

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



Hopefully, you now have a good idea as to why your dog is barking and have put his behaviour into one or more of the four groups. You should also have thought about which of his barking is reasonable/acceptable and which you would like to resolve. Remember he didn't develop this behaviour overnight so it will not be cured overnight. It will take time, consistency and patience!

HOW DOGS LEARN

Any behaviour that a dog repeats frequently is done so because he gains some benefit from exhibiting it. This may be;

- A directly rewarding outcome from the owner – treat, game, attention etc.
- Something the dog finds fun to do – chase, chew, dig etc.
- The removal of something unpleasant – a threat stopping or the dog being removed from a scary situation.

Most people understand that the best way to motivate a dog to exhibit a behaviour is to reward him for doing so; understandably, they then accept that the best way to discourage him from a behaviour is to do the opposite. For most people the natural opposite of reward is punishment. However, whilst punishment certainly can discourage unwanted behaviours it is often unsuccessful because;

1. The dog simply does not link the punishment with the crime.
2. The punishment does not occur consistently every time he displays the behaviour.
3. Even if 1 & 2 do exist, the dog may decide that the benefit he gains from the behaviour outweighs the punishment he receives often resulting in progressively more severe punishments being necessary to achieve the same result!

If however we look at the opposite of 'reward' as 'no reward', we are likely to have much more success. No intelligent animal continues in a behaviour that never achieves a result, long term!

So when we want to change a dog's behaviour, the most effective way is to control the outcome so that it no longer earns a benefit to the dog. Further success will be gained if we also offer him an alternative behaviour (that is incompatible to the first) and make that very rewarding.

This basic principle applies to all behaviour, especially barking; we of course need to work out just what benefit the dog is gaining (in order for us to control it), which we should easily be able to do now that we have thoroughly assessed his barking for two weeks!

Now we can look at how to use this principal to help 'stop barking' in the four categories:

Attention seeker/excitement barker

In principal this is one of the easiest benefits to control but in reality it is often extremely difficult to put into practise! All dog owners, to a greater or lesser extent are conditioned to responding to their dogs (often subconsciously). How many times do you stroke your dog just because he puts his head on your knee or open the door to the garden because he has scratched at it?

Of course a lot of these responses are not problematic but if your dog learns that barking is an effective way to get your attention, he is likely to repeat that behaviour in other situations. As discussed last week, even a negative response can be a successful outcome for your dog. Shouting at the dog will rarely work, for many dogs when you shout you are simply joining in as another dog would.

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



Hopefully, you now have a good idea as to why your dog is barking and have put his behaviour into one or more of the four groups. You should also have thought about which of his barking is reasonable/acceptable and which you would like to resolve. Remember he didn't develop this behaviour overnight so it will not be cured overnight. It will take time, consistency and patience!

Removing your attention means totally ignoring the dog, not just verbally but also physically; even eye contact can motivate him to continue.

If there is another influence that is encouraging him to bark e.g. food on the side, toy behind the sofa etc then you must control both benefits; so, no attention for barking but also not gaining the potential reward. In some instances it is easy to just remove the object and put it out of sight but sometimes that is not possible or realistic. In these cases you should remove the dog. Of course if removing the dog means giving him attention then we are back to square one! The best way to overcome this is by using a [CLIX House Line \(available from www.companyofanimals.co.uk\)](http://www.companyofanimals.co.uk) which is simply a long, lightweight lead that the dog trails from his collar; when he barks at an object, you pick up the line and remove him from the situation but without giving him any attention, if necessary he can be briefly excluded from the room. If, once allowed back in, he immediately picks up where he left off he can be briefly excluded again. Of course the house line should only be fitted when he is supervised.

If the barking is directed at you (or another person) then the person should ignore him and turn away. If the barking continues then the person can leave the room thus giving the dog the absolute opposite of what he wants i.e. isolation rather than attention. When the barking stops, the person can reappear and continue as if nothing has happened.

