

Barking

Barking is a form of canine communication and has many causes. In order to effectively and humanely change this behaviour we need to understand why the dog is barking and whenever possible, identify and eliminate the cause. In many cases the dog's basic needs are not being met. Like any unwanted behaviour, you can manage the symptom all you want but until the root cause of the problem has been addressed, the behaviour will return.

For example: most dogs don't get nearly enough exercise. Many behaviour problems have been solved by simply tiring the dog out. Many dogs bark for attention. If this is the case, ignoring the barking is crucial to success. People tend to ignore behaviour they like and pay attention to behaviour they don't like. Because attention is one of the most potent rewards you can give your dog, rewarding the dog when quiet is as important as ignoring when it barks.

A lack of consistency is often the root of the problem such as rewarding barking at certain times and punishing it at others. Punishing a stressed or anxious dog simply increases the stress and anxiety and *therefore* increases the barking. Furthermore, some dogs perceive you yelling as joining in with its barking. Some people use muzzles to stop the barking. This increases stress and anxiety and interferes with the dog's ability to breathe properly and control its body temperature. Muzzles used incorrectly or for the wrong reasons are counter productive if not abuse and can be very dangerous.



NJ's New Puppy Tala

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Techniques

Creative Avoidance

Example: If your dog only barks when the neighbour's dog is out, leave him inside during that time.

Interrupt & Re-Direct

Example: If you know your dog will bark when you see another dog while out on a walk, take aromatic treats or a favourite toy with you. Cross the street when you see a dog approaching. This is to allow enough space to ensure you can get your dog's attention. Use the treat or toy to re-direct your dog's attention. Ask it to perform a previously taught cue and reward it with the toy or treat.

Socialization

Many dogs that bark do so because of a lack of sufficient socialization causing the dog to bark when anything changes in its environment. When a dog is not thoroughly socialized to a variety of dogs, people, animals, sights, sounds, smells and environments, anything new can cause excitement or fear resulting in a release of this pent up energy through barking. In this case, a careful yet thorough socialization program is necessary to solve the problem. (see "*Socialization*" handout)

Speak and Shush

In order to control your dog's barking it's important to create a reliable "on/off" switch. If your dog is a barker this will be easy because it's a lot easier to teach a dog to be quiet than teaching it to bark. Many people who have quiet dogs choose not to teach their dogs to speak, because they would rather keep the dog quiet. Others are concerned because their dog will not alert them to intruders or scare intruders away.

If you teach your dog to "speak," it's imperative that you teach it to "shush" as well, because once your dog realizes barking gets food or attention your problem will only get worse. An on-switch without an off-switch can become a serious problem.

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Teaching “Speak”

Many dogs will bark if you ask them to in an excited voice and some dogs will bark if you knock on the wall or create an unexpected sound. Another option is to use a recording of a doorbell or someone knocking on your door or have someone knock on your door at three-minute intervals. It's easiest if you can identify the trigger that makes your dog bark and use that as your training tool as long as the trigger does not cause stress, fear or anxiety for your dog. If this is the case, a systematic desensitization program will be required to desensitize your dog to the trigger. (See “*Systematic Desensitization*” handout)

Get your treats ready and entice your dog to bark. When you can reliably predict that your dog will bark, add your “speak” cue before doing so and move your hand as if playing with a hand puppet, this is your hand signal for “speak.” Encourage no more than three barks in a row, giving your cue “speak, good dog.” After three “barks” give your reward marker “YES” and give your dog a treat.

This is the one and only time you'll reward your dog for speaking. Once your dog realizes it will be rewarded for barking you need to immediately install your off switch. From this moment forward you will no longer reward your dog for the “speak” you'll only reward it for the “shush.”

It's important to NEVER reward your dog for doing something you haven't asked for. If your dog barks when you haven't given the cue, ignore it. During this exercise, if your dog barks before the cue is given, or when you haven't asked for it, simply leave the room closing the door behind you. When your dog is quiet you can start again. Your dog will learn that it's never rewarded for offering a behaviour that was not requested.

