

# BARKING

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Barking is a major aspect of a dog's communication system. They bark to alert their pack of possible danger and to warn off perceived interlopers or predators. This can be the dastardly trash truck in the alley, the meter reader, or other dogs and people walking down the street. The dogs also bark during play, to elicit play, in response to another dog's barking, to communicate a need (time to feed me or potty), to get your attention (my ball is under the couch or can we go for a walk), or to just express their feelings (you're home!). The dogs bark from instinctual catalysts such as "critters" like squirrels in their yard. And finally, the dogs can bark from sheer boredom.

NOTE: If your dog is barking out of boredom, this is your fault, not theirs. This indicates they need more appropriate outlets for their mental and physical energies. You may need to spend more time taking them for walks or playing ball. Or, you may need to provide some other form of mental and physical release such as an interactive toy or chew item. There are commercial toys available that gradually dispense treats as the dog plays with them. Also, the "real or sterile" bones purchased from pet stores are hollow and you can smash peanut butter or cheese in each end. The dogs will spend hours working to get their goodies.

When a dog is barking, most people yell at the dog to stop barking which is the worst thing you can do. This will only exacerbate the situation. Consider the dogs' hearing is their second most acute sense, only exceeded by their sense of smell. When we "yell", our voice/commands become distorted due to the dogs' acutely sensitive hearing. This is similar to turning up the volume on the television until the words are distorted and unrecognizable to you. Moreover, when this occurs, these loud and distorted sounds almost hurt our ears and we frantically rush to get the volume down to an acceptable level.

We think we have to yell to be heard over the dogs' barking, but we are actually producing NOISE that the dogs do not "hear" as understandable words/commands. We sound like another barking dog. Consider that one barking dog causes another dog to bark. When we yell, we create a barking frenzy between us and our dogs, which increases and incites the very barking behavior you want to stop.

If you physically react in an over excited, over stimulated manner this will also infuse your dog's already excited and stimulated emotional state. Our overt verbal and physical reactions can actually validate and reinforce the dog's behavior. Think about when your dog is barking in response to the doorbell. You frantically try to quiet them by yelling at them and even trying to physically contain them. Their barking and physical reactions

increase proportionally to your emotional state. Your behaviors are telling them whatever is on the other side of the door is something to be excited or concerned about.

To properly modify your dog's barking and accompanying behaviors, you must remain calm verbally and physically. You want to DIFFUSE, NOT INFUSE their emotional state. The key is to get your dog's attention. Calmly approach them and raise their head so they are looking at you. Tell them "no bark" in a controlled and firm tone. The instant they stop barking, tell them "good no bark". Immediately, you will want to DIVERT their attention to another behavior and away from the original catalyst. This may mean a toy, sitting for a treat, or running to another room or their crate for a treat. You can even train them to run to a certain spot and sit for a treat. Initially, this "spot" should be concretely defined such as a small rug.

As with any training or behavior modification program, you must be consistent, patient, and understanding. The dogs learn behaviors we want through "patterning". This is especially true of behaviors that are contradictory to the basic nature of being a dog. To insure consistency, you may need to prevent your dog from being stimulated to bark at certain catalysts when you cannot reinforce the new behavior(s). Barking is "self reinforcing" and while you are patterning the new behavior(s), you do not want your dog to be self reinforced by engaging in barking that goes unchecked. This may mean keeping them out of a particular area, blocking their "view" of external catalysts, and/or using another sound (television or radio) to mask outside sounds they could react to during the time you are "patterning" new reactions and behaviors to those catalysts.

Successfully patterning any new behavior is directly governed by your efforts, consistency, patience, and understanding. When dealing with barking and other instinctual and innate behaviors, you are asking a dog to behave in a manner that is contradictory to their basic nature. The manner you choose to handle these behaviors will either positively or negatively impact your dog and their resultant behaviors. The choice is yours. In teaching your dog anything, please take the time to understand and realize what your dog is doing and why and how your reactions are affecting their behaviors and emotional state.

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