful punishment and negative reinforcement, causing dogs to live in fear of being electrocuted for normal behaviors like crossing invisible lines, barking, and jumping onto surfaces within their own homes. Positive training methods, in which dogs are rewarded for what they do right, are kinder and more effective.

Shock Collars

Dogs wearing shock collars can suffer from physical pain and injury (ranging from burns to cardiac fibrillation) and psychological stress, including severe anxiety and displaced aggression. Individual animals vary in their temperaments and pain thresholds; a shock that seems mild to one dog may be severe to another. The anxiety and confusion caused by repeated shocks can lead to changes in the heart and respiration rate or gastrointestinal disorders. Electronic collars can also malfunction, either administering nonstop shocks or delivering no shocks at all.

Electronic Fences

Dogs whose yards are surrounded by electronic fences may develop fear or aggression aimed at what they believe is the source of the shock (kids riding by on bikes, the mail carrier, the dog next door, etc.). Dogs have been known to run through electronic barriers when frightened by fireworks or chasing a squirrel and then be too scared to cross back through the barrier.

Electronic fences may actually *encourage* animals to try to escape. Since dogs only suffer painful shocks in the yard, they may associate the shock with the yard itself—once they get out of the yard, the pain goes away. The fact that the pain returns when they try to reenter the yard can cause dogs to believe that they are being punished for returning home.

Even when animals are confined within certain boundaries of an electronic fence, they are still in danger of attacks by roaming dogs, cruel humans, or other animals, who can freely enter the property. Electronic fences are a dog thief's dream come true!

Humane and Safe Boundaries

The most effective way to keep your dog safely confined to your property is to keep him or her inside the house when you aren't home and allow him or her outside only under close supervision on a leash or in a securely fenced enclosure.

Some Fencing Guidelines

A 6-foot privacy fence is best, preventing your dog or intruders from scaling it.

Wood or vinyl fencing is optimal for privacy, but chain link is less expensive. (Small windows covered with wire mesh can be cut into wooden fences to allow dogs to see out.)

Replace a short fence with a taller one, or add an extension to the top.

Line the fence with rocks or a cement-filled trench to prevent digging.

If you cannot afford a fence, have a yard that would be difficult to fence, or live in a condominium or townhouse where fences are not allowed, consider letting your dog out only on a leash and taking him or her to a fenced dog park or to a friend's fenced yard for play and exercise. You may also want to consult a certified dog behaviorist about teaching your dog to stay within boundaries through the use of positive reinforcement.

Living With Barking Dogs

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons but mainly because of boredom, distress, separation anxiety, and defense of their territory. Young dogs, small or active breeds, and dogs who are chained up or left outside most of the time are more likely to bark. For humane and safety reasons, as well as to maintain good relations with your neighbors, it is best to keep your dog indoors when you are not at home. Dogs are less likely to bark indoors, and any barking that they do indoors is less likely to be loud enough to disturb the neighbors.

Tips to Prevent Boredom-Related Barking

Take your dog for two or three walks per day; family members, trusted neighbors, or professional dogwalkers can help during the workday.

Allow your dog least five opportunities to relieve him- or herself during a day.

Provide plenty of chew toys; rotate them and provide new

ones.

Give your dog a toy that can be filled with treats; working to get the treats out will provide mental and physical stimulation.

Agility and flyball courses are fun and a great outlet for a dog's energy.

Barking at intruders or frightening noises is a natural behavior for dogs and should not be totally forbidden.

Tips to Prevent Excessive Barking at Strangers or Noises

Take your dog out daily to interact and socialize with other people. Praise him or her for friendliness.

When people visit your house, give your dog a treat or toy so that he or she associates guests with something positive.

When something frightens your dog, encourage him or her to sit, lie down, or play with a toy.

A humane dog trainer or certified behaviorist will be able to provide more tips on desensitizing your dog to frightening sounds. If your dog's situation is severe, the behaviorist may suggest that you consider consulting your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medications that can help calm your dog.