

# Barking in the racing greyhound kennel environment







## Introduction

### Excessive barking is one of the most common disruptions to a greyhound kennel.

Often it is only one or two greyhounds who bark excessively, but their barking behaviour can influence and even teach younger dogs to bark. This can create a stressful kennel environment (for dogs and people) and nuisance complaints with neighbours.

When there are excessive barkers in a kennel, participants often look for effective and quick solutions to reduce or silence barking behaviour. In some cases, participants will use anti-barking muzzles or other similar anti-barking devices to prevent problem barking; particularly during feeding times.

However, there are welfare risks associated with the use of barking muzzles as they can prevent greyhounds from drinking, panting and, more importantly, vomiting, which can cause death from choking. In addition, the use of barking muzzles is a risk to the reputation of the greyhound racing industry.

This booklet discusses excessive barking and presents different options for managing and retraining excessive barkers. While none of the methods described within this booklet are as easy as using a barking muzzle, with persistence and patience they should provide good results that are enduring through to retirement and re-homing. Most importantly the methods are safe.



## Why does my greyhound bark?

Greyhounds, like other dogs, will often bark when kennelled or in yards. They may be barking at other dogs, people walking past, **seeking attention** or **alerting you to a threat**. This is normal barking behaviour and is the way greyhounds communicate with each other and with people.

Abnormal barking behaviour is where a greyhound continues to bark long after they have made their communication. It may also be where they bark for extended periods of time for no apparent reason. It can be a sign that something is not quite right.

In a kennel where there are excessive barkers, the noise can be stressful and interfere with rest time for the whole kennel. This, in turn, can interfere with learning and race performance.

If you can get to the bottom of why your greyhounds are barking, you can put in place steps to reduce the barking triggers and address the barking response.



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*Excessive barking can be managed, and barkers retrained, without the use of barking muzzles.*

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## What causes excessive barking?

Excessive barking is a form of **stereotypic** or **abnormal behaviour**.

These are behaviours that are repeated to excess, or at times when you would not expect it. For example, barking for 2-3 minutes just prior to feeding can be quite normal. However, barking during other parts of the day, non-stop for an extended time (10-30 minutes or longer) is not normal.

Abnormal behaviours generally develop when a greyhound's environment does not allow them to express a behaviour or where there is insufficient mental stimulation in their environment.

Abnormal behaviours are **coping mechanisms**, that allow the greyhound to adapt and cope with their stressful environment. Other examples of abnormal behaviours include, bopping, excessive licking or destructive chewing behaviour.

When we think about excessive barking as abnormal, we can start to look for reasons why a greyhound begins to bark excessively. Some of the common reasons for excessive barking include:

- **boredom** resulting from a lack of company, exercise or mental stimulation;
- **anxiety or excitement**;
- **hypervigilance** can lead to excessive barking triggered by an unusual noise or movement, such as leaves falling off a tree;
- **fear** from loud noises such as thunder or fireworks or alerting you to an **intruder**;
- a **medical condition**;
- a **physical** reason such as heat, cold, hunger or thirst; or
- **frustration** arising from repeated exposure to other greyhounds through barriers, or while watching an exciting activity through a fence or barrier (e.g. when other dogs are undergoing training within sight of the barking greyhound).

For greyhounds that are particularly noise-sensitive, being kennelled with an excessive barker can be highly stressful.

