

## **Barking**

Dogs bark. Sometimes we consider barking a benefit, expecting the dog will alert to danger, and save us from intruders. Too often the barking becomes excessive, costing dogs their homes and even their lives. Solutions to barking problems come from how you manage and train your dog.

Dogs bark for more than one reason, and finding the cause can help reduce the noise. The earlier you change the barking, the better the chance to prevent it from becoming a habit that will be more difficult to change.

### **When You're Not Home: Disturbing the Peace**

Barking dogs are one of the leading causes of strained neighborhood relationships. Where neighbors share walls in apartment and condominium living, people frequently face either quieting their dogs, getting rid of them, or moving.

Quieting a dog adequately to prevent disturbing neighbors through shared walls will be impossible with some dogs. Dogs inherit much of their tendency to bark. Putting a noisy dog into a situation that demands silence is sure to frustrate the dog's family, the neighbors, and the landlord or condominium board of directors.

If the dog is already a family member and barking noise has become a serious issue with neighbors, an excellent solution is to move to a home where the dog's normal noise won't disturb others. Obviously not everyone can manage this, but it's something to consider, because freestanding houses with fenced yards certainly provide more dog-management options.

When a dog's barking from a fenced back yard disturbs the peace of a neighborhood during sleeping hours, moving the dog indoors at night resolves the issue. Most dogs soon learn to sleep quietly indoors with humans. Added bonuses to keeping a dog indoors at night include having the dog available to alert and protect the family. Indoor dogs save lives.

Daytime barking also disturbs neighbors, especially those who work or sleep at home during those hours. The resident of a freestanding house has the option of keeping the dog as an indoor dog, thereby eliminating the noise complaints. At first the dog may need the help of some confinement area indoors, to prevent housetraining or chewing damage during times no one can supervise. Eventually most dogs will develop the ability to enjoy some degree of freedom in the house even while home alone.

Many a burglary has been prevented because the dog stayed in the house rather than the yard while the people were away at work. Indoor dogs also escape injury and death from a number of outdoor hazards, including theft, escapes that end in being hit by cars, teasing from children and resulting bites to children, damages when dogs and meter readers clash, and poisoning.

### **Barking Solutions**

Yelling at a dog to "Shut Up" is an exercise in futility. You might intimidate the dog into a moment or two of quiet, but you will likely increase the long-term barking. You have, after all, just joined the dog in making noise! Whispering "Hush" works better to cue a dog to be quiet. Then you're demonstrating quietness!

Debarking surgery is something to discuss with your veterinarian. Different people have different attitudes about this procedure, and it can cause complications.

Collars that correct a dog for barking also raise controversy. Those that emit a spray of citronella can work for some dogs. Those that deliver an electric shock to the dog can produce undesirable side effects, such as causing the dog to become aggressive (or more aggressive than before) toward the type of person or other animal the dog is looking at or smelling when the shock occurs.

Trainers often recommend that you teach your dog to "speak," in order to be better able to get the dog to "not speak" the rest of the time. This may work for some dogs, but you're more likely to get the best results by never encouraging barking at all. Don't worry—your dog will still bark when there's real cause for it.

The fear that a dog will not develop "protectiveness" leads many people into trouble. The defense drives in dogs emerge past puppyhood. Puppies need to be friendly. A puppy's job is to get used to the world and to learn what's normal and safe. Protecting the pack comes later. A puppy encouraged to bark at strangers, at the sound of a knock on the door or doorbell, or at people on the other side of the fence can mature into a paranoid dog.

This is not what a knowledgeable person wants in a protection dog. An effective protection dog is mentally stable, safe to have around strangers and children, and well trained. A paranoid dog is acting out of fear and SELF-protection, and often exposes you to serious liability from the risk this presents to other people—including your own family.

Barking can give dogs an "adrenaline rush" that makes them even more likely to keep barking and to start barking again in the same situation in the future. This adrenaline state also causes some dogs to progress from barking in a situation to eventually becoming aggressive in that situation. This is a very good reason to interrupt inappropriate barking. But it's also why you don't want to just shut the dog up without dealing with the reasons behind the barking. To do that could create a dog who bites without warning.

A dog repeatedly barking at people or other animals on the other side of a fence is a crisis in the making. Children on the other side of the fence tend to interpret this behavior as that of a mean dog and tease the dog. Now you have a dog who may develop a problem with children-not only the children who did the teasing, but also other children similar to those children, or ALL children.

What often happens when a dog is behind a fence barking at animals and people on the other side is called barrier frustration. The adrenaline builds, the attitude builds, and one day when that dog gets a chance at a person or animal like those barked at in this situation, there may be a serious bite. Dogs act on instinct, and allowing this instinct to develop to this degree is dangerous.

The same can happen to dogs confined indoors where they see activity outside that overexcites them and causes them to bark. For example, results are predictable when the dog has barked at a mail carrier daily over an extended period of time, and then one day manages to escape and bite the carrier.

It's wise to remove your dog from a situation like this. One way is not to leave the dog outdoors alone. When the problem occurs indoors, another way is to block the dog's access to that view.

Some dogs just bark from excitement. They pursue barking as a hobby. These canine cheerleaders might never progress to aggression, but no one can be sure they won't. Even when they're barking for joy, the noise is bothersome, and their barking will trigger other dogs to bark, too.

### **The Foundation: Training to Come When Called**

When you are with the dog, the most effective way to handle problem barking is by using the come-when-called behavior. This training saves dogs' lives, making it well worth your time to teach it.

