



Excessive Barking:

Let's face it, dogs bark. Barking in itself is not wrong; it is natural. However, excessive amounts of barking or barking at inappropriate times can be a real problem for some owners. Remember that barking problems are rarely solved in a day. You should understand that your dog was not born an "over-barker." Natural behavior in dogs indicates that they generally do not draw attention to themselves when alone or scared. Chances are they learned to bark incessantly as a response to the environment in which they live.

Why do some dogs bark more than others?

The Territorial dogs

These barkers are most often unaltered males and/or dogs that have been encouraged in some way to take an active role in protecting their environment. Whether it's on purpose or by accident we play a big role in creating this problem. These dogs are protecting their yard, house and general "space" from intruders such as the mailman, a squirrel, a passing dog or neighbor, or any new activity. Most people do not realize that any dog of any size will protect its territory. It is a natural behavior.

Neutering will always help any male "relax" their duties as protector of the universe. However the "job" of protector must be reassigned to someone else in order to stop over barking behavior. This can be done through establishing yourself as the leader. It is YOUR job to protect the house, not theirs!

The bored or under-exercised dog

Think about what your dog was bred to do. Every single breed was created for a job. If your dog is not doing what it was bred to do, or is not getting equivalent amounts of exercise than it is BORED! When dogs are under-exercised they have all this pent up energy and nothing to do with it. This is when we run into things like digging, chewing furniture, running in circles, barking, or any other destructive behavior. It is also important to keep in mind that letting them out into a fenced yard is NOT giving them exercise! After they have explored the entire yard, it becomes nothing but a big crate (boring!)

The fearful or neurotic dog

Often a dog like this is under-socialized, coddled too much by its owner, and spends too much time not being alone. Maybe he is rarely taken on outings to experience new things. Many miniature breeds can fall easily into this category as well as dogs that have been passed around from home to home several times. Shelter and rescue dogs may easily fall into neurotic barking because they have experienced so many changes in their short lives. Not to mention all the barking that happens in kennels!

Often we make the problem worse by catering to the dogs' shyness or fear. When a dog is afraid of something we as humans like to pet them and tell them that "it's ok". But remember dogs do not speak English and simply feel the reward of you touching it! So,

patting and stroking a fearful dog while the behavior is happening actually can make the problem worse. You're actually rewarding your dog for being fearful!

The attention seeker

Because we are human, we like to ignore the good behavior (quiet) and only pay attention to the bad behavior (barking). The dogs who crave attention and get bored easily are the ones who learn barking = attention. Attention can be anything: yelling "hey knock it off", eye contact, touch, even grabbing their collar! Remember that ANY attention good or bad is seen as fun for the attention seeking dogs. Most owners will complain that the dog ONLY barks when they are on the phone, or watching a movie. This is because you are ignoring your dog and he/she is not about to have that!

Changing the way you do things

How much time do you spend with your dog? If your dog is alone more than 8 hours, that is part of your problem. Where is the dog kept when alone? Often allowing a dog the run of the house can lead to bad behavior. While you're gone they run from window to window alerting the neighborhood that a squirrel has run by and someone better do something because they are all locked up in the house. A crate will alleviate pacing and worrying about what is going on outside or simply confining the animal to one room will calm them and remove the "job" of pacing and tracking the activities outside. Also, try giving them something to do while they are crated all day: a stuffed Kong toy or a frozen toy is great mental work and will keep them busy for hours!

What do you do when you are home? Of course every dog needs regular walks but keep in mind that walking may not be enough stimulation. Remember most dogs need a job. Frisbee, fetch, find the toy. ...Mental activities like problem solving can sometimes be more tiring than a walk! Stuffing a Kong toy or making them a frozen toy is a great mental work out.

What do you do when the behavior is happening?

Petting or praising your dog while barking MUST STOP! You will only make it worse. Your dog is barking to say "hey there is something here, are you going to get it or should I?" If you do not check it out, he assumes it is his job. This also goes along with your leadership roles. It is YOUR house, not his; therefore it is your job to check everything out. It is ok for him to let YOU know that there is someone there (1-2 barks) but anything past that is unnecessary! The other thing to keep in mind is that dogs feed off of energy. If you are frantic and over-excited then that's exactly what your dog will become! If you are yelling "hey, hey, hey, quiet, quiet, quiet!" what does that sound like to them? Yep, you guessed it - barking! You are simply joining their party and helping them out. So what do you do when the barking is actually happening? Well, there are a few different approaches, you just need to figure out which one works for you!

Teaching the word "Quiet": What we need to start doing is teaching him that quiet is SO much better than barking. The problem with us humans is that we ignore the good and ONLY pay attention to the bad! So let's try the exact opposite! Start rewarding your dog for simply being quiet and pair the reward with a "good quiet". This will teach your dog

exactly what the word “quiet” means. After they understand the word, we can start applying it!

