



# THE DOGGY DIGEST

## TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

### **To Bark, Or Not To Bark? That Is The Question!**

Barking is a form of communication and perfectly normal behavior to engage in if you are a dog. In the next few articles, we are not going to be discussing how to eliminate barking but will be discussing how to reduce excessive barking. Barking is normal and we do not believe in removing a dog's means of communication. Dogs communicate in a variety of ways. Some of these include their tails, ears, lips, hackles, and less popular, their voices. Removing an animal's form of communication is inhumane and could be downright dangerous when considering that a growl is their non-aggressive attempt to let us know that they are scared or uncomfortable.

Exploring why dogs bark can be enlightening. When the time is taken to understand why your dog is barking, appreciation for your dog's loud outburst can be a surprising emotion. The truth is dogs bark for a variety of reasons. Barking can alert the presence of a stranger on your property, announce that it is time to go to the bathroom or expression of sheer delight in anticipation of an opportunity to play. IF my dogs bark because a stranger is by my front door, I am less likely to ask them to be quiet when compared to their joining the neighborhood symphony of boredom barking from the dog down the street. IN fact, I appreciate the barking when a stranger is at my front door. It alerts me to their presence and I may or may not decide to answer the door. However, if your dog's barking is linked to fear or aggression, has suddenly started without any environmental changes, primarily occurs when left alone or when isolated from humans, or you cannot identify any triggers or patterns you should consult an experienced trainer to begin problem solving and a counter conditioning program.

So, what is barking? Barking is cool because it is behavior. Behavior can be modified. Notice I said modified and not eliminated. When clients are annoyed by their dogs barking, and the dog begins to whine, they become confused when I reinforce the whining behavior. They also become confused if a dog stops barking after two-three barks. That is when we discuss a reduction. two barks certainly, is better than forty, and whining is also better than barking in general, as annoying (as whining can be).

So, to begin getting this nuisance behavior under control, begin by doing what we call, loading a bridge. This is where you will say the word, "Yes!" and then give your dog a treat. Do this seven times a day, for ten days. Your dog does not have to be doing anything when you are loading the bridge word, "yes". In fact, your dog can even be barking his head off. Once you begin this fun game with your dog, I bet you the hot dog you are waving he will quiet right down, and choose to focus on you, instead of the usual trigger. This is step one in the training process.

Now that we have an established bridge, you can use it to mark desired behavior, behavior we want to see more of. When your dog begins barking at a trigger, get your highest value food reward and wait for your dog to acknowledge you exist. IF your dog still hasn't realized you just went and got his favorite treats, walk over to him and put the treat right in front of his nose. Most dogs will smell the food, and dogs cannot bark and smell at the same time. Neither can you. Try it, try to smell something and say "yes". The moment your dog is silent and eating one of the treats, push your hand out towards them like you are signaling traffic to stop. Say "yes" and reinforce your dog. Repeat this over and over, as fast as you can for at least twenty repetitions. IF your dog is running or pacing back in forth, put them on a leash, so his choices are more limited. You can step on the leash, to free up your hands. Do not try to keep your dog silent, just get silent and reinforce it. Practice this exercise every time your dog is triggered to bark to interrupt the behavior.

It is important to note, that working on barking in the house, is completely different from working on excessive barking outside in the yard. IN the yard, there are different rules. You do need to get control over the behavior in the house first. Begin with these few steps, and we will explore the yard and forms of management in next months article. IF embarking on this alone makes you nervous, never hesitate to give us a call at 281-685-7601 or email [trelle@muttswithmanners.com](mailto:trelle@muttswithmanners.com).

**Until next time, keep it pawisitive!**