Dog Barking

Seek First to Understand, Then Seek to Be Understood

Courteous Canine, Inc.
Results the FUN way!

When we hear an undesired bark, our instinct is to stop it. While this is an understandable response, we challenge that notion and encourage first seeking to understand why a dog is barking, and then to seeking to have our need for quiet to be understood. It is by listening to barking first, that we can attain our request for quiet to be understood by our dogs.

Barking dogs are communicating. Frustration is often triggered because the reasons for barking are not clear, helping people understand why their dog is barking, is a good first step in addressing unwanted barking. So, let us seek to understand the reasons why dogs bark.

Common Reasons for Barking

Here are 11 of the most common reasons for barking. They vary from genetically motivated barking to dogs that are mentally ill or even a combination of some of the above. Unwanted barking is a complex issue.

Boredom

Many dogs bark because they are bored. Dogs should **never be left outside unsupervised**. Likewise, tying a dog to a stake or fence outside is a bad idea and a great way to enable unwanted barking. Dogs must live inside as they are **social** and will vocalize to entertain themselves and out of loneliness.

> " Dogs must live inside as they are social and will vocalize to entertain themselves and out of loneliness. "

Please note even two or more dogs left outside will long for **human companionship**. Avoiding outdoor barking is easy because you can **avoid leaving your dog outside unsupervised**. For outdoor barking that happens while supervised, investigate the cause of the barking, and then use the quiet cue, to end barking. See how to train quiet cue below.

Breed Related

Dogs that are bred to bark, bark more than dogs that are not bred to bark. Please note that dog genetics can vary even within breeds, these breed groupings are generalized for the purposes of this article. It is possible to decrease barking in dogs genetically bred to bark, it can be more challenging and may require more time.

Examples of dogs that are bred to bark, or vocalize are:

Terriers

Terriers are bred to go into holes and bark at its residents to **flush them out** enabling them to be chased, or grabbed or killed. Terriers often do this with rats who are highly intelligent and so a high degree of **persistence** is required, thus terriers often love to bark. Most find the sound of their voice rewarding. If you don't like barking, getting a terrier is likely not an ideal choice.

Herding Breeds

Australian Shepherds and other herding breeds **move livestock by barking at them**. This means they have been bred for hundreds of years to bark.

Hounds

Hounds are bred to **bark, and chase** hunted animals to certain locations, again hundreds of years of artificial selection are at work to create a dog that barks or bays, so these dogs often engage in vocalizing.

Startle

Bang! Imagine a sudden loud, sharp noise, both you and your dog startle, you may loudly say "what was that?" your dog however will likely bark. If I told you that under no circumstances was it ok for you to startle and say anything it would be impossible for you to comply. The startle response is a reflex. Just **like an eye blink** or your mouth producing saliva, it is not something that is subject to self-control.

" The startle response is a reflex. "

There is **good news** for some dogs with an exaggerated startle response. For example, a dog that was not socialized may startle at normal sounds or environmental changes. More information on this below under Tools for Communication and Change-Socialization. Back to the good news: when you reward a dog for recovery from startle **the startle response can decrease** and the number of **barks**

can decrease. So, while startling itself is unavoidable the intensity of the startle and the recovery from startle can be trained, by giving treats when they stop barking.

Alert

Alert barking is closely related to startle. A friend of mine tells a story of how his normally calm German Shepherd Dog completely "lost it" while looking out a back window and engaged in a very intense barking fit. My friend was unable to see anything out the window, so he left his dog safely inside and went outside. Surprise! He found a man hiding in a bush next to the very window that had triggered his dog to "lose it". My friend called the police and went inside to thank his dog for alerting him to a dangerous situation.