Teaching “Shush”

When your dog is speaking on cue, hold a treat in your hand with your index finger up in front of your dog's nose. Allow your dog to sniff the treat while giving the cue “shush, good dog.” This works because your dog cannot sniff and bark at the same time; however, if your treat has no aroma, it may not work. Make sure you are using valued, aromatic treats for this exercise.

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Putting “Speak” and “Shush” Together

Ask for three “speak” followed by three “shush” rewarding only the “shush.” Then ask for three “speak” followed by five “shush,” then three “speak” followed by seven “shush,” etc. remembering to only reward the dog for each “shush.” By doing this you are teaching your dog to bark no more than three times keeping the “speak” short and controlled, while making the “shush” longer and stronger. Practice this often as a trick and out of context when your dog is not barking to create a strong “on/off” switch.

If Your Dog Doesn’t Shush on Cue

If your dog will not quiet down on cue, immediately leave the room closing the door behind you. When your dog has been quiet for a few minutes, call your dog to you; ask for a sit and reward your dog for compliance then start again.

Keep in mind that deeply rooted behaviours can take six to eight weeks of consistent training to replace old habits with new ones and if you’re not meeting all of your dogs basic needs you may not see results. Most dogs thrive on the attention associated with training and learn very quickly. Others may be more excitable and/or distracted and will need more time, practice, patience and consistency. In all cases, practice your cues out of context making sure you are obtaining reliable responses before asking for them when the dog is excited or distracted.

Take Away the Resource

Example: If your dog enjoys being outside and only barks when the neighbour’s dog is out, give your no reward marker “too bad” the moment your dog barks and put it in the house. When it’s quiet it can come back outside again. With repetition your dog will learn that barking ends the fun and quiet brings fun back.

Time Out

The idea of the time out (or walking out on the dog) is to teach the dog that freedom end when the unwanted behaviour occurs and it returns with desired behaviour. Many people attempt to stop, re-direct or punish unwanted behaviour without realizing that the attention is actually rewarding the behaviour. Many are unaware that attention is one of the most potent rewards you can give a dog so anything you do to stop the behaviour actually rewards it.

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Prepare your “Time Out” Place

- Blocked off Area

If you block off an area to use as your “time out” place it’s important that your dog cannot escape and that there’s nothing inappropriate in that area for your dog to chew on. In fact you’ll want to remove any beds, blankets and chew toys.

- Crate

It’s important to prevent creating an unpleasant association with the crate because even if you don’t use your crate as a happy place on a regular basis chances are there will be a point in your dog’s life when it may need to be confined at home or at a vet clinic for safety or health reasons. If you use your crate as your time out place you can do the following:

1. Change the location – If you use the crate on a regular basis, move the crate to a new location. If your dog is usually crated in the living room you may wish to move it to a bedroom or kitchen for time out.
2. Take out the good stuff – Take out the toys and blankets as the idea is not to make your dog comfortable or give it something else to do, the idea is to keep it safe only until the unwanted behavior stops.
3. Change the top of your crate – If the top of the crate is usually covered to create a den like effect, remove the cover. If the top of the crate is usually left open cover it to create a new association.

- No Tie Downs

I prefer not to use tie downs for safety reasons as a dog can get tangled or choked by the tie down. Even if you’re supervising, if your dog needs to be untangled, you’ll be rewarding the current behaviour with attention.



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Procedure

Put a lightweight leash on your dog during times when you feel the unwanted behaviour may occur. The moment the unwanted behaviour occurs give your dog a *no reward marker* such as “that’s not it” allowing it the option to make a choice and choose a more acceptable behaviour. If the behaviour continues, immediately pick up the end of the leash and move your dog to its time out place. As soon as your dog is calm and quiet, it can come out again. It’s important to let your dog out of its “time out” place as soon as it’s calm and quiet so that it learns which behaviours earn and maintain its freedom. If you leave the dog in its “time out” place too long the association will be lost. It’s crucial to ignore all barking and demands for attention while it’s in its “time out” place and only pay attention to your dog and let it out when it’s calm and quiet.

