

## 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.

### Teaching Your Dog To "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.

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### 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.

### 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 the "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 then reward your dog for compliance then start again.

## **Speak and Shush**

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 it back.

### Time Out

Put a lightweight leash on your dog during times when you feel barking may be an issue. The moment your dog barks give your dog an instruction "quiet," allowing it the option of making a choice. If the barking continues immediately give your no reward marker "too bad," pick up the end of the leash and remove your dog to its time out place. If your dog resists the leash, switch to one of the other techniques. As soon as your dog is calm and quiet, it can come out again. It's crucial to ignore all barking and only pay attention to your dog when it's 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 you, create fear and/or hand shyness. Reaching for the pup should always be a good thing – never a punishment.

Your time out place needs to be somewhere your dog can't get into any trouble. If you use your crate or exercise pen, make sure you move it to a different location and that all toys and blankets have been removed. 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 barking ends freedom and being quiet brings it back.

### References

Dr. Ian Dunbar, Seminar notes Puppy Training 1990