



Behavior and Training Department Behavior Resources

Bark Control

Nothing is as annoying to neighbors (and others) as a barking dog, especially one who barks consistently and persistently.

As the dog's owners, we want our dogs to bark when there is something important to bark about -- not at every little movement in the yard next door....or at a flock of birds high overhead. Dogs do not bark out of spite, or to punish you.

Therein lies the problem. Dogs do bark for a reason, but we often do not recognize it, and thus cannot stop it. In order to control your dog's barking, you must have a good idea of what is causing the problem. There are specific behavior modification techniques for each behavior.

1. Loneliness or Anxiety: The dog begins to bark or howl as soon as you leave the house, and continues off and on, possibly throughout the day or night.

Dogs are social creatures, and need to feel part of a pack to function properly. Dogs left out in the yard alone all day are likely to be lonely, anxious, destructive, and noisy. Bring your dog into the house when you are home, at least for a good portion of the time. However, he or she should also be put outside from time to time while you are home, so he doesn't feel isolated as soon as he is left out.

- If he is very demanding of your attention when he is inside, make a habit of not petting him every time he seeks attention. Instead, ignore him - he will eventually relax. This takes patience. Desensitize him to your absence. Put him outside, leave the house for just a minute or so, then return and go about your business -- all without saying anything to the dog. Do it enough that the dog becomes acclimated to it, then increase the time in increments of ten to fifteen minutes. It is very important that you do not pet or croon to the dog, since that is quite likely to actually increase the anxiety.
- If need be, counter-condition the dog by giving him a long lasting treat/toy (a Kong stuffed with peanut butter or cream cheese is a good one) for the time you are gone. Give it about 5 minutes before you leave, pick it up upon your return. Only let the dog have this particular toy when you are gone.
- Make sure the dog is getting enough exercise. Playing in the yard is probably not good enough, since dogs need outside stimulation. Two substantial walks per day are adequate.

2. Alerting the Pack: The dog sees your family as his pack. Therefore he will begin barking as soon as something seems moderately alarming. The barking will continue for a while, then stop, then begin again when the dog is aroused by something else.

The dog is trying to tell you that something needs your attention, whether its an intruder or an intrusive blackbird. You need to tell her that you have EVERYTHING under control.

The following technique is worth a try, because it's easy, and it sometimes works.

- When your dog barks and you are home, first call her to you, and reward her when she comes. Then investigate the noise with her; then tell her "quiet". When she complies, praise her - then leave her.
- When she alerts again, do the same thing, but say "quiet" more quickly. Again, praise her when she is silent.
- When she barks again, just tell her "quiet." Rest assured that if something really important intrudes, nothing will quiet her!



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- If your dog is outside and begins to bark, open the door, and walk quickly and firmly towards your dog. You can say, "Quiet" or "Enough" as you're walking. Move into her physically, taking control of the area. When she stops barking, tell her she is good, and return to the house. Again, be prepared for many repetitions of this, as it takes a long time to teach. This is an inappropriate technique if your dog has ever shown any aggression toward you – growled, snarled or snapped.

3a. Attention Seeking or Demanding: The dog is probably bored, and wants your attention. Experience has shown him that if he barks - he gets your attention, even if it's negative (any attention is better than none at all). So your goal must be twofold: stop the barking without giving the attention.

3b. Amusement: The dog is bored, and barking stimulates him.

The behavior modification techniques are similar for both these motivations. Try them in order, until one works.

- If he's outside and barks, open the door and without saying anything at all, spray water on him. You may need to set up a hose next to the door, with the water already on. When he stops barking, close the door. Don't look directly at him during this whole procedure.
- If he's outside and barks for attention, open the door and take him immediately into a small room (or crate if he tends to be destructive). Leave him there for 15 minutes or so, then let him outside again.
- Let him out and praise him when he hasn't barked for a few minutes (don't push this and make him wait for praise until he's been quiet for hours! - he needs to make the association between quiet and approval).
- If he's inside and barks for attention, take him by the collar or leash to a small room or crate, and leave him inside for a few minutes. Let him out and praise him after he has STOPPED barking.

In all these cases, you are withholding the reward - your attention – until the appropriate behavior has occurred.

4. Aggression: The dog is warning someone or something to stay away or he will have to attack. The dog will bark as long as the stimulating object is close, in some cases hurling himself against the fence as well.

- Remove the dog from the stimulation. If he is outside, bring him in if that's possible. If he's inside, make sure he can't see out a window.
- Take him to obedience class or teach him yourself, and then do your obedience practicing around the perimeter of your yard and/or house.

If the aggressive barking continues, please consider consulting an experienced dog trainer or behaviorist.

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