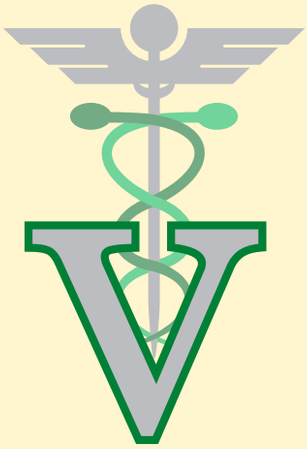
Alert barking is what we want our dogs to do, but when it becomes excessive, a dog barking at noises **that do not require our attention**, such as a dropped spoon, it can become a problem. Dogs that alert more than appropriate need to be evaluated so that a customized program can be designed to help them. Like the advice for startling above, there is hope, after investigating the cause for the alert, giving treats for quiet is often a successful strategy.

" Alert barking is what we want our dogs to do, but when it becomes excessive it can become a problem. "

Acknowledge the alert

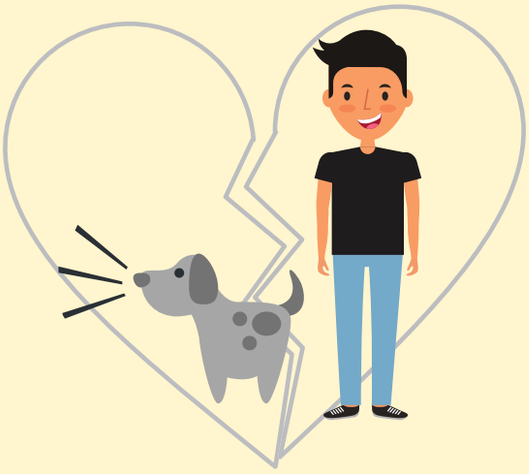
Barking serves a function of alerting to a situation. If a dog does not see you respond to that alert, they can become increasingly frantic and getting them to quiet will be unsuccessful.

Separation Related



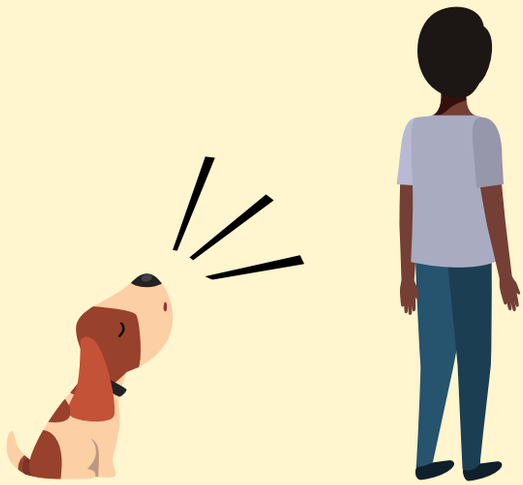
Separation Anxiety is a medical condition that requires medical attention by a **veterinarian**. Mild cases of separation related stress or dogs that require learning to be alone are addressed in this section.

Separation related barking can be confusing to both professionals and dog parents. The reason is because dogs don't always bark when they are alone. Some dogs only vocalize when a **specific person** or persons leave. Let's say the family consists of four people but the dog is bonded with Patty. It may be difficult for the family to identify that their dog only barks when Patty leaves and thus that this is separation related.