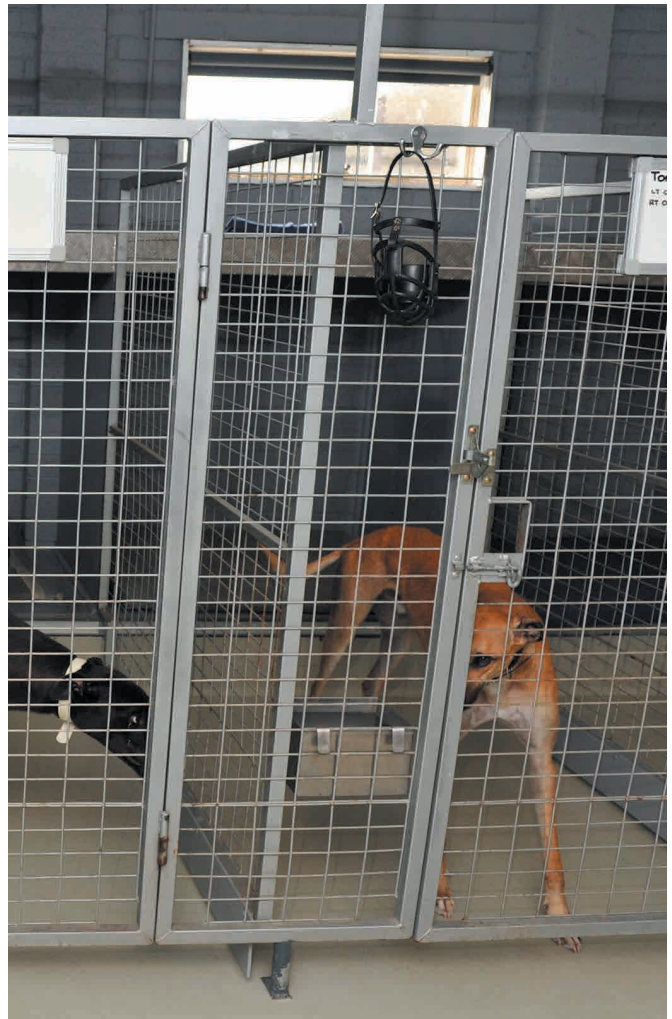
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*Remember that barking occurs for a reason.*

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Once you understand why a greyhound is barking excessively, then you can consider appropriate training, exercise and environmental enrichment strategies; as well as possible infrastructure or husbandry solutions.

***Using positive reinforcement through tools such as food treats or praise is more effective long term than punishment techniques such as spraying water or applying barking muzzles.*** Punishment techniques can lead to further problems and can reinforce or worsen excessive barking.



## Managing excessive barking

1. Record for several days **when and where** your greyhound barks excessively, then review this information and consider the following questions:

- a. **Is the barking in response to an event or is it random?**
- b. **When does excessive barking occur – is it after exercise, before or after feeding, or during long periods of inactivity?**
- c. **Does excessive barking occur during transport or at the track?**  
  
Participants often report greyhounds barking excessively during transport or in race kennels at the track. This could be a sign that the greyhound is anxious and not coping well with transport or time spent in a race kennel; or it could indicate the greyhound is easily excitable, has poor impulse control, or has been rewarded for barking behaviour previously.
- d. **What is the greyhound's kennel environment like? Do they have bones or other objects to occupy them and stimulate them mentally? Is the greyhound located in a part of the kennel where they are regularly being exposed to visual, auditory or social barking triggers?**

2. Based on your observations, if the excessive barking occurs in the kennel block there are many things you can do to address. Table 1 later in this booklet offers you a range of **environmental enrichment tools** to consider and try. Try changing routines, adding enrichment items, rotating or changing enrichment items etc. Change one thing at a time and give it a week to see if any changes in barking behaviour are noticed and or sustained.
3. Practice **retraining techniques** offered in “Tips for responding or modifying excessive barking” on page 8.
4. Be **patient, kind and persistent**.
5. If excessive barking continues, then **seek help** from your veterinarian or a specialist dog trainer.





## Case study 1

I have one dog, Joe, who starts barking around 9.30am every day and continues to bark until he is placed in a day yard for the afternoon. He then barks in the evening as I feed all the dogs, but eventually settles into sleep at night around 8.00pm. In my kennels, I exercise all the dogs in groups of 2-4 between 5.30am and 6.30am. They are then all toileted as I clean the kennel block. The morning meal is given around 8.00am and three of my dogs are placed in day yards. I then head to work. I pop home at lunchtime and rotate the other three dogs out to the day yards, bringing the first group into the kennel block, before heading back to work for the afternoon. I toilet and feed between 6.00pm and 7.30pm placing all the dogs back in their kennels for the night. I turn the lights off in the kennel block and lock up before 8.00pm most nights.