The leash is important because grabbing your dog will either: reward the behaviour with attention, turn it into a chase game, cause your pup to bite the hand reaching for it or create fear and/or hand shyness. Reaching for your pup should always be a good thing – never a punishment.

Summary

Your time out place needs to be somewhere your dog can’t get into any trouble. The idea is to make sure your dog is safe so you can ignore it but you also want to avoid creating an unpleasant association with your dog’s necessary confinement area. Through repetition your dog will learn that the unwanted behaviour ends freedom and attention and being calm and quiet brings it back.

Watch Me

Getting your dog’s attention off what it’s focused on and back on you is the first step to stopping unwanted barking. The purpose of the “watch me” exercise is to teach your dog to focus on you, on cue.

When a dog begins training it usually has no attention span and can become distracted at the worst possible times. When a dog becomes distracted in public, owners often lose control as the dog lunges and barks at the approaching dog, person, etc. Not only is this embarrassing for the owner, it can cause fear in the approaching dog or person and creates behavioural habits that can escalate into aggression. Punishing the dog creates an unpleasant association with the handler and the approaching dog or person making the problem worse. Teaching impulse control and alternative behaviour is a great way to prevent and solve this problem.

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Focus, concentration and self-control must be taught and strengthened as you would strengthen any muscle in weight training. If you can't get your dog's attention, you can't teach it anything, nor can you ask it to do something it's already been taught. Teaching your dog to watch you on cue is taking a big step toward being able to control your dog in public.

Procedure

1. Hold a treat in front of your dog's nose allowing it to sniff the treat.
2. Move the treat from the dog's nose to your eyes.
3. The moment your dog's eyes connect with yours give your "YES" reward marker and reward your dog with a treat.



Greg shows Sahara a treat then lures her focus to his eyes

4. Feel free to crouch in front of your dog and hold onto its collar at the beginning if it's very small, young or jumping around excitedly.
5. When your dog makes eye contact with you every time you move the treat from its nose to your eyes add the "watch me" cue before moving the treat.
6. When your dog makes eye contact every time you give the "watch me" cue, require your dog to hold the eye contact for the count of two before saying "YES" and giving the treat.

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7. When you're successful with the count of two, require your dog to hold eye contact for the count of four, then six, eight etc. gradually increasing its focus and ability to concentrate.
8. Take this exercise on the road by asking your dog to "watch me" at different locations along your walk, beginning with short eye contact when there are no distractions and gradually increasing the length of contact and intensity of distraction as your dog is successful.

Note

- If your dog breaks eye contact when you expand the length of time, shorten your time requirement to ensure success. When your dog is successful with your last goal, you can once again ask for more.
- Remember to give your dog a play break after a maximum of three repetitions.
- The body movement of luring your hand toward your eyes will eventually become your hand-signal for "watch me."
- When asking your dog to do anything when distracted, begin with mild distractions at a distance then gradually increase the intensity by shortening your distance or increasing the volume. If your dog is unable to focus on you, the intensity of the distraction is too high. When this occurs, go back to your last point of success and proceed more slowly. Let your dog tell you by its success when it's ready to take the next step.

Specific Causes

Caused by Boredom or Loneliness

- Be fair! Dogs are social animals and should not be forced to spend too much time alone. If you are unable to meet your dog's needs it should be re-homed with someone who can.
- Get a companion for your dog.
- Exercise your dog. If your dog is tired it will be more likely to sleep while you are away.
- Hire a reputable dog walker or take your dog to a reputable dog daycare.

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- Leave on a looped recording of normal sounds of your household playing while you are away.
- Leave a radio or television on to mimic normal household sounds while you are away.
- Give your dog a variety of chew options. (See “*Chew Options*” handout)

Caused by the Doorbell

- Change the ring of your doorbell.
- Desensitize your dog to the doorbell. Record your doorbell and play it back in a loop when you’re not home so that your dog learns that the doorbell ringing does not necessarily mean someone is coming in the house.
- Reward your dog for not barking when the doorbell rings.

