

Dealing with Excessive Barking

By Susan Carney

Let's face it, dogs bark. Barking in itself is not wrong; it is natural. However, excessive amounts of barking or barking at inappropriate times can be a real problem for some owners. In order to successfully teach your dog to control its barking it is important to determine the motivation is behind it.

Why do some dogs bark more than others?

The Territorial dogs

These barkers are most often unneutered males and/or dogs that have been encouraged in some way to take an active role in protecting their environment. Whether on purpose or by accident we play a big role in creating this problem. These dogs are protecting their yard, house and general "space" from intruders such as the mailman, a squirrel, a passing dog or neighbor, or any new activity.

Most people do not realize that any dog of any size will protect its territory. It is a natural behavior. Believe me they know the difference between an unwanted visitor climbing in the window at 2 a.m. or a friend coming to the front door for dinner. There really is no need to teach protective behavior even to a poodle. This comes naturally.

Neutering will always help any male "relax" their duties as protector of the universe. However the "job" of protector must be reassigned to someone else in order to stop over barking behavior.

The bored or under-exercised dog

Any dog can fit this category. If you do not provide quality time with your pet more than once a day then you have a bored dog. Being tied out on a runner, walked for half an hour before and after work or school is simply not enough. Dogs need both mental and physical stimulation to create balance and fun in their lives.

The most common types of play that your dog doesn't get enough of

- Wrestling and body slamming
- Running and chasing
- Quietly chewing on a yummy bone

The fearful or neurotic dog

Often a dog like this is under-socialized, coddled too much by its owner, and spends too much time not being alone. Or he is rarely taken on outings to experience new things. Many miniature breeds can fit or fall easily into this category as well as dogs that have been passed around from home to home several times. Shelter and rescue dogs may easily fall into neurotic barking because they have experienced so many changes in their short lives.

Often we make the problem worse by catering to the dogs' shyness or fear. Patting and stroking a fearful dog while the behavior is happening actually can make the problem worse.

Changing the way you do things

How much time do you spend with your dog? If he/s is alone more than 8 hours that is part of your problem. Where is the dog kept when alone? Often allowing a terrier the run of the house can lead to bad behavior. While you're gone they run from window to window alerting the neighborhood that a squirrel has run by and someone better do something because they are all locked up in the house. A crate will alleviate pacing and



worrying about what is going on outside or simply confining the animal to one room will calm them and remove the “Job” of pacing and tracking the activities outside.

What do you do when you are home? Of course every dog owner goes for several walks with their dog each day right☺. But there is more too it. Do you play games and give your dog stuff to do. Remember most dogs need a job. Frisbee, fetch, find the toy. Anything for ½ an hour, TWICE A DAY.

What do you do when the behavior is happening?

Many of us tell our dogs to SSSHHH and pet them while they bark. We beg, plead, and stroke, “SHH, Please STOP, NO, NO, Don’t Bark, PAT, RUB, and RUB.” In actuality, what is happening is, your dog is barking to say, “Hey there is something over there or, “That person is a bit scary, don’t you agree?” By stroking the dog during the behavior, you are giving the dog attention *and* (you got it) agreeing with your dog. “Pat, pat, “hey, you’re right I see it,” stroke, pat. “Thanks for the warning, we’d better keep an eye on that scary person,” stroke, pat, pat. This must STOP. Do not pet your dog when he or she is doing something, ANYTHING that you do not want him or her to do. STOP, stand there and ignore the behavior. If your dog looks to you for a response DO NOTHING. Wait for your dog to quiet down then PRAISE it. If it seems that your dog never quiets down then try this:

While the behavior is going on BARK, BARK, BARK . . . call your dog to you, “Tucker Come.” Tell him to SIT then reward him for coming and sitting with a pat or a cookie. . . while he is enjoying your pat or the cookie chances are he is quiet. Then tell him (or her) GOOD BOY, GOOD QUIET BOY. If you repeat this every time your dog hears something and starts barking it will eventually learn that it is better to come to you and sit and wait for a reward than to bark at whatever it is that he sees.

Barking at a visitor

When a dog runs to the door barking and jumping they perceive the person on the other side as a trespasser. We can easily create a friendly greeting by using food and being sure that every time a person comes to the door and the dog starts “working” that we first say the dogs’ name, physically get between the dog and the door. Tell to dog to sit and “I’ve got it.” And then answer the door by going outside saying hi with the dog and asking the person ask the dog to sit and show the dog that people coming to the front door just might have something to offer and aren’t so bad.

The dog must always be on a leash and under your control. First and foremost if you do not have control you must return to obedience class and regain that control or you’re in for some trouble

Barking at an object or person outside during a walk

Go over to it. Let your dog sniff and check it out. Tell your dog QUIET as you walk slowly towards the object and show that it is not so bad. As soon as your dog is quiet reward it. Even if it just for a second, use words instead of patting just incase your dog starts barking again as you pat him. Ask the person if you can say hi and be sure to tell them not to stare. (By the way it is impolite to stare at any dog you do not know.)

Barking when you are not home

If your dog barks at home when alone leave a radio or TV on. Silence can be a scary thing. A little soothing background noise will drown out noises from the outside and creeks and squeaks within the house.

Leave quietly without the long good bye. If you make a big deal of leaving so will s/he. The first 20 minutes is the worst for them so sneak out while your dog is busy or falling a sleep recovering from your morning walk.



Have a special toy. Buy a new toy and sleep with it or stick it in the dirty laundry. Use this toy as a special security blanket for while you're gone. Don't get frustrated if you have to replace it often. You want your dog to work out its loneliness and frustration on the toy not the garbage or your stuff. Toys are for tearing up; let your dog do it that means it is working ☺

Set him up

If you have tried everything but none of it works you may have to "set your dog up". This can take time but in the end it is worth it.

On the weekend or when you don't have to work, imitate your daily departure routine. Do the usual, put on make-up, search about for keys, gloves, etc., pack a gym bag or throw out the garbage. Make the dog think that this is just like any other daily departure.

Leave for 1 – 2 minutes. If you normally lock the door with a key, make the right noises, but don't lock it. You must be able to enter quickly if he stops barking. If you wait for an elevator, ring for it and get in. Go one floor down and come back up.

If the dog has not barked, return and PRAISE, PRAISE; PRAISE your dog for a "good quiet." If you hear barking, wait for it to stop. As soon as it stops count to 10 and go in. Reward your dog for "GOOD QUIET" Behavior! Then turn and leave again. Try again

The goal is to get your dog to realize what behavior you want. Praise, reward and affection are what the dog wants, so use those to modify the behavior. Ignore the bad stuff and focus on the good stuff. Remember you are praising good behavior with positive reinforcement. Punishment for barking (a normal behavior) is confusing.

If your dog is one that believes that negative attention from you is better than no attention at all, you will have to intensify your response.

Remember that barking problems are rarely solved in a day. You should understand that your dog was not born an "over-barker." Natural behavior in dogs indicates that they generally do not draw attention to themselves when alone or scared. Chances are they learned to bark incessantly as a response to the environment in which they live. Take time to understand how dogs are naturally and learn how to acclimate them to our way of living. It takes time and is best done if you begin at the puppy stages. For more help with an over-barking problem or other behavior problem please call us at 603-772-2921 Ext. 112

If people are complaining then let them know that you are not ignoring their complaints and that you understand their discomfort, and are taking steps to correct the problem. Quite often, they will cut you a little slack if they know that their complaints have not fallen upon deaf ears.