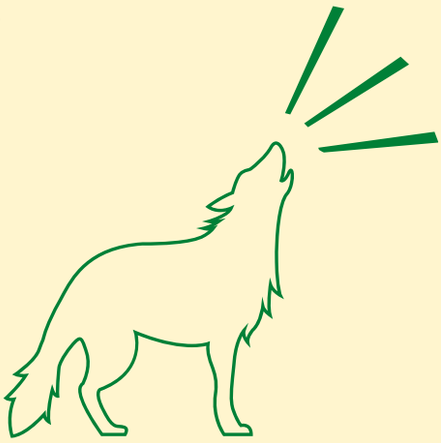


Also, some dogs can suffer from a condition called

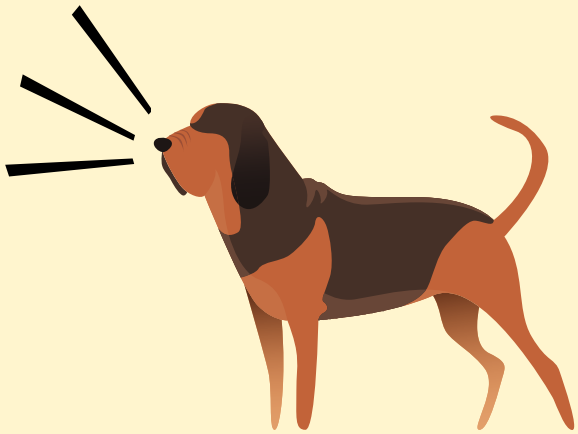
virtual separation anxiety which means that the person does not actually need to leave but simply the person turning their back can trigger anxiety which can then trigger barking. If virtual separation anxiety is occurring with more than one family member or with all family members, it can become hard to figure out the cause for the barking. If we don't identify a cause it becomes often impossible to change the behavior.



Note, **howling when left alone** is often a sign of separation related distress. Check with your trainer to help you determine if your dog has separation issues versus something that requires both **medical intervention** by a veterinarian and a **behavior change plan**.



Demand Barking



Demand barking is dogs barking to communicate their desire to obtain food or access to something. Your dog is **making a request**: loudly. You are eating dinner and your dog wants your food, so they start barking. The strategy is for you to be worn down by the barking until you give them food. **Giving them food of course rewards the barking**. Demand barking is barking that has been accidentally trained by the dog parent.

Dog parents can prevent demand barking by giving their dog a **stuffed Kong toy** *prior* to the situations that trigger demand barking.

Unidentified Cause

You may have no idea why your dog was just barking, but there is **always a cause**. Dogs can perceive sounds that we cannot. Also, not all human's hearing is the same, so it is possible that you just **missed the sound** your dog is barking at.

" It's possible that you just missed the sound your dog is barking at. "

Investigating the barking trigger by enlisting the help of a human with excellent hearing, and teaching quiet (see below) are both helpful.

Mental Illness Related

What if your dog barks at noises or "things" that no one can perceive? If this is the case, it could be that your dog is suffering from mental illness. Most people don't realize that **dogs can hallucinate** and that just like humans they can also have **psychosis**. This means their brain produces stimuli that don't exist to the rest of the world. These dogs need the most love and support of all dogs.

" there are Board Certified Veterinarians who can help these dogs "

The great news is that there are Board Certified Veterinarians who can help these dogs. They are called **Veterinary Behaviorists** and we have a list of local professionals who can help. If you are not local to us, you can do a search at The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior - AVSAB. (Click here)

PTSD Related

(Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)

Just like people who have been to war or experienced other traumatic events, dogs can also experience PTSD. This was discovered when dogs went to war. Soldiers got PTSD and reported that their dogs appeared to display the same behaviors. PSTD in dogs is a **medical condition** that requires the help of a board-certified veterinary behaviorist.

" PTSD in dogs is a medical condition that requires the help of a board-certified veterinary behaviorist "

Noise Sensitivity or Phobia

Phobias are medical issues that require the attention of a vet. Dogs that have unusual sensitivities to noise **can often be trained**. These dogs need extra love and patience. Living with a dog with noise sensitivity can present special challenges but as with other challenges help is available. **Border Collies** are the number one herding dog in the world and part of what they were bred for is a fast response to whistles at huge distances. So, it should be no surprise that Border Collies are also the number one breed for noise sensitivity. While this means they cannot magically be "cured" of noise sensitivity it does mean **we can help them**. Products like **Mutt 3 Muffs** can be used to muffle sound: www.MuttMuffs.com, or you can also use a swim snood to accomplish the same, www.DoggLegs.com sells neoprene **swim snoods** that can be used to hold stuffed cotton inside the dog's ears.

Combination of Any of the Above

In many situations, barking dogs can also have **multiple reasons** for barking. Lets use a fictitious dog as an example, "Barkalot." Barkalot is a herding breed so he is **genetically predisposed** to barking, he also has a lot of energy, so he **gets bored easily**. When his mom gets on the phone he loves to bark for **attention**. He also has **sound sensitivity** and **PTSD** from when he was present during a medical emergency and his mom was taken to a hospital via a very noisy ambulance. As a result Barkalot has a list of the following triggers:

- Boredom
- Other dogs barking
- High pitched sounds like dings or beeps (such as a microwave ding)
- Sirens
- Dogs barking on TV

Below you see customized recommendations for Barkalot. Let's talk about how to create quiet and reduce barking.