Caused by Fear, Stress or Separation Distress/Anxiety

- Remove the source of stress.
- Provide sufficient exercise to burn off your dog’s excess energy. Although physical exercise is important you can also tire a dog out through mental stimulation. Train your dog more often and/or play games with it. (see “*Great Games That Teach*” handout)
- If your dog is fearful a fear rehabilitation program is required. (see “*Fear Rehabilitation*” handout)
- If your dog is suffering from separation distress/anxiety a rehabilitation program is required. (See “*Separation Distress/Anxiety*” handout)
- Many dogs respond well to a Thundershirt. It has the same effect as swaddling has on a baby. For more information about the Thundershirt visit www.thundershirt.com.
- Lavender scent is known to have a calming effect on both dogs and people.

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- Holistic remedies such as Pet Sedate, Rescue Remedy, Anxitane, Holistic Blend Herbal Calmer, Calming Aid, Nature Vet and Dr. Good Pet can be helpful in some situations. Always consult a vet or holistic vet before using any type of medication to make sure it's safe for your dog. Any medication should be temporary and only used along with a rehabilitation program designed to solve the root cause of the problem. For more information about Anxitane visit www.virbacvet.com/products/VirbacAnimalHealthBehavioralHealth/ANXITANEChewableTablets.aspx
- DAP – Dog Appeasement Pheromone – “In a certain study, scientists discovered that female dogs naturally produce a calming and tranquilizing pheromone 3 to 5 days after they give birth to their puppies. This dog appeasing pheromone is responsible for giving the newborn puppies the message of constant security, safety, and reassurance.” DAP is a synthetic form of the pheromone created by scientists that is available in a spray, plug-in or collar used to “produce natural tranquilizer for dogs in times of dog anxiety and stress. For more information about DAP visit www.dogappeasingpheromone.com.



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Caused by Sounds Outside

- Leave a radio or television on to block outside noises.
- Give the dog a variety of chew options to keep it occupied.
- Tire your dog out so it is more relaxed and less likely to bark.

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Cause by Visual Triggers

- Cover the windows and doors or block your dog's access to them to prevent visual triggers from inside the house.
- Cover the fence with a tarp or fill in any openings in the fence with additional fencing to block visual triggers from your yard.

Attention Barking

- Ignore the barking – Reward quiet behaviour.
- Walk out of the room and close the door when your dog barks at you.
- Give your dog other things to do. (See "*Chew Options*" handout)
- A dog that receives plenty of exercise will be more relaxed and less likely to demand attention.

Barking in the Car

- Put your dog in a covered crate to eliminate visual triggers.
- Play music to cover auditory triggers.
- Use a seatbelt to keep your dog still and safe.
- Use a Thundershirt to calm your dog. (See www.thundershirt.com)
- Give your dog something to chew on to distract it.
- Pull over when your dog barks and sit quietly until it stops barking, then start driving again.
- For long trips, medications such as DAP, Pet Sedate, Rescue Remedy and Anxitane. Always consult a vet before using any type of medication.

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Excitement Barking

- Provide sufficient exercise to burn off your dog's excess energy. Although physical exercise is important you can also tire a dog out through mental stimulation. Train your dog more often and/or play games with it. (see *"Great Games That Teach"* handout)
- Feed your dog a natural, balanced diet, as there are ingredients in many kibbles that contribute to excitability.
- Maintain a calm and quiet environment at home as your dog will be affected by the energy in your home.
- Teach your dog to fetch a ball or soft toy. Every time your dog barks, instruct it to fetch as it's harder to bark with something in its mouth. Do not use this method if your dog is barking for attention.
- Teach your dog to calm itself on cue following the program in the Excite and Settle handout.
- Ignore excitable behaviour and reward calm behaviour with attention.
- Systematically desensitize your dog to whatever trigger is causing the barking. (See *"Systematic Desensitization"* handout)
- If your dog is barking when out for a walk, desensitize it to whatever is causing the barking.
- If your dog is barking when out for a walk, ask the dog to do something else you've taught. (See *"Interrupt and Redirect"* on page 2)
- Give your dog a variety of chew options to keep it busy. (See *"Chew Options"* handout)