If barking occurs during a specific activity e.g. whilst preparing his dinner. Progress towards his end goal (being fed) should cease until the barking stops, once it does then progress continues. This principal also applies for all excitement barking, the activity stops until he is quiet and then resumes once he is.

In order for this to be effective the consequence (being ignored, progress stopping etc) must occur immediately that the barking starts and cease once he is quiet. If you continue to ignore your dog once he has stopped barking then he will never link the negative consequence with his barking behaviour. Unfortunately many owners just ignore their dog regardless; so rather than the dog learn what causes the consequence, he just becomes more motivated to do something to get a response! You cannot 'hold a grudge' if you want to train your dog!

Do be aware that when you first start to remove your attention, your dog may actually increase his barking. This is because he has learnt in the past that it is successful; like us if something isn't working that normally does, they will usually try harder to make it work. The worst mistake to make at this time is to respond as you will simply have taught your dog to bark harder and louder in future!

Rewarding quiet behaviour is just as important as ignoring the barking, remember to praise your dog for being quiet and offer his positive outcomes when he displays quiet behaviour particularly if this is a situation in which he would normally bark.

Warning/alert barker

It is important to understand that often this type of barking is involuntary in that the dog does not always make a conscious decision to bark; rather it is a reflex reaction to the occurring stimulus. It may however then be reinforced by an outcome e.g. attention, response from another dog or the stimulus (particularly if it is perceived as threatening) leaving/stopping. A typical example of this is the postman; as the postman approaches the house, the dog barks as he does with any other visitor approaching. However, unlike other visitors, the owner does not go to the door and resolve the situation by allowing the guest in thus allowing the dog to learn that this person is no threat. Instead the postman delivers the mail into the house thus increasing the level of threat, the dog's barking increases and the postman leaves. The dog has no understanding that the postman was leaving anyway so links his own barking with successfully removing the intruder. This behaviour is reinforced, usually on a daily basis until the dog is conditioned to bark at the mere sight or sound of the postman!

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



For most of us, our dog barking at the arrival of visitors is understandable and acceptable. Often though, this is the exact same behaviour that he displays at other times and we don't find it acceptable. For instance people just walking past the house or garden or when our neighbours use adjoining gardens. Of course most dogs do not understand that the neighbour has a right to use their own garden and perceives them as a potential visitor or threat in exactly the same way.

For dogs that are particularly reactionary to the arrival of visitors it is worthwhile desensitising them to the sound of the doorbell. Start with him on a lead and with the door open (so that he can see there is not actually a visitor there), ring the bell and ignore any barking or noisy behaviour. Once he is calm, reward him, and repeat this on several occasions until there is little or no reaction to the bell. Gradually you can start to close the door (little at a time) and randomise the ringing of the bell. Eventually, the doorbell will become much less of a 'trigger' to him. Having visitors telephone ahead first so they don't have to ring the bell, will help to disassociate the exciting arrivals with the sound of the bell. Similarly, family members should ring the bell when they come home to start to create a positive association with the bell.

In order for our dog to learn that these other stimuli are not threatening we need to spend some time teaching him how to behave. As before, the dog should be fitted with a [CLIX House Line](#) or if the behaviour is occurring in the garden a sturdier and longer, [CLIX Long Line \(available from \[www.companyofanimals.co.uk\]\(http://www.companyofanimals.co.uk\)\)](#). When he starts to bark at the sight or sound of the stimulus, the line should be used to immediately remove him from the immediate situation e.g. window or garden to break the reactionary behaviour. Again, he should not be given any attention. Once he stops barking, he should be allowed to regain his freedom and rewarded for any tolerance of the stimulus.

For persistent offenders, it is often easier to do this in a controlled situation so that you can control both the dog and the stimulus. So for example, if you have a dog that is very reactionary to people passing the window then you should engage the services of a friend or neighbour to act as a 'stooge'. Have your stooge walk past the window slowly so that the dog reacts in his normal fashion, use your [CLIX House Line](#) to break his eye contact from the window and preferably have the stooge stand still. This way we have broken the reflex reaction, not reinforced with attention and not given the benefit of the stimulus leaving. Once the barking stops, calmly praise your dog and allow him some access to the window whilst keeping hold of the line, if he remains quiet then praise and reward him, if he barks then you should repeat as before. Once all is calm, have the stooge move on and then repeat the whole process as many times as you can until your dog is habituated to the stooge walking past the window. This needs to be repeated on many occasions with different stooges in order for him to generalise his behaviour. The training needs to be consistent so access to the window should be denied unless you are there to supervise accordingly.