Understanding the motivation for behaviors is the first step to changing behaviors. That is why the information above is so important. If we understand why, it becomes much easier to figure how to set your dog up for success and what tools will be appropriate to use.

Tools for communication and change

On the surface many “cures” for unwanted barking sound great. Slick marketing campaigns and false promises make these products even more attractive. When your dog barks you may have thought that you wish there was something fast and effective to immediately stop barking. The truth is that there are no short cuts. There are products that can *appear* to work in the short term that end up **causing more problems long term** and, in some cases, cause the equivalent of a dog **nervous breakdown**. Tragically, these breakdowns can be fatal to dogs and the companies that made the products are never held liable. It is a loophole, there is no dog consumer protection.

" The truth is that there are no shortcuts "

What to avoid: aversive stimulation

Many dog owners are not open to using the tools that are listed below, but here is the list:

Ultra Sonic Devices

These devices do not work. Clients report that if they work, they work maybe 2-5 times, and then they **stop working entirely**. Your dog would appreciate you not trying them because the ultra-sonic noise is **painful** to their ears.

Spray Fluids

Whether you buy a spray device or make your own, this method of stopping behavior **teaches your dog nothing**. Dogs are smart enough to know that you are the one spraying them so the use of this type of device is damaging to your trust and bond with your dog. **Trust and bonding** is what keeps dogs from biting humans so anything that is punishing applied by human hands increases the risk of dog bites. Even if your dog is deeply bonded with you, making the choice to use a tool listed here **can lead to biting**.

Corporal Punishment

It is never a good idea to **throw things** at dogs, to **scream** at or to **hit** them. Again, doing these things erodes trust and bonding and increases **bite risk**.

Bark Collars

The biggest problem for dogs that bark are bark collars, also called ecollars. These collars shock dogs and the **pain** of the shock causes many dogs to fall silent. **Falling silent** does *not* mean you are trained. If I scream and you slap me, that does not teach me how to handle the situation that caused me to scream. And, also hitting a human for screaming has legal repercussions. **Inflicting pain is never an answer**. Triggering fear via **intimidation** is never an answer.

" pain and fear is never an answer "

Please say no to aversive stimulation, your dog will love you for it.

Effective Tools

Understanding the **motivation** for behaviors is the first step to changing behaviors. That is why the information above is so important. If we understand why, it becomes much easier to figure how to set your dog up for success and what tools will be appropriate to use.

Many of the tools listed below apply to all barking: 1-5. Tools 6-9 only apply to some dogs. Check with your trainer to see which tools apply to you and your dog.

1 Increase Physical Exercise

This advice seems counter intuitive. What would physical exercise have to do with unwanted barking? Dog trainers have a saying: **a good dog is a tired dog**. This statement applies more to unwanted barking than any other behavior. One of the best tools for behavior change is to set your dog up to engage in a behavior that is incompatible with barking. In this case a fantastic incompatible is sleeping!

Barkalot is going to be engaging in **full speed running** play activities twice a day. His mom takes him to a fenced in area and let him play catch with a disc. This activity will ensure that he is running full speed for about 20 minutes. If she wants to take him for a walk that activity will be in addition to these full speed running sessions, but full speed running twice a day is the non-negotiable. When this form of exercise was introduced into Barkalot's day, barking reduced by more than half!

2 Increase Mental Exercise

Boredom is not just remedied by physical exercise, it also requires mental workouts. A great way to achieve this is to play **scent games** with your dog. Finding food games or finding a specific odor (which is even more complex than finding food) activates 60% of a dog's brain. This is because a dog's brain is built for sniffing. When Barkalot's mom added three scent games sessions to his week, barking reduced by ten percent! Barkalot's mom reports that the days she does the scent games he sleeps two hours more than on days she does not. But even on the days that don't include scent games Barkalot barks less.