### Analysis

It is likely that Joe finds spending long periods of time in the kennel block during the day very frustrating. He is an active dog who is curious and happiest when he is free to wander around and sniff. He needs something to do when he is in his kennel or more free time.



### Retraining Program

1. Alternate Joe's time in the day yard between morning and afternoon.
2. Alternate fresh bones and toys on rotation, for example a fresh bone day one and a toy on day two. Change the toy each time and consider treat balls filled with kibble twice a week, so as not to interfere with his race diet.
3. Start playing the radio in the kennel block all day to break up the silence for the greyhounds and to cover background noise that may trigger barking in reactive barkers. White noise CDs, classical music or commercial dog CDs can also be used for this purpose. It is important to note that some greyhounds who appear bored are instead over-aroused and simply don't know how to rest. These greyhounds need to be taught when to use their energy and when to rest, rather than being continually over-stimulated.
4. Try and spend a few extra minutes with Joe each day and provide him some free time out of the kennel and the day yard. Greyhounds like Joe often benefit from social enrichment such as playtime with another dog, or structured play with people, followed by a period of trained resting time.
5. Add some enrichment features to the day yards to reduce barking there as well.
6. Try the anti-barking reward chart to help reward Joe when he does not bark (see page 9).

### Results

It took about 4-5 weeks for me to get our routine and program right, but Joe only barks now when I first come into the shed just two or three times as a greeting and then he settles down. When I come home at lunchtime, I spend five minutes with Joe patting and talking to him and I let him run around the kennel block with me until I am ready to leave for work, which is especially important on the days he is in the kennel block in the afternoon. I always put Joe out, even in rainy or bad weather, as he needs his time in the day yard. All the greyhounds are happier now and so are my family and my neighbours.

## Tips for responding to or modifying excessive barking

It is natural for your greyhound to try and communicate with you and other dogs, whether it is for attention or other reasons identified earlier.

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*The key to training is to ignore the barking behaviour and reward them when they are not barking.*

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For example, if every time a greyhound barks when you come into the kennel, turning or moving away from the greyhound will help them to learn that barking is counter productive. This will probably need specific attention for a while as your care and husbandry routines are likely to be associated with exciting things such as food. If you are working with an individual dog out in the yard, turning away or withholding a reward will also help them to associate the lack of a barking behaviour with your action.

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*Remember to be patient, take your time and be consistent.*

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Try this Anti Barking Reward approach to deal with barking in the kennel environment where a greyhound may be seeking attention:

Anti Barking Reward Chart

Step 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start by making sure you have plenty of tasty food rewards.</li><li>• Slowly walk up and down the kennel block or yards that you are going to focus on.</li></ul>
Step 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For greyhounds who remain calm and quiet, toss a treat into their kennel.</li><li>• Ignore the greyhounds who bark.</li></ul>
Step 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where a greyhound is barking, if they stop, even just to take a breath, throw a treat through the pen door on to the floor.</li><li>• Proceed to the next pen.</li></ul>
Step 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good timing is vital as no dog can bark endlessly.</li><li>• Catching those times when the dog isn't barking will provide it with valuable information as to how to earn a treat.</li></ul>
Step 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repeat the above process until you have made 3-4 laps of the kennel block.</li><li>• Repeat the process multiple times throughout the day.</li><li>• Once the greyhounds begin to show understanding of the training, you can proceed to the next level where you pause briefly in front of a kennel with a barking dog and immediately throw a treat in when they stop barking.</li></ul>



## Case study 2

I have one dog, Betty, who she runs her race either in the trailer on the way to the track, or in the kennels before her race. She is fine in the kennels at home, but as soon as I walk her towards our trailer she starts to prance around and pull on the leash. After she has been in the trailer for about 15 -20 minutes, I hear her barking when we stop at traffic lights. We generally travel anywhere from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours to a race meeting. The more time Betty spends in the trailer the more she barks.

