

Teaching "Quiet" command

Does your dog bark constantly when someone knocks on the door or a person walks by your house? Alarm barking is a natural behavior in dogs and we can't expect to completely eliminate it, but we can learn to control it. What you need to do is teach your dog to stop barking on command. We essentially want to tell the dog "thank you for that warning, now be quiet".

First find out what triggers your dog to bark (doorbell, other dogs, etc.). Then work the following sequence in practice sessions that you set up with a helper:

1. Have your helper initiates the trigger - (rings the doorbell or walks by with a dog)
2. Your dog will start barking
3. After 3-4 barks put a really yummy treat in your dog's face and when he stops barking to get the treat, you say "Quiet" (you do not have to shout, just use a normal tone of voice) - then say "YES" and give him the treat.
4. Repeat this 5-6 times per session and do a few sessions each day for a week.
5. Test your cue - when your dog starts barking - say "quiet" without showing the food treat first. If he has learned the cue he will stop barking and look for the treat - at which time you should say "YES" and give the treat. If he doesn't stop barking - go back to pairing the word "quiet" with the behavior of not barking until he better understands the cue.
6. Once your dog knows the cue "quiet" - start to wait a little longer each time before you "YES" and treat so that you condition in a longer duration of quiet behavior.
7. You will want to play this game in different locations in the house so the dog generalizes.
8. You will also want to do practice sessions with each trigger that sets off your dog.
9. Eventually you should switch to random reinforcement for the quiet command (not treating each time).
10. In time, you will be able to cue the dog to "quiet" and say "good boy/girl" without giving the treat reward.

It is important that you do many set-up practice sessions before trying this on the real thing. Once you have your dog reliably barking and quieting on command during these sessions you can try it in the real world. Don't be surprised if it doesn't work the first time. Go back to showing the treat up front as you say "quiet".

Outdoor Barking

Some dogs bark incessantly when outside in the yard. The barking can be triggered by just about anything - a passerby, a dog barking down the street or a leaf falling to the ground. This can be a hard behavior to control because you are in the house when it happens. If you don't reward or punish the behavior while it is happening or at least within a half a second, the animal doesn't make the connection, which means that you won't be able to punish this type of barking effectively.

For these dogs, I like to train in a reliable whistle recall. Teaching the dog to come into the house when he hears the whistle will at least allow you to cut the barking episodes short.

In some cases, I may recommend a citronella bark collar. Citronella is a harmless substance that some dogs simply find offensive smelling. The true beauty of the citronella bark collar is that the dog's barking gets punished EVERY time it happens and you don't have to be anywhere nearby. The collar works by detecting the barking through a microphone. The barking then triggers a spray of citronella in his face. Both the startle effect of the spray and the odor of the citronella can help to stop the barking.

This is a harmless device, as it does not cause pain. This said however, it is never recommended for dogs that are barking due to anxiety. For those dogs - we need to address the source of the anxiety. Stopping the barking will only cover up a symptom.

The downside to using a citronella bark collar:

Not all dogs are deterred from barking by the citronella bark collar. Some dogs simply don't care about the spray in their face while others learn to turn their head just so, to avoid the spray. Many dogs become "collar wise" meaning they learn that when it's on they can't bark but when it's not on they can. Some dogs may eventually habituate to the spray and therefore it stops working after a while.

A shock collar is NEVER recommended. These collars cause fear and pain and can make your dog very anxious or even aggressive.