

Pawsitive Results Critter Academy

Where people learn to lead....and pets love to follow!

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The Barking Blues

Understanding Barking

Barking is a means for dogs to communicate all kinds of information to us and to each other. If your dog barks when he is home alone, he may be begging you to come home or may be trying to protect himself and his territory by keeping intruders at bay. Some dogs also bark when playing or to entertain themselves when they're bored. If your dog has energy to burn, he may be vocalizing his need for exercise! If your dog barks at you or is more vocal when you are home, he may be doing it for attention. For some dogs, even negative attention is better than being ignored!

The Path to Peace

When dealing with excessive barking, it is important to keep in mind that barking can be an important means of communication for your dog. Instead of focusing on making the barking stop, focus your efforts on recognizing and eliminating the reasons for the barking.

- 1) **Engage Your Dog in More Productive Hobbies.** Keeping your dog busy with other activities and providing enough exercise to tire him out can help decrease barking of all kinds.
 - ◆ Most dogs can easily run 1-3 miles per day. If you aren't able to provide this level of exercise, consider hiring a dog walker or taking your dog to a reputable doggie daycare.
 - ◆ Feed your dog his meals out of treat-dispensing toys. This is a great way to focus his energy while providing mental stimulation and physical exercise.
 - ◆ Take your dog to training classes. Positive reward-based training is a great way to build communication with your dog. As your lines of communication grow, your dog will have less of a need to bark and it will be easier for you to redirect any barking that does occur. Spend quality time practicing obedience exercises with your dog every day!

- 2) **Remove the Temptations.** Making changes to the situations that cause barking can go a long way towards making everyone a lot happier.
- ◆ Keep your dog indoors if she barks when left alone outside. Leaving the TV on can help mask outside noises. If your dog is destructive indoors, crate train him so that he can stay inside safely.
 - ◆ If your dog barks at people or dogs walking by, shut the blinds or block the lower portion of the windows so he can't see out.
 - ◆ If there are things that your dog is barking at out of nervousness, acclimating him to these things can help solve the problem. The goal is to associate the presence of these things with fun things such as treats and play. If your dog has serious or long-standing fears, you may need professional assistance to work through these issues.
- 3) **Accentuate the Positive.** Your dog should be getting attention for doing the right things, not for doing things you don't like!
- ◆ Reward your dog when he is being well-behaved. Resist the temptation to "let sleeping dogs lie". If being quiet gets the dog ignored, then there's no reason for him to keep doing it!
 - ◆ Do not give your dog attention for barking. Even negative attention can encourage a dog to continue barking. Turn or move away from your dog, walk out of the room, or take your dog to a "time out" area if he barks for attention.
 - ◆ If you want to discourage barking in some situations, then make sure you aren't encouraging it at other times. It will be harder for your dog to bark less when the doorbell rings if you reward him with attention for barking excitedly when you come home.
 - ◆ Teach your dog that good manners are a great way to get what he wants. Before giving your dog attention, treats, petting, walks, or playtime, ask him to perform a simple obedience behavior such as a sit or a down.
- 4) **Put "Quiet" on Cue.** Since some barking is acceptable, you need to let your dog know when you've had enough.
- ◆ Set up a situation that will make your dog bark. For example, have someone ring the doorbell or knock on the door. Have extra-special treats ready.
 - ◆ Let your dog bark a couple of times. Then calmly say his name and tell him "quiet". If he stops barking, reward him with the treat. If he continues barking, put the treat on his nose and draw him away from the door before rewarding him. Continue practicing this until your dog looks to you for a reward when he hears "quiet".
 - ◆ Continue to reward your dog for quieting on cue, and begin to time him out if he continues to bark. To time him out, say "too bad" and isolate him away from the source of the barking until he has been quiet for at least one minute.