Start when the dog will definitely come to you. Certainly mealtimes are great times to practice! Carry tiny treats when you're out with your dog, and in the house have treats handy. Develop games that your dog enjoys. Cultivate your dog's love of your touch and the sound of your voice giving excited praise. All of this means spending pleasurable time with your dog and developing your relationship. Taking the dog through a positive training class will help enormously. Always make sure positive things happen when your dog comes to your call, and never negative things. If you need to put the dog into the crate or do anything the dog will not like, go get the dog rather than calling.

### **Training to Control and Reduce Barking**

Now you have a dog who comes when called (or is wearing a leash or long line without tension on it), and the dog starts to bark at something. First identify the reason for barking. This is how you preserve the dog's ability as a watchdog - you always check on the reason for the barking.

Now, call your dog. When the dog arrives, praise the dog. This will develop your dog's responsiveness to your praise, because you're going to follow the praise with another reward. This association will cause your dog to start thinking of praise as being part of other good things.

As you praise, pet your dog. This helps to reduce the dog's adrenaline rush, as well as switching the dog out of the drive that causes the barking and into a drive oriented toward you. Quickly now, give your dog another reward. Small treats carried out of view are a good way to start. Praise/pet/whip out a treat and give it. Align the treat so that the dog looks at your face when you give the treat.

The reason we're not dangling the treat in the air in the dog's sight is that we do not want the treat to be a bribe (at some point, adrenaline would feel better than food, if the dog is comparing the two!), nor do we want it to become part of the "Come" behavior. We want the dog to come whether a treat is in view or not. So keep the food out of sight until the dog arrives. You'll also be able to use words like "cookie!" "Are you hungry?" "Want to go for a walk?" as bridges to the reward, once your dog learns the meaning of these promises. Always keep your promises to your dog, or they will lose their power.

After the dog has come and you've done one praise/pet/whip out a treat and give it (or other reward, as you and your dog progress), step away from the dog again and repeat the sequence. Do this three to five times, to sustain the dog's attention on you. Now your dog's attention has been completely removed from the reason for barking. Release your dog (keep the leash or long line on, if you're using one to insure the dog will come).

If the dog goes back to barking, call the dog again! Repeat the entire process, including the three to five repetitions of "praise/pet/whip out a treat and give it" after the dog arrives to you.

After you've done the exercise a second time (remembering NOT to get impatient or angry with the dog!), release the dog again. If the dog goes back to barking, guess what? That's right! Call the dog and do the entire exercise, including the 3-5 repetitions, for a third time! You might even have to do the entire exercise seven times at first! But soon you'll notice, when the dog barks, a glance over the shoulder at you, and a fast response to your call. And you'll find yourself only having to call the dog once or twice.

You'll also see a dramatic decrease in such symptoms of high adrenaline as raised hackles. You are not only gaining control of the barking, but you are reducing the chance of your dog escalating the behavior into a bite. In the process, you aren't doing anything to

hurt your dog or make the situation worse before it gets better. Your dog's training and your relationship with your dog are getting better and better.

If your dog barks at people or other dogs from the house, or on outings on leash with you, the same technique will work. Step away from the dog and call the dog's name to move with you. Remember to align the treats so that the dog makes eye contact with you when getting each one. When you have control of a dog's eyes, you have control of that dog's behavior! Expert trainer Linda Newsome developed this method of teaching focused attention.

A head halter helps interrupt the habit of barking on leash until your ability and the dog's training with the attention exercise become reliable. Then, for most dogs, you'll be able to stop using the head halter. If there is a risk of aggression, though, keep using the head halter for the protection of others. Get the help of a behavior specialist or trainer skilled with head halter use, to fit your dog with it correctly, and to show you how to use it safely and effectively.

### **The Doorbell**

You can also use come-when-called and the attention exercise to handle your dog's barking when the doorbell rings or someone knocks on the door. This training requires focusing on your dog at the same time you answer the door, so set up practice times with people who will patiently wait for you to call your dog and give treats.

An alternative way to solve barking at the doorbell is to teach your dog to take up a particular station away from the door while you answer it. Give treats to the dog on the spot where you want the dog to wait, and the lessons will progress quickly.

Dogs bark at doorbells and we rush around when someone comes to the door. You can help change your dog's reaction to the doorbell by having it ring a lot and ignoring it! Unless you can wire your doorbell so that you can ring it by remote control (that would make a great tool for all of us with dogs), you'll need a helper to ring the bell while you pretend it's of no importance at all.

It's wise to teach your young pup to sit calmly for a treat from any delivery person who comes to your door. This is easiest when the pup is young and cute, not yet defensive about territory and not yet scary-looking to delivery people!

### **Multiple Dogs**

If you have multiple dogs, train them one at a time before expecting them as a group to come when called, do the attention exercise, or be quiet when the doorbell rings. Like humans, dogs in a group develop a mob mentality, which is pack instinct in dogs.

To control the pack, you first need to put in the training time with each dog as an individual. One barking dog often causes every other dog in the house (and nearby) to bark more, too, so the more dogs you have, the more important this training becomes.

### **Boredom**

Some dogs can get plenty of physical exercise scampering around your house, while others need more room to run. All dogs need interaction with their humans, as well as mental exercise. An increase in exercise helps to solve some dogs' barking problems.

Another thing that can help is providing the dog with more interesting toys, such as toys with part of the dog's daily food ration inside. Letting the dog work to get the food makes the dog's life more interesting. Think about ways you can increase your dog's involvement in your life.

Barking is not a simple problem. By choosing a dog that fits into your living situation, managing the dog properly, and doing some enjoyable training, you can have a great dog and be a great neighbor, too.