



Doorbell Behaviors

When someone unexpectedly rings your doorbell, you probably react. You might feel slightly anxious about why someone is at your door. You might be excited because you are expecting a delivery or know a friend is coming to visit. Dogs commonly have the same feelings and we see that in the rowdy behaviors that occur at near the door when guests arrive.. The most common complaints center around barking and over-excited jumping up on the door or on visitors as they enter.

As with any challenging behavior, the solution is twofold. First, the dog should never be allowed to practice the undesired behavior. Secondly, the dog needs to perform a trained replacement behavior instead. In some cases, not allowing the dog to practice the behavior can be challenging.

Consider barking. Your dog may bark at the sound of the doorbell, the vibration of the knock on the door, the sight of the door opening or even your movement as you go to answer the door. Remember that barking to alert humans that there is a change in the environment is completely normal. It may be tough to prevent the initial bark from happening. In fact, it is recommended that you allow the initial bark or two, to allow your dog to communicate. However, it is not acceptable for them to continue to vocalize after you have acknowledged them or if it becomes a nuisance. To help with this natural reaction, you should practice desensitizing the sights and sounds that set your dog off.

To desensitize your dog to the sound of the doorbell, start in a room away from the door in case the sight of the door contributes to your dog's response.

1. Use your phone to record the sound of your doorbell. This way, you can play the sound back at a very low volume WHILE you feed them delicious treats. Ideally your dog will be so busy enjoying the treats that he doesn't respond.
2. Gradually increase the volume while feeding treats. If your dog is not responding to the sound, progress to the third step. If your dog acknowledges the sound in anyway, decrease the volume and repeat until they show no signs.
3. Play the sound and then treat your dog. At this point, your dog should look at you expectantly when they hear the doorbell. The sound should equal a treat in your dog's mind.
4. Try ringing the actual doorbell. To make this step easier for your dog, start with them on a leash and the door open so that they can see there is no visitor. This keeps excitement and anxiety levels down.

Once the sights and sounds of the doorbell do not cause the unwanted behavior, teach a new behavior to replace the unwanted one. If possible, the behavior should be incompatible with the unwanted one. Often, we teach Place to prevent jumping up and toy retrieval to help with barking. To teach your dog to go to his Place, follow the steps below:

1. Choose the Place you want your dog to go. This might be a dog bed or crate and it should be visible to your dog.



2. Lure your dog to the Place and reward them heavily. It is a good idea to have the Place pay your dog, so put the treats on the Place rather than handing them to your dog. This will help build value in this location for your dog. Toss a lower value treat away to move your dog off of the Place.
3. Take one step away from the Place and pause to see if your dog returns to it automatically. When they do, Jackpot them with a handful of treats and release them by tossing one lower value treat away from the Place.
4. Repeat these steps gradually adding distance from the Place.

To help build even more value to the Place, consider feeding your dog on the place or offering their favorite chew toy when there. Once your dog understands the cue and reliably goes to Place, pair the behavior with a knock on the door, opening of the door and eventually the sound of the doorbell or a guest entering.

For some dogs, going to Place is enough to quiet the barking that may occur. Some dogs may need a little more help. Working with your dog to hold a toy in their mouth can reduce barking. Start by lavishing your dog with attention whenever they have a toy. This helps your dog realize that YOU really like it when they are carrying a toy. Then introduce a knock on the door or a doorbell noise and have your dog fetch a toy you have thrown. The idea is to have your dog associate the door sounds with getting a toy. Eventually your dog will connect the doorbell or knock with getting a toy.

To set your dog up for success, be sure to desensitize to the door first. Adding too many behaviors when your dog is already excited sets you and your dog up for failure. Practicing at calm times helps your dog learn the new behaviors faster and gives them something to do, rather than the undesirable behavior.