Frustration Barking

- If your dog is frustrated because it wants its dinner, to go out, to go play with a friend etc, ask it to perform a control exercise such as sit stay or down stay first then reward it by giving it what it wants.
- Wait until your dog is calm and quiet before giving it what it wants.

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Greeting Barking

- Have a party! – Troubleshoot this by setting up a number of greetings in a row. Invite a few people over for a party, but arrange their arrivals at ten or fifteen minute intervals. Have your dog on leash when your first guest arrives and leave a bowl of treats just inside your door for easy access. When your guest enters your home stand back far enough that your dog cannot reach your guest. Don't talk to your dog, instruct it or reprimand it, just wait. The moment your dog is sitting quietly your guest is to give it a treat, go out the door, come back in and repeat the exercise. It seldom takes more than a few repetitions before the person enters and your dog sits quietly because it's learned that's the only way to get treats or attention. When your dog sits the moment that person enters, your guest can grab a drink and a seat. Repeat this with each successive guest until everyone is in. Consistency is the secret here because all it takes is one person looking at your dog, talking to it or touching it when it's barking to reward the unwanted behaviour. When this happens, the behaviour returns. So if the quiet greeting is falling apart it's because someone is rewarding the barking.



Complements of Janet Greenwood, CTB.ccs

CCD – Compulsive Disorder Barking

- CCD barking includes barking without an identifiable trigger or barking in situations that would not bother the average dog.
- Treatments include eliminating any possible physical causes first.
- All stressors must be removed from your dog's living environment.

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- Increase your dog's exercise.
- Create a routine and calm atmosphere at home.
- Distract your dog when the barking occurs.
- Punishment is guaranteed to increase stress further exacerbating the problem.
- A number of prescription medications and holistic remedies are available to decrease your dog's stress.

(See *"Canine Compulsive Disorder"* handout)

Play Barking

- Allow your dog to bark during certain play sessions to allow a release for this natural behaviour. Give your dog a cue to let it know when it's ok to bark.
- Play using a ball or toy because it's more difficult to bark when your dog has something in its mouth.
- The moment your dog barks during play, immediately leave the room and close the door. If you're outside immediately go inside leaving your dog outside. As soon as your dog is quiet you can return and resume the game. Through repetition your dog learns that barking ends the game and being quiet brings it back.

Protective, Territorial - Defensive Barking

- This type of barking is a warning that if the dog or person doesn't back off they could get bitten. Instead of addressing the symptom of the problem – the barking, you'll need to treat the cause, which is your dog not being comfortable with the approach of dogs or people. If you stop the barking without addressing the cause there may be no warning before the dog bites. This is on par with taking the batteries out of the smoke detector – your dog is telling you there's a problem that needs to be addressed.

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- Protective, territorial and defensive barking is treated through systematic desensitization and counter conditioning to create a pleasant association with the approach of new dogs and people while teaching an incompatible behaviour. When the dog would rather the dog or person approach than chase them away, the barking disappears on its own.

Social Barking

- Because social barking is normal it's unfair and unrealistic to expect to eliminate it completely. However, you can control the environment and teach your dog to control itself on cue.
- Teach "watch me." (See *"Watch Me"* on page 5)
- Teach "speak" and "shush." (See *"Speak and Shush"* in page 2)
- Leave a radio or television on to block outside noises.
- Cover the windows and doors or block your dog's access to them to prevent visual triggers from inside the house.
- Cover the fence with a tarp or fill in any openings in the fence to block visual triggers from your yard.



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