Ignoring approach: When the dog is barking: STOP, stand there and ignore the behavior. If your dog looks to you for a response DO NOTHING. Wait for your dog to quiet down then PRAISE it and say “good quiet”. If it seems that your dog never quiets down then try this: While the behavior is going on (BARK, BARK, BARK) call your dog to you, “Tucker, Come.” Tell him to SIT then reward him for coming and sitting with a pat or a cookie...while he is enjoying your pat or the cookie chances are he is quiet. Then tell him (or her) “GOOD QUIET”. If you repeat this every time your dog hears something and starts barking it will eventually learn that it is better to come to you and sit and wait for a reward than to bark at whatever it is that he sees.

Distraction approach: When your dog is barking, simply distract him and then reward him when he STOPS with a treat and a “good quiet”. A few different ways to distract is: stomping (if on a hard floor), shaking a shake can from behind your back, or clapping. When you make these noises it should simply just distract him...when he stops treat him(right away!) for that, keep treating for as long as he remains quiet...we will prolong the duration of quiet as he gets better.

Leadership approach: This works best if your dog is a barker in the house (at doors or windows). The reason they are barking at people who pass is to say “hey, get away from my territory!” And the bad thing about barking at the mailman or passer-by is that it WORKS, they walk away! So this behavior has become self-rewarding. If you were leader of the pack it would be YOUR job to check everything out, not theirs! So we need to show them that. Along with all the other things you have learned to gain leadership (see leadership handout) you must also own your space. What I mean by this is showing them that YOU got it! When your dog is barking at the door, you should get in between the door and your dog...walk towards them into their space. If they back up and stop barking reward them! If they keep coming towards you and trying to go around you, either he’s not getting the message or you are not being bossy enough!

Desensitization approach: For most dogs the things that make them bark or get excited are the things that do not happen very often. So what we are going to do is set them up. What I mean by that is have a partner knocking at the door or ringing the doorbell with you and your leashed dog inside giving treats. This will teach him that the doorbell = food! The more you practice, the more the doorbell will become boring! The other thing you can do is actually have every visitor give treats as they enter. This way your dog will generalize that every visitor is fun. NOT scary!

ALL of these approaches work if you put in the time! You can always do ALL of them for even faster results. Remember to always be the leader of your pack!

Crate Barking:

Ignore Ignore, Ignore!!! Somewhere down the line your dog has learned that if he barks, it gets him attention (good or bad). Yelling at them does NOT work; you are still giving them attention. Also, usually when you put them in the crate it means you will be gone for a long time. So let's start teaching them that it doesn't always mean that!

Desensitizing the crate:

Start by feeding them dinner in the crate with the door open, then the next night shut the door and let them out when they are done. This will help them associate the crate with good things! Or try putting them in the crate for 5 minutes; make sure you are not in sight (the crate should be in a quiet place out of the main traffic). Let the dog out ONLY when quiet. You can also throw treats in the crate every time you walk by so that your dog will run in, grab the treats, and come back out.

Barking in the crate:

Hide behind the corner if he's barking, wait for him to be quiet, even if it's only for a second, then jump out from behind the wall and say good "quiet". If he starts barking, disappear behind the wall again, do this over and over while increasing the duration of quietness before you jump out. Or you can try the shake can. Every time your dog barks, shake a can filled with pennies or marbles making sure he does not see that this noise is coming from YOU (hide behind a corner, or put it behind your back) OR you can try actually throwing the shake can...this way he will think the world is crashing down on him when he barks! Hide behind the corner...when he barks throw the can somewhere AROUND the crate, not AT it!

Make sure you ONLY let the dog out when he is quiet and not whining, barking or scratching at the door. Use the door as a tool by shutting it in his face if he tries to rush out!

Setting them up:

On the weekend imitate your daily departure routine: Do the usual, put on make-up, search about for keys, gloves, etc., pack a gym bag or throw out the garbage. Make the dog think that this is just like any other daily departure. Leave for 1 – 2 minutes. If you normally lock the door with a key, make the right noises, but don't lock it. (You must be able to enter quickly if he stops barking.)

If the dog has not barked, return and PRAISE, PRAISE; PRAISE your dog for a "good quiet." If you hear barking, wait for it to stop. As soon as it stops count to 10 and go in. Reward your dog for "GOOD QUIET" Behavior! Then turn and leave again, repeating the same several times over.

The goal is to get your dog to realize what behavior you want. Praise, reward and affection are what the dog wants, so use those to modify the behavior. Ignore the bad stuff and focus on the good stuff.