



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

To Bark Or Not To Bark Part II

One hundred years ago, barking was regarded as nothing less than simply another item on a dog's 'to-do list. Today, researchers are discovering that there is a lot of information in a dog's bark. They actually bark for different reasons and why they bark can determine how obnoxious we may feel it is. Barking is one of the most common complaints among families and can be the deciding factor in taking the plunge in hiring a trainer. If you plug 'no barking' into a search engine, you will find a number of devices designed to eliminate the bark. One thing all these devices share is that not one of them takes into consideration why dogs bark. The truth is, we may never know why our pup is barking, but by looking at behavior and potential stimuli, we can take a good guess. Remember, the goal of this article is not to completely silence dogs, but to reduce excessive barking.

Before we go into three common reasons why dogs bark, consider this...how could we as the humans in our dogs lives contributed to the barking behavior? It is important to recognize our role in shaping our animals behavior. Did you inadvertently train your dog to bark? Some children throw occasional temper tantrums, but some children are very smart and have realized that if they whine long enough, or longer than last time, you will cave. Dogs are not any different. What you reinforce, you will see more of, and what you do not reinforce will go away. At the very least you will see a reduction in behavior.

What is your dog trying to say, anyways?

1. Your dog is outside and wants inside...or vice versa: Most dogs do not do good outside by their selves. They are social animals and need supervision. They also desire direction and guidance, which we as their humans can provide, as long as we go outside with them. Instead of ignoring their whining to come inside, we could have reinforced it by giving them what they wanted and let them inside. Whining is better than barking. However, what if we taught your dogs to ring a bell? We can teach behavior, to prevent unwanted behavior.

2. Boredom Barking: Again, dogs are social animals, and left to their own devices they, well, get bored. To prevent boredom barking limit your dogs access to the yard, unsupervised. Are you seeing a trend here? NO more than 15-20 supervised minutes. Yes, if it is raining, you do still have to be outside for this to be effective. Once you have decided your dog is not going to bark with you in the yard, leave him alone for just a few minutes. Make sure you play with him first, to burn some excess energy. When you leave him outside for a few minutes, make sure you leave him with an interactive toy or a puzzle feeder complete with a high-value food item. IF your dog is boredom barking because you leave him outside while you are gone, consider crate training. IT is safer and your dog cannot engage in nuisance behaviors. Each time he is allowed to engage in it, it gets stronger.

3. Territorial Barking when strangers or unknown animals are near the property: Train a rock-solid recall. Working on your dog's recall skills when no strangers or unknown animals are around will help with this. This is what we call an incompatible behavior. Your dog cannot run away from the fence line towards you and bark at the fence line at strangers at the same time. Begin by getting your dogs attention by calling their name. When they look at you, say 'Yes' and reinforce them. If they come to you say 'yes' and reinforce them. As they get better and better with this, add in distractions like dogs and strangers they know and practice recalling them away from the fence line. As the exercise gets progressively harder for your dog, make sure the rewards are getting progressively better.

Remember, management will be your best friend during training. Visits to the yard should be short and supervised. IF you need to, put your dog on a leash and find other ways to exercise him. Short and supervised visits to the yard on a leash will provide your dog with the opportunity to build new habits and give you the ability to intervene if needed. When in the aired with your dog, practice putting the leash on your dog and running away happily into the house. Once you are in the house begin asking for basic obedience and trick behaviors so you have something to reward. Become more aware of your visual and auditory surroundings. IF you hear something that may trigger your dog, put the leash on and run away into the house and begin basic obedience drills.

There are many other moments in time when your dog will bark, but a lot of those are outside the scope of this article. As usual, consistency is one of the most important tips to drive home. Coupled with positive reinforcement, you can effectively shape behavior and create a quieter version of your fabulous dog!

Until next time, keep it pawssitive!