



# Barking

Dogs bark for a variety of reasons:

- 1) Watchdog Barking serves the dual purpose of alerting pack members that there is an intruder and warning the intruder that they have been noticed.
- 2) Request Barking is the dog's way of communicating to the owner that he would like something NOW. Typical requests are "open the door NOW," "pay attention to me NOW," "let me out of here NOW," "I wanna see that dog NOW" etc.
- 3) Spooky Barking occurs when the dog is uncomfortable about something in the environment and barks to say "I'm dangerous! Don't come any closer!"
- 4) Boredom Barking can result when the dog's daily needs for exercise and social stimulation are not met. The dog has gone essentially mad from boredom.

## Controlling Excessive Barking

### Watchdog Barking

The standby technique is to teach the dog a competing response – such as fetching a certain toy or doing a down-stay on a mat (which cuts barking in many dogs) for tasty food rewards. Practice out of doorbell or "intruder" contexts first and then incorporate the game or command into real-life situations. The dog will need some coaching and prompting the first few times in the real-life situation so prepare to budget some time for that.

Even better, set it up with a cohort to play "visitor," so you can focus on the dog rather than being forced to attend to the person at the door. When the dog is more advanced, you can also incorporate penalties. If he gets it right, he is rewarded as usual. If he barks, he goes into the penalty box – a back room or crate that is far from the action.

Another technique – high effort but great result - is to teach the dog the meaning of the words "bark" and "quiet" (or any word you want to use as an "off" switch). First, you have to teach the dog to bark and quiet on command as a trick. To elicit the barking so that you can practice, you must use something you know makes the dog bark, like the doorbell or a weird noise outside (you may need a helper). Arrange the following sequence:

- 1) your command "bark!"
- 2) the doorbell or other prompt

- 3) barking from the dog
- 4) praise from you: "good bark!"
- 5) your command "quiet"
- 6) showing him the treat
- 7) his (eventual) distraction from barking by the treat
- 8) 3-5 seconds of quiet during which you praise "gooo-ood quiet"
- 9) giving him the treat after 3-5 seconds of perfect quiet
- 10) repeat, gradually lengthening the duration of the "quiet" up to a minute

Do it over and over until the dog knows the game. He knows the game when he barks on the command and doesn't need the doorbell anymore, and he quiets on the first quiet command without having to be shown the treat (you still give him one from your pocket, you just don't show it anymore). If ever he interrupts a quiet with even one bark, say "oh! too bad" and start counting the quiet time from the beginning again. Barking during the quiet time will cost him his treat.

You must be able to yo-yo the dog back and forth reliably between bark and quiet before you try out your "quiet" command in real situations. The most common mistake is trying to use the quiet command before it's well-enough conditioned in training sessions. Think of quiet on command as a muscle you're making stronger.

When you can turn barking on and off anytime, anyplace as a trick, you may now start commanding quiet after a few barks when your dog barks on his own in real-life situations. The first few times the dog will respond poorly to the command. Don't give up. Have really good treats handy. Go back to showing him the treat up front the first few times. Practice makes perfect.

If your dog "goes off" for the smallest sounds and changes in the environment, it would help the cause to get him better habituated. Take him out more, invite people and dogs over to socialize, expose him to a wider range of sights and sounds.

### **Request Barking**

When they want something, dogs will experiment with various behaviors to see if any of them work. They quickly figure out that barking works with their owners. If you don't like barking, stop rewarding it with attention, door-opening services, releasing from crates etc. Period. No buts.

Rather than the dog telling you when to take him out, take him out at regular intervals, making sure none of them are preceded by barking. Don't let a barking dog out of a crate until he's quiet. Ignore dogs who bark at you. Keep in mind that if you have been

rewarding it for a while, the barking will get worse before it goes into extinction. You're changing the rules and the dog will be frustrated at first. Whatever you do, don't crack and reward the WORSE version of the barking!