The exact same training can be used for dogs who bark in the garden at neighbours etc. However for many dogs, just being in the garden is a rewarding outcome so this is another benefit that can be removed whenever they display barking behaviour. This is particularly true of dogs that are barking at other influences outside of your control like birds or wildlife. Each time he is let into the garden the [CLIX Long Line](#) should be fitted, immediately that he starts to bark you should pick up the line and quickly but calmly bring him into the house and shut the door. Wait for him to be quiet and calm before allowing him outside again, repeat as necessary. With practise your dog will learn that barking actually ends his fun and denies him access to the garden and does not gain your attention. For dogs that do habitually bark at birds etc then providing him with other forms of entertainment e.g. a chew bone or food dispensing toy can also help.

Again, access to the garden should be confined to period when you are able to carry out the training.

If you have deemed your dog to be anxious at these times, you should also read through 'reactionary barker' for tips on reducing his anxious behaviour.

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



Reactionary barker

Many of the principals previously described also apply to dogs that fall into this category. However, as discussed last week we also need to decide whether our dog is behaving anxiously or through excitement and frustration. Remember if your dog is anxious then his barking is a symptom of his anxiety, it is his anxiety that is the problem behaviour. If you attempt to resolve the barking without addressing his anxiety not only will you be unlikely to succeed you may actually make his behaviour worse! If you are unsure, then you should ask your vet to refer you to a suitably qualified behaviour specialist who can help you with your individual dog.

Reactionary barker (non-anxious); these dogs are behaving in a very similar way to the attention seeking/excitement barker in that they have linked their barking with achieving a rewarding outcome. Progressively the barking occurs earlier and earlier in the cycle of events as the barking itself adds to the general increase in arousal thus becoming self reinforcing.

As with the excitement barker, the best way of resolving the problem is to always make sure that your dog never achieves the desirable outcome whilst he is barking. You must also make sure that you are not acting as a secondary reinforcer by giving him attention at these times.

If your dog barks at the sight of another dog or person as they approach you should increase your distance until he stops, once he does you can proceed towards them again. This needs to be repeated until you can get all the way to the dog/person without barking, only then should the interaction (positive outcome) be allowed to occur. Alternatively, you can ask for your dog to sit and focus his attention on you using food or a toy reward. Praise for all calm, quiet behaviour and then release from the sit and allow the interaction to occur.

If your dog's reactionary barking occurs at the arrival to the park, you should calmly stand still and ignore him until he is quiet and calm before allowing him to run free. Walking past the entrance to the park several times before entering can also achieve a calmer dog.

If you drive to the park; you should stop any progression towards letting him out of the car until he stops barking. This may be broken down into several parts, for instance; arrive at park – barking starts = you stay in car until he is quiet. Get out of car – barking starts = stand still and ignore until quiet. Start to open door to let him out – barking restarts = close door immediately until quiet. Open door and let out once quiet.

Reactionary barker (anxious); Like us, dogs do not learn well when they are stressed and anxious; the more reactionary your dog is, the more aroused he is likely to be which also means he is less likely to learn anything positive from the experience. Reactionary barkers usually get progressively worse as they are often reinforced by both their owner's reaction and also by the negative reinforcement of the 'scary' object leaving! We have all seen owners whose dogs' react negatively to an approaching stranger or dog; the owner usually shortens the lead and scolds the dog, the closer the stranger gets the more restraint and admonishment occurs. Often the owner will physically drag the dog away whilst shouting at him. Once the stranger has passed, the owner relaxes and stops the admonishment and the restraint. Whilst the owner's behaviour is understandable, in reality they are likely to have made their dog's behaviour worse. Rather than learning not to bark; the dog associates the punishment with the approach of the other person or dog rather than with his own behaviour. Of course this just serves to further motivate him to keep the other dog/person away by barking!

