

UNDERSTANDING THE BARKING DOG

Barking is a normal part of a dog's communication and behavior. Dogs use vocalization as a way to communicate with each other and with you. When a dog's barking becomes inappropriate or excessive, it can become a nuisance and be problematic for you.

WHY DOGS BARK

- **Territorial Barking** – Barking in response to people, dogs, or other animals within or approaching your dog's territories. Your dog's territories can include the house, the car, the yard, during walks or places where she spends a lot of time.
- **Alarm/Alert Barking** – Barking in response to noise and sight stimuli, regardless of context or location.
- **Attention-Seeking/Request Barking** – Barking to gain attention, rewards, toys, food or play.
- **Greeting Barking** – Barking in response to greeting people, other dogs or other animals.
- **Compulsive Barking** – Barking in a repetitive manner, usually without obvious stimuli.
- **Socially Facilitated Barking** – Barking in response to hearing other dogs bark or howl.
- **Frustration-Inducing Barking** – Barking in response to frustration or inability to access something the dogs wants.
- **“Spooky” Barking** – Barking in response to something your dog finds scary (i.e. motivated by fear).
- **Illness/Injury/Discomfort/Pain** – Barking in response to an illness, injury, being in pain or discomfort.
- **Separation Anxiety** – Barking in response to being left alone. Other signs of separation anxiety are pacing, destruction, elimination and not willing to eat.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Prior to attempting to address any barking problem, it is recommend that you have a full health examination done by your veterinarian. Undiagnosed medical issues or injuries can contribute excessive barking in dogs. If your dog is healthy, the first step in treating excessive barking is to identify its cause and your dog's motivation for the barking. Ask yourself these questions:

- When and where does the barking occur?
- Who or what is the target of the barking?
- What things (objects, sounds, animals, people) trigger the barking?
- Is my dog barking because she is “scared” or because she is “happy”?

MANAGEMENT, TRAINING & OTHER OPTIONS

- **Reducing Visual Stimuli** – Block your dog's ability to see the things that can trigger her barking. Some options include opaque film or black out curtains on windows, opaque plastic slats on chain link fences, moving furniture so she can't see out of windows, placing a solid baby gate in front of a glass door, etc. If your dog barks while in the car, have her ride in a crate to obscure her view. Reducing visual stimuli will not modify her excessive barking behavior, but can create an environment that will help with training and behavior modification; as well as reducing her access to the triggers that can cause her to bark.



- **Consult a Veterinarian** – If your dog is excessively barking due to fear, general anxiety or separation anxiety you may want to consult with a veterinarian for medication. While medication will not work on its own, it can be very effective with a training and/or behavior modification protocol.
- **Quiet Cue** – If you want your dog to bark to notify you when she hears or sees something, but need her to stop, you can use this cue. This cue teaches your dog it's ok to bark two or three times, and then stop when she hears you say, "Quiet."
 - 1) After your dog has barked two or three times, say, "Quiet"
 - 2) Wait for the moment she stops barking and immediately give her several bite-sized high value treats one after another
 - 3) Gradually increase the time between when you say, "Quiet" and giving her the treats (i.e. 2 seconds, then 5 seconds, then 10 seconds, and so on)
- **Appropriate Greetings** – If your dog excessively barks in response to being "happy" about meeting people, you can teach her how to appropriately greet people by sitting or lying down. When working this exercise, ensure you and the dog are in a fully enclosed area where the dog cannot escape. *This technique will be easier to teach if your dog has already been taught to "Sit" and "Down" on cue.*

Step 1

GOAL – Dog automatically "Sits" when a person stands in place in front of her

- 1) Walk toward your dog
- 2) Stop moving and stand in place when you get approximately one foot from your dog
- 3) Cue, "Sit"
 - If your dog does not know the "Sit" cue or does not sit, use a lure to get your dog to sit
- 4) The moment your dog sits say, "Yes" and give a treat
- 5) Repeat Steps 1 through 4 until your dog is automatically sitting when you stop walking and stand in place in front of her

Step 2

GOAL – Dog automatically "Downs" when a person crouches down in front of her

- 1) Walk toward your dog
 - 2) Stop moving and stand in place when you get approximately one foot from your dog
 - Your dog should automatically "Sit" by now. If not, go back to Step 1 and repeat Steps 1 through 4.
 - 3) Crouch down to your dog's level and cue, "Down"
 - If your dog does not know the "Down" cue or does not lay down, use a lure to get your dog to lay down
 - 4) The moment your dog lays down say, "Yes" and give a treat
 - 5) Repeat Steps 1 through 4 until your dog is automatically laying down when you crouch down to her level
- **With Me** – If your dog excessively barks because she is afraid of something (i.e. other dogs, people, large trucks, etc.), you can use this cue to teach her to focus on you instead. With this exercise you will be very gradually counter conditioning your dog's reaction to the trigger (i.e. something she finds scary). It is imperative to progress slowly and prevent reactions from occurring as much as possible. You need to be very aware of the surroundings and keep your dog calm. Once your dog is reliably orienting toward you when the cue is given, you can start using the cue in the presence of a trigger. ***The cue, "With Me," needs to be taught in an area free of triggers first.***
 - 1) Say, "With Me" and give a piece of high value food to your dog

- If your dog is not orienting toward you, use the piece of food as lure to get your dog to focus on you **before** you feed
 - Always feed your dog in position ... meaning, feed your dog when her attention is focused on you
- 2) Start at a distance where your dog can see the trigger, but your dog remains calm and does not react
 - If your dog reacts to a trigger you are too close – move away to a distance where your dog is calm again
 - 3) Say, “With Me” as soon as your dog looks at the trigger and feed your dog when your dog orients her attention toward you
 - If your dog does not orient her attention toward you but does **not** react, use happy talk to get your dog to orient toward you and then feed

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not encourage your dog to bark at sights and sounds by saying things like, “Who’s there?” when someone knocks or getting up to look out windows or doors when you see or hear something.
- Do not encourage your dog to bark at certain sights or sounds by giving her attention/treats (like someone knocking at the door), but not at other sights and sounds (like people walking down the street). This is confusing to your dog, and will prolong any training and/or behavior modification you do.
- Do not use a muzzle intended to keep a dog’s mouth closed to keep your dog quiet. Dogs cannot eat, drink or pant to cool down with this type of muzzle on.
- A note about commercially available anti-bark collars: These collars are designed to deliver an unpleasant stimulus in the form of vibration, shock, ultrasonic noise or a spray of citronella mist when your dog barks. While these collars may work in the short-term, long-term use of these items has proven to be ineffective. Dogs often become “collar-wise,” meaning they learn not to bark when the collar is on but revert to barking when they are not wearing them. Dogs are often so motivated by the visual or auditory stimulus that they will still bark through the punishment that the collar delivers, which can cause physical harm to them. If your dog is barking from fear or anxiety, the punishment that the bark collar delivers can make their fear or anxiety worse.

