

BARKEOLOGY

Study of Canine Communications

WHY DO DOGS BARK?

Dogs bark (or vocalize) to communicate a message. They bark for a variety of other reasons: to alert, out of boredom, to get attention or for the sheer enjoyment of expressing themselves.

Barking is kindred to a human talking. As humans we can express ourselves in a variety of different ways with our voice: we laugh, whisper, talk, cry, shout, babble, nag, sing and whistle. We can do this in a tangential, offensive or boring manner, or we can be receptive, reasonable and responsive (listening, as well as talking).

COMMUNICATION IS A TWO WAY CONNECTION

When humans communicate, they usually expect some kind of response. Barking dogs do too! If they don't get it, they will resoundingly bark even more. With this, most dogs are met with a reprimand and/or forced somehow to stop barking (confinement in a faraway place, verbal or physical reprimand). *This is counterproductive and can be abusive.*

Metaphorically, it would be like a human having a strong piece of duct tape put over their mouth, then placed in a dark room for a few days. If you couldn't speak, how would you communicate your emotions, wants, needs, desires and frustrations? How would you engage someone in conversation, activities or play? How would you develop your social skills? Perhaps, you would use improvisation by miming, jumping, drawing, and making frantic bodily gestures. One way or another, we all need some sort of interaction with another living being or risk suffering severe deprivation and possibly insanity (Wackadoodle Sanitarium).



SHAPE THE BARKING

Dogs already know how to eat, sit, stand, lie down, jump, paw, lick, play and roll over at 3 weeks of age. They are extraordinarily adept at developing survival and defense mechanisms to cope. They know instinctively how to bark, whine, yodel or "gurgle bark" (like our American Bulldog). As human companions, we are not teaching them how to do what comes naturally! We are shaping when, where and how we expect them to do it, in a savvy manner, among the human population.

As with any other behavior, barking can be put on cue for most dogs. Dogs are social animals. They usually won't bark unless they are left in a position that incites them to bark: alone on a cable run, loose in the yard, chained to a dog house, in a basement, in a kennel or crate for long periods, out on a walk in different locations that they have never been assertively and positively introduced to before.

These imposed situations create a monotonous barking dog. It becomes a losing battle between owner and dog. Barking becomes an insidious habit. For example: a dog left on a cable run, where they can view but not interact freely with children and other dogs playing, will create a barking dog! Children romping back and forth along the side of the dog (on or off of a cable run) will create a jumping, barking dog! The dog is, in essence, set up for failure when they are allowed into the home to see if they can behave. The outcome is a jumping, barking dog in the home: exactly the way they were taught outside!

FORGIVE YOURSELF AND PUT BARKING ON CUE

Pretend you are the Maestro of a symphony orchestra. Remember that dogs have to bark, so eliminating barking isn't the objective. The goal is to orchestrate where, how long, at whom and when you want your dog to perform their "barking symphony". As with any behavior shaping, **focus** on rewarding the behavior you desire tout-suite. When your dog doesn't bark for as little as 3 seconds, expediently praise and reward. *Timing is essential.* If you wait, you have forfeited the opportunity to capture a "magical" moment in directing the musical agenda (barking).

Begin by snap shooting silences (ecstasy). CEASE any tactile contact with your dog like petting when your dog barks. Touching exacerbates barking. Contrary to popular belief, this does not calm a habitual barker. It *may* calm a nervous, frightened dog. Basically, you are giving carte blanche approval to "please bark some more". It is contradictory to your goal and a confusing message to the dog!

Get motivated! Consider shaping barking. Get focused. The game is to strategize what, when, where and how long you want your dog to bark. Be flexible. This will never be perfect. Dogs will bark at chipmunks, squirrels and other stimuli in *new* environmental locations. Teach dog to whisper and bark, 1, 2, 3, then shush. Praise. Integrate this into your lifestyle by socializing the dog to new environments frequently.

Back Presentation: One of the easiest ways to cease annoying behavior (barking, jumping, mouthing) is to ignore it! Turn around & present your "back" to your dog. Walk away if necessary. Zoom back the second your dog stops barking & praise. Stressed out? A deep breath and "time-out" (dog in crate) is helpful.

Choose your words carefully. For example, our Newf, Sage, is an energetic barker. She loves to hear her bark echo through the woods. We knew this from the “get go”, so Sage was taught to express herself at different octaves. We prompt her with “whisper”, “shout” “shush” “listen” and “watch”. When we say “shush, watch” or “listen, what’s that?”, Sage responds as if to say, “I don’t know, but maybe we should check it out”. She perceives this as an opportunity to go exploring. She has a job to do now. We always follow-through by finding something: “oh look, it was “chewman” hiding behind the tree”!

Give them a job to do. They can’t bark very loud with a found toy in their mouth.

For “whisper” use a subtle movement by clicking together your index finger and thumb. The movement, cue and voice request does not have to be elaborate. Sometimes less is better, so keep it simple. For a “speak” or “shout”, open and close your hand (like a talking puppet).

TRY THIS!

Sit with your dog, their dinner dish and kibble (with a few extra-special, healthy treats). Shape barking for 5–minutes every day. Add in a few sits and downs. Always end on an achievement, however small.

Teach an alternate behavior like sit, shush (or quiet), then praise when you get it for 5 or 10 seconds. Starting slowly ... build this up.

Channel Barking into a Positive Outlet

“Listen” is more difficult but oodles of fun. Looking very expressive, put your hand to your ear and say “Listen”. If you receive a quiet, positive response, of course, praise and reward. Your intonation and facial expression speaks volumes. Change them to fit the request and change the dog’s mind.

You can put “Shush” on cue *while your dog is barking*, when you are convinced that you have practiced enough so that the dog understands the difference between barking and not barking. For Example: your dog begins barking, walk over and say “shush”. If your dog stops barking for 1 second, praise. The timing has to be lickity split. The association must be positive! Let them know that this exactly what you expect ... **“YES”!**

To get dogs to stop barking, if they don’t on their own, is more complicated. Humans generally get into a “barking contest” with their dog. You yell and they bark louder. The dog is thrilled that you are joining in to serenade the neighborhood! The neighbors may have a different viewpoint.

Be mindful of what you reinforce, paying more attention to “quiet” than bark. **Redirect** the barking. “Listen”, “watch” or “what’s that” are excellent ways to do this. Change the dog’s mind without setting yourself up to become a “barking butler” (dog barks, you pet and throw a ball). Don’t throw the ball until you hear silence. At that moment, just throw it! Later on add a “shush” at an opportune time so that you make the connection between quiet and bark.

Once you put barking on cue, you have developed a respectful way of controlling the barking to a certain degree. Create your own unique cue of communication that no one else will be able to botch!



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BARKING

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