When we get to the racetrack, if she hasn't already barked the whole way and is exhausted, Betty will start to bark continuously as soon as she is locked in her race kennel. Depending on the time of her race, she is often exhausted by the time it comes time to get ready for her race.

I have been putting a barking muzzle on Betty to keep her calm and stop her from running her race in the trailer or in the race kennels, but I can't do that in hot weather.

### *Analysis*

Betty appears to get quite excited and/or anxious about travelling in a trailer and being confined in a race kennel before a race. Barking is Betty's way of coping with her anxiety, so she uses all her energy barking which means she performs poorly. The barking muzzle prevents Betty from using excessive energy during travel and kennelling prior to racing, but it does not resolve her anxiety. She needs to learn to travel and spend time in a race kennel without becoming anxious and barking.

### *Trailer retraining program*

1. Begin loose leash walking training with Betty and practise having her walk on a loose leash all the way to the trailer. Repeat this process until Betty can walk up to, around, and get in and out of the trailer while remaining on a loose leash without barking. Do not allow Betty to approach the trailer while she is pulling on the leash and barking.
2. Teach Betty how to lay down and settle when she is not in her kennel or paddock run. Take a kennel mat or blanket and place it on the ground nearby when you are completing an activity. Bring Betty to the mat, then encourage her to lay down and settle with a chew-based enrichment, or by feeding a stream of small treats on the ground near her feet. Once Betty can settle in place outside of the trailer, practise close to the trailer. A thunder jacket can help some dogs to stay calm, so it is worth trying once to see if this helps.
3. Load Betty into the trailer then encourage her to settle on her mat in the trailer in the same way as you did in Step 2. Once she can do this, place her in the trailer compartment with a fresh bone or favourite food and the thunder jacket on and leave her for 30 minutes (the time when Betty usually starts to bark). Be sure to take her out of the trailer before she starts to bark, and if she starts to bark, wait until you hear a quiet period before you let her out.
4. Start making short journeys with Betty in the trailer (wearing her thunder jacket) that start and end at your property. Start with a 5-minute journey and gradually increase the time each day as she becomes more used to the routine of travelling without going to the track.
5. Once Betty can spend an hour in the trailer without barking, change the routine so that you start at home, stop at a racetrack or trial track and then return home. When you get to the racetrack, take her out of the trailer for a walk and to toilet. Spend 10-15 minutes at the track and encourage her to settle on her mat, before loading her again. If she starts to bark use the Anti Barking Reward Chart (on page 9) to manage her barking.
6. When Betty can successfully complete this journey without barking, you may wish to repeat the process with travelling companions.

The purpose of this activity program is to provide Betty with positive transport experience to reduce her anticipation about travelling in the trailer. The method used helps to break the link between travelling and racing, while also teaching Betty how to settle herself in exciting situations.



