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Barking

All dogs bark. They bark when they are excited, scared, bored, upset, on guard, or when they need something, like a potty break. Whatever the cause, barking is always triggered by something. Once we find the trigger, we can create a plan.

Step 1: What Can You Change?

Small changes in your home or yard can prevent barking. If your dog barks at people and dogs from your front window or fence, blocking the view takes away the reason for the barking. If they bark at noises, playing white noise or water sounds can mask the sounds.

Step 2: What Can You Reward?

Dogs do what works, so if being quiet works better than barking, that’s what they’ll do more often. There are many times during the day that your dog isn’t barking. Try to catch those moments.

Step 3: Tailor The Training to The Type of Barking

Alarm Barking

This is the dog who barks at noises. Reducing how much noise they can hear by using white noise machines, fans, or radio/television can reduce the barking when you’re not at home. You can also reward your dog for not barking. For example, you hear a noise outside and reward your dog before the barking starts.

Attention Barking

Looking, talking, and touching are all attention, so even scolding or shushing them rewards this type of barking. Watch for patterns when the barking starts. If it’s around the same time or during the same activity, you may be able to prevent it by giving them an activity before the barking starts.  Long-lasting chews, stuffed Kongs™, puzzle feeders, and/or walking or playing with your dog is also a great way to channel their energy into something positive.

Anxiety & Reactivity

Dogs that are anxious can see other dogs or people as a threat and barking is how they keep threats at a distance. This is often called “reactivity.” A short-term solution is to walk your dog in areas or at times you are less likely to run into triggers. Giving your dog as much distance as possible when encountering a trigger can also prevent reactions. You can also decrease reactions by tossing or scattering treats on the ground until the trigger passes - however, if they stop eating in these situations, distance is the best solution.

Separation Anxiety/Distress

 If your dog is barking for long periods of time when alone, or barking and damaging furniture, they may be suffering from separation anxiety or isolation distress. In some cases, this problem is so severe it may be necessary to speak with your veterinarian about anti-anxiety medications.

Summary

These are simple tips that can prevent or manage barking. However, some barking is more difficult and may require the help of a behavior consultant to resolve the problem.

Nothing stops barking completely. If the cause is fear or anxiety, adding something unpleasant, scary, or painful may stop the barking temporarily, but will only make the dog feel more anxious or afraid. It’s definitely NOT going to make them feel better about those situations.

By focusing on what triggers the barking instead of the barking itself, you will get peace and quiet much more quickly!

Remember:

* You can manage barking by avoiding, blocking, or removing common triggers.
* Catch your dog being quiet! Reward them generously for times when they don’t bark.
* Not all barking is the same. The right intervention will vary, depending on the cause.
* Punishment for barking can make the problem worse – and it doesn’t teach your dog what you want them to do, instead.

Resources

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants:  IAABC.org

Whole Dog Journal: www.whole-dog-journal.com