Dogs that react to any stimulus because they are anxious need to be systematically desensitised. This basically means exposing him to a low level of the stimulus until he becomes habituated to its presence, only once he is calm and tolerant should you try and increase the level of exposure. This can be a lengthy process which takes time and patience.

If your dog is reactionary to other dogs; try walking him at a distance from other dogs where he is aware of their presence but not reactive (this is your safe distance). Allow your dog to look over at the other dogs intermittently but keep engaging him in other activities such as training or a game. By getting him to focus his brain onto another activity you will help to keep him calmer. Gradually as he becomes more tolerant and less inclined to focus on the other dogs, you can get a little closer. If at any point he reverts to barking, you should simply increase

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



the distance until he is calm again. With regular, controlled exposure your safety distance should soon reduce.

When dog's react anxiously towards other people, the stranger's reaction is often to try and make friends with the dog by talking to him or even stroking him. Unfortunately, this often has the opposite effect; the dog is reactive because he is fearful of the person's approach so barks a warning to keep them away, if the person then increases their level of interaction by coming closer, looking at or speaking to the dog, he is likely to feel his warning is being ignored and try harder to achieve his end goal i.e. get the approach to stop. Conversely however, if the person immediately leaves when the dog barks, his barking behaviour will have been successful, increasing his likeliness to bark in the future!

As previously described, the dog needs to be desensitised to strangers whilst he is still calm. The approaching stranger should not look at or speak to the dog; instead they should calmly stay at the safe distance to allow the dog to habituate to their presence. Ideally it should be the dog who then initiates the approach when he is calm and feeling confident enough to do so. Even then the stranger should not attempt to touch him; stroking a dog is not always a rewarding experience for him if he is not comfortable with the person doing the stroking, in the same way that you may enjoy a hug or a kiss from a loved one but would not necessarily be happy about having the same level of interaction with a stranger!

In both instances, food can be used to create a positive association with the presence of the scary stimulus; either given by the owner whilst the dog is being quiet or thrown by the approaching stranger.

If your dog is behaving reactively towards other dogs or people in an aggressive fashion, you should always seek professional help from a suitably qualified behaviour specialist.

Reactionary barker (chase motivated); many dogs react to moving objects such as cars, cyclists or livestock. This is especially true of 'herding' breeds such as collies. Again barking is not the real problem here, it is the chase behaviour that needs to be addressed in order to stop the barking.

Desensitisation can also be used to teach your dog that barking in these situations is not appropriate. The important element in this training is to expose the dog to stationary or very slow moving stimuli only, whilst giving him an alternative chase object such as a ball. He needs to learn that it is more fun to chase his ball than it is the car! Obviously this training needs to occur in very controlled situations so that there is no danger to the dog, other people or other animals. For instance play ball in a park close to a quiet road with the dog on a [CLIX Long Line](http://www.companyoofanimals.co.uk) (available from www.companyoofanimals.co.uk) to keep him safe.

It is helpful to keep a special toy that your dog does not have free access to; often just allowing your dog to carry the ball for short distances around the chase object will calm him and discourage the barking.

Anxiety and boredom barkers

Dogs that are overly anxious when left home alone are a common problem, often the first the owner knows of the problem is when a neighbour complains about the dog barking. As discussed in week one, nuisance barking can land you in trouble with the environmental health and earn you a hefty fine. However, this is another situation in which the underlying root of the problem needs to be addressed not just the symptom i.e. barking. If your dog is suffering from separation problems you should seek advice from a suitably qualified behaviour specialist to work out a program specific to you and your dog. However there are also some things that you can start at home to get you started;

- Your dog needs to learn that being left is a completely normal part of everyday life and not something to become distressed about. For this to happen, you need to habituate him to gradually increasing periods of isolation whilst also de-sensitising him to all the possible 'triggers' that warn him you are about to leave.
- Progress can only be dictated by the dog and his tolerance levels; if he is anxious after one minute of isolation, there is no point trying to stay away longer than that as his level of arousal will simply be too high for him

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



to be able to learn. Instead you should work on habituating him to the actual routine of you going out of the door and immediately returning, this should be repeated multiple times on each occasion until he is less reactive, only then should you attempt to stay away for a very short period.