Above all, start noticing the dog when he's quiet. Teach him that there are payoffs for lying quietly, chewing on a chew-toy and refraining from barking.

### **Barking When Alone**

This is a common form of request barking: the dog is requesting that you come back. There is also often some anxiety involved. When you get a new dog or puppy, set a good precedent right away. Don't smother him with your constant presence and attention. Come and go a lot and never go to him when he's vocalizing. Wait until he's quiet for at least 30 seconds so you don't risk rewarding the noise making. If your dog already has a habit, you must start a multi-pronged assault:

1) When you're at home, don't let him shadow you around: lock him in various rooms away from you to practice "semi-absences." Reprimand or ignore any barking (ignoring is actually a more powerful tool). If you choose to reprimand it, burst through the door, scold the dog and then immediately disappear again, closing the door behind you. Remember that he's barking to get you back: with some dogs, a reprimand is better than nothing so you may be rewarding him...

2) Practice loads of brief absences every day. Go out and come back in after 2 or 3 seconds over and over to get the dog desensitized to your departures. Do it in a matter of fact way, more or less ignoring the dog whatever he does. Then do outings of 10 seconds, 30, a minute, 10 minutes etc. Mix it up. Dogs who are anxious need to learn that your departure doesn't usually mean a traumatically long period of isolation. Keep all your departures and arrival greetings low key. Never enter when the dog is barking. Wait for a lull of at least 30 seconds.

3) Dogs are a highly social species. They don't cope well with prolonged isolation. Consider a second dog, daycare or dog-walker at lunchtime if you work all day.

4) Increase physical and mental stimulation. In a natural environment, a lot of your dog's energy would be spent acquiring his food. He would have to find prey, run it down, hang onto and kill it and then rip it apart to eat it. He'd have to attempt several finds and run-downs before he successfully made a kill. That's work!

Tire him out more before long absences. Walks don't cut it as exercise for dogs. Most dogs like getting out and checking out the environment but it's not exercise. Exercise

means exertion. Start working your dog out with high-intensity games like ball-fetch, Frisbee, tug-of-war, hide & seek, free-play with other dogs etc.

Make him work to acquire his food. Hide it around the house, scatter it in the grass in the backyard, make him extract it from the hollow inside of a bone or Kong toy (which you also hide), make him earn it piece by piece for obedience exercises or tricks, make him solve problems. Your imagination is the limit. Make your absences predict that his meal is hidden around the house so that he has to get busy when you leave if he wants to eat. Dogs are programmed to work for their food. It's no wonder there are so many problems related to understimulation.

5) Get him more focused on toys. When you play with him, incorporate toys. Hold chewies for him. Teach him to find a toy that you've hidden in the room and then celebrate his find with tug of war or fetch. Teach him his toys by name. Ask him to bring you one when you come home. Don't greet him until he's brought it. Then have a vigorous game of fetch. Leave him stuffed chew toys during absences: fill hollow bones or Kongs with cheese, peanut butter, cookies or combos.

If your dog is anxious to the point of panic attacks, he has separation anxiety and need formal desensitization and/or medication. Contact a competent trainer.

### **Spooky Barking**

In this case, it is important to get at the underlying undersocialization. Socialize puppies extensively to as wide a variety of people and dogs as possible. You cannot overdo it. Expose them to plenty of places, experiences, sights & sounds and make it all fun with praise, games & treats. Find and attend a good puppy class.

If you missed the boat socializing your puppy, you'll have to do remedial work with your adolescent or adult. Whatever it is that your dog is spooky about must now become associated with lunch. This is how undersocialized dogs work for their food. If he doesn't like strangers, meals need to be fed bit by bit around strangers until he improves. It takes a while to resocialize adults so stick with it.

### **Boredom Barking**

If you don't have time for a dog, don't get a dog. Dogs are not space-intensive, they are time-intensive. If you have an outside dog, train him to be an inside dog. There is no quick fix here: you must meet your dog's basic needs for stimulation, exercise and companionship.