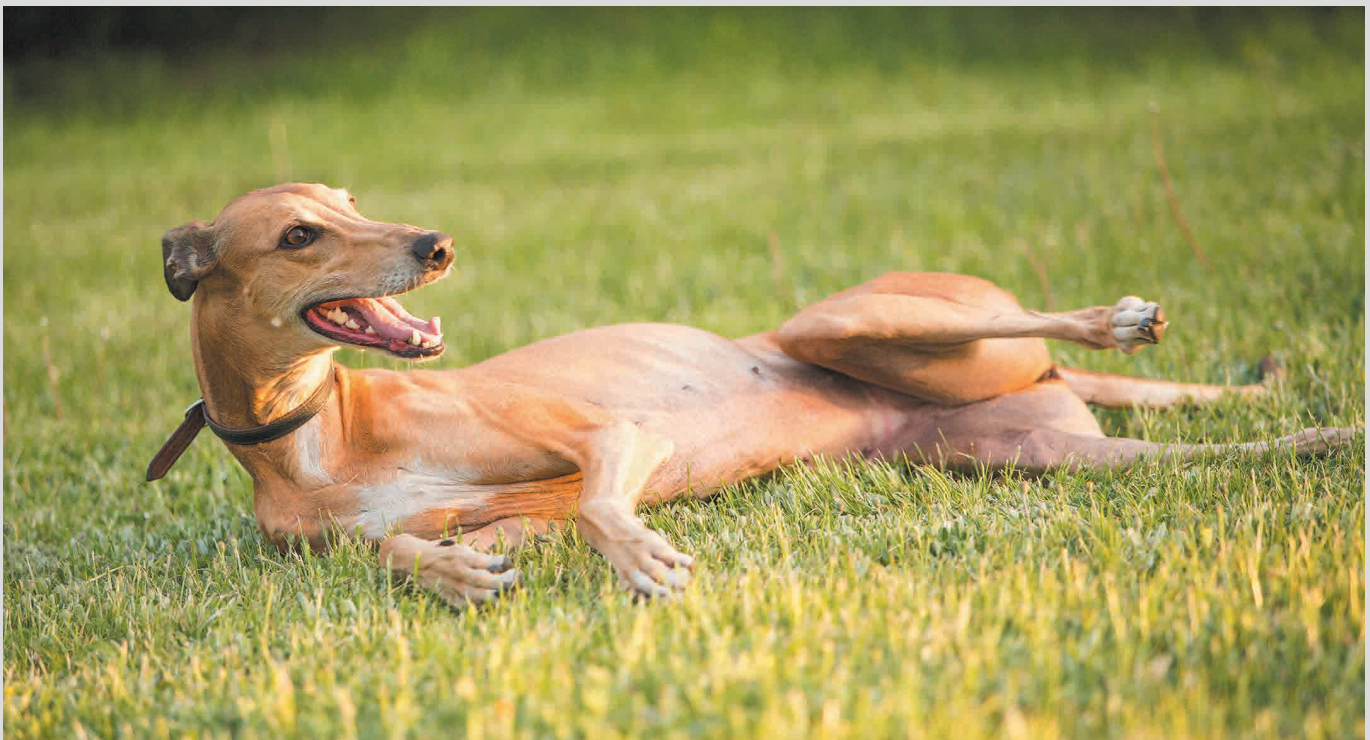
### *Race kennel retraining program*

1. Obtain or build a race kennel or a crate of similar shape, size and material as a race kennel.
2. Begin a program of reducing anxiety in the race kennel environment, like that used for the transport trailer.
3. After training/exercise each day, place Betty in the crate with a fresh bone or favourite food and the thunder jacket on and leave her for 30 minutes (the time when Betty usually starts to bark in the trailer). Do this every day, gradually increasing the amount of time she spends in the crate by 10 minutes a day until she can spend up to 3 hours without barking regularly.
4. Once Betty can spend 3 hours in the crate without barking, move the crate to a location near your exercise area where Betty will be able to hear, but not see, training sessions. Begin placing her in the crate for 15 minutes before exercise, wearing her thunder jacket, and with a bone or toy to keep her occupied. Gradually increase the time in 10 – 15 minute increments until she can wait in the crate for 60 minutes before her exercise session without barking and without food or a toy. This may take several weeks. If she starts to bark use the Anti Barking Reward Chart (on page 9) to manage her barking.
5. If Betty begins to bark when the other greyhounds exercise within her line of sight, cover Betty's cage with a light sheet and uncover it when she is quiet. If Betty is unable to consistently keep calm and quiet when she can see the other dogs exercising, move her far enough away that she can successfully complete the process and progress more slowly.
6. Consider contacting your local race club to ask whether they will allow you to use their race kennels for training Betty. You may wish to transport several of your dogs to the track or ask some friends to bring their dogs so you can simulate a race day.

The purpose of these exercises is to make the crate a positive experience and then help Betty learn to rest during her time in race kennel.

### *Results*

It took about 4 months, but after 4 months of daily activities, Betty no longer barks in the trailer or the race kennels. She now races far more consistently and has won several races over the past few months. Betty always wears her thunder jacket and every now and again I get the crate out and put Betty in with a bone to maintain what she has learnt.