- Remember that whilst the habituation needs to be progressive; you should frequently practise lower levels of exposure rather than an ever increasing period. For example if you achieve a tolerance level of ten minutes then frequently practise periods of five or less minutes. This will tend to build his confidence and reduce his overall anxiety making the end result of leaving him for longer periods ultimately easier to achieve!
- If your dog is reactive to your absence when you are at home. You should start to desensitise him to brief periods of isolation whilst you are at home rather than allowing him to follow you at all times. By using safety gates across the doorways to some rooms, you can prevent him from following you constantly.
- Practise putting him behind the gates regularly throughout the day (not just when you are going to leave). Vary the length of time that you leave him, sometime no more than a few minutes, sometimes an hour or so.
- Move around the house whilst he is behind the gate, frequently disappearing from view then reappearing again. Do not say anything on departure or arrival. You should also practise opening the front door frequently without leaving.
- If your dog becomes distressed then return to view but without giving him any direct attention, until he calms down. If necessary, you can go right up to the gate so that he can gain comfort by being able to make contact with you but you should still not give him any attention or even eye contact
- As his tolerance improves, you can vary the length of time you leave him.
- Desensitise your dog to all the 'triggers' that you are about to leave by practising them frequently without actually leaving; putting on coat, picking up keys etc are all classic cues.
- When you are really leaving, try to perform your routines out of sync; try to give him as few clues as possible e.g. put bag and coat in the car then come back into the house and sit down for ten minutes.
- Avoid giving your dog any attention at least twenty minutes before you leave to allow him time to accept less interaction before you actually go.
- Practise mock departures frequently, prior to actually leaving.
- Use food dispensing toys to keep him entertained and less focused on you during the day, we need to increase his independence. In general you should try and provide most/all of his meals through food dispensing toys to both provide him with mental stimulation and give him a positive outlet for chewing. Position the toys around the house so that your dog 'discovers' them rather than always receiving them from you.
- Try providing an old T shirt so that your dog always has something that smells of you close to hand.
- Leave a radio or the T.V. switched on for some background noise
- Practise simple 'stay' exercise with your dog, at home, in the garden and on walks. Tether him to a suitable place and take a step away, ignore any whining or pulling towards you and return once he is calm and reward him. If he jumps up or becomes very excitable as you return, you should immediately step away again until he is calm. Your dog should soon learn that the only way to engineer your return is to offer calm behaviour. Gradually you can step further away for progressively longer periods.

STOPS BARKING CHALLENGE

in association with Dog Train & Behave Week 2010



Boredom barkers; dogs that bark through boredom are suffering from a lack of mental stimulation. Whilst physical exercise is important to dogs so is mental exercise particularly for working breeds. Try and break up your dog's day with short sessions of play or training as well as walks. If you give your dog one long walk a day then if possible, try two shorter walks.

Food is another great way of providing mental stimulation; having food magically appear for free each day in a bowl is the norm for the average domestic animal. However, much can be achieved by having your dog work for his daily ration of food rather than receiving it for free. Imagine your dog were a stray, he would probably spend approximately 70% of his day looking for food; when it is provided for free however, he is likely to spend that time bored and under stimulated! There are now a huge range of food dispensing toys on the market that engage your dog's brain providing much needed mental stimulation. Rather than his dinner being a two minute affair, it can last for thirty minutes or more and give him a positive outlet for his energy!



FUN CHALLENGING GAMES & PUZZLES

- Interactive reward based games
- Suits all ages and sizes of dog



Great fun for all the family!



The Training and Behaviour Experts since 1979
www.companyofanimals.co.uk