## Preventing the development of excessive barking

The key message to minimising a barking response is to start early and take your time!



Think about barking from the greyhound's perspective, if they have some control of their environment (e.g. a place to rest, observe, move around, or get away from something), they will be less stressed and less likely to respond by barking.

For any greyhound, of any age, introduction into a new environment or routine can be stressful. This is particularly the case for puppies or young greyhounds coming to the kennel environment for the first time. Getting used to new routines, exposure to new greyhounds, and periods of isolation can be stressful and trigger a barking response.

Depending on the age of your greyhound and its stage of development, exposing them to different people, situations and environments will be an important part of their training program; reducing fear, anxiety and boredom.

Making kennel life a positive experience can be achieved through:

- a gradual introduction to the kennel environment;
- progressive interaction with compatible greyhounds;
- multiple enrichment items to avoid boredom;
- exposure to a range of different people in a calm and friendly way; and
- gradual, positive exposure to confined, small kennels or crates and periods of isolation.

Using toys or hiding food treats around their kennel or out in the yard are great ways to occupy a greyhound's time. The opportunity to spend time with other greyhounds, dogs and people is also important.



As a young dog progresses through its development into education, training and a racing career, the most effective way to avoid excessive barking from boredom and stress is to ensure plenty of exercise and enrichment, as well as opportunities for quality rest in a comfortable space.

This it is an essential part of good greyhound development and training program to ensure each dog can cope in the race day environment. Using up all their racing energy from stress responses such as barking is something you want to avoid.

Changes in routine and environment will always cause some degree of anxiety in a greyhound. However, making the kennel environment interesting, with small changes associated with positive experiences will help to minimise the triggers for barking.

Table 1. Environmental enrichment ideas provides some great tips for enriching your kennel environment (see page 14).



**Table 1. Environmental enrichment ideas**

<b>Change kennel routines or design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work each day to change something within the normal kennel routine. This will provide mental stimulation for all the greyhounds and will also prevent some of the learned triggers that are often associated with excessive barking.</li> <li>• For dogs that are reacting to sound triggers, playing suitable music (e.g. slow classical music, or a commercial CD like 'Through A Dog's Ear') during periods when triggers for barking are present can help to mask the sound triggers.</li> <li>• For greyhounds that are responding to visual triggers, such as other greyhounds walking past the front of their kennels, use of visual barriers can help to reduce barking. Moving the greyhound to a less busy area of the kennel block can also help.</li> </ul>
<b>Social and Physical Enrichment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide multiple enrichment items that are regularly rotated to reduce or avoid boredom. Food-based enrichments, long-lasting chews, and toys that encourage interaction usually work best for in-kennel enrichment.</li> <li>• Provide plenty of exercise daily.</li> <li>• Place the dogs in external yards with plenty of enrichment options such as ramps, toys, pools of water, etc.</li> <li>• Make sure your greyhound has plenty of water and shelter, and access to different areas, hard and soft resting surfaces, areas which block visual access to other greyhounds, and quiet.</li> <li>• Consider using a pressure jacket (thunder shirts or thunder jackets).</li> <li>• Regularly provide your greyhound with opportunities to socialise with friendly and appropriate dogs.</li> </ul>
<b>Husbandry and Routines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the amount of time spent brushing, bathing or handling greyhounds per week.</li> <li>• Regularly handle and expose greyhounds to people other than their usual handlers.</li> <li>• Implement a 'quiet kennels' training program, where all greyhounds are rewarded for quiet behaviour throughout daily activities. This type of training can also be used for specific dogs by hanging a container of treats on the front of their kennel and having all handlers in the kennel reward the greyhound every time they go past and the greyhound is quiet (see page 8).</li> <li>• Modify sounds and smells around the kennel environment, for example play a radio during the day to provide variety. Be careful to also provide designated quiet times when outside sounds are minimised; lunchtime is an excellent opportunity to provide 1-2 hours of quiet time during which all greyhounds are given chew-based enrichments and all activities within the kennel are stopped.</li> </ul>