3 Reduce or Eliminate Triggers

What Barkalot's mom did to reduce his triggers is she made a list of barking triggers she could control:

- Household item buzzers and dings
- Dogs on TV

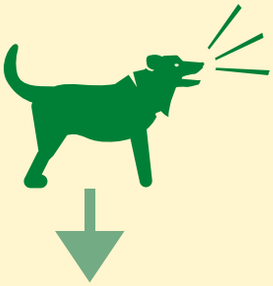
And a list of barking triggers she could *not* control:

- Neighborhood dogs barking
- Doorbells

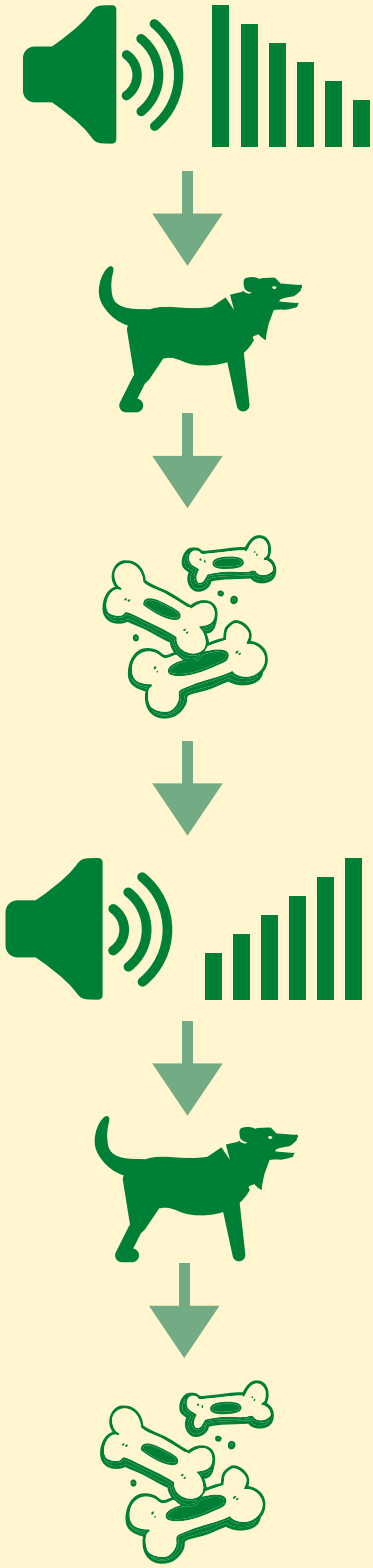
Mom's plan was to teach behaviors for the triggers she could control and to use a **"quiet" cue** to turn off barking for barking triggers she could *not* control. Here is the plan for the barking triggers she could control. Mom noticed that if Barkalot was upstairs the household item noises in the kitchen would **not trigger barking**. Whenever mom was getting ready to use a noise making appliance she just sent Barkalot upstairs. During the training phase she would **hide treats or a stuffed Kong toy** for him ahead of time. That way when she sent him up he would find a surprise, but soon Barkalot learned the pattern and **chose to remove himself** from the kitchen to the upstairs, which mom sporadically rewarded.

4

Counter Conditioning with Systematic Desentiziation (CCDS)

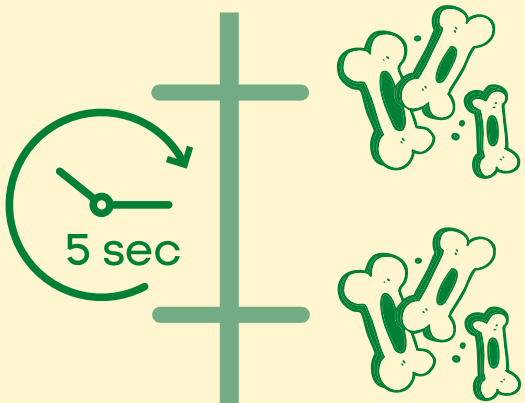


For the issue of dogs on TV, Barkalot's mom chose another method, making use of the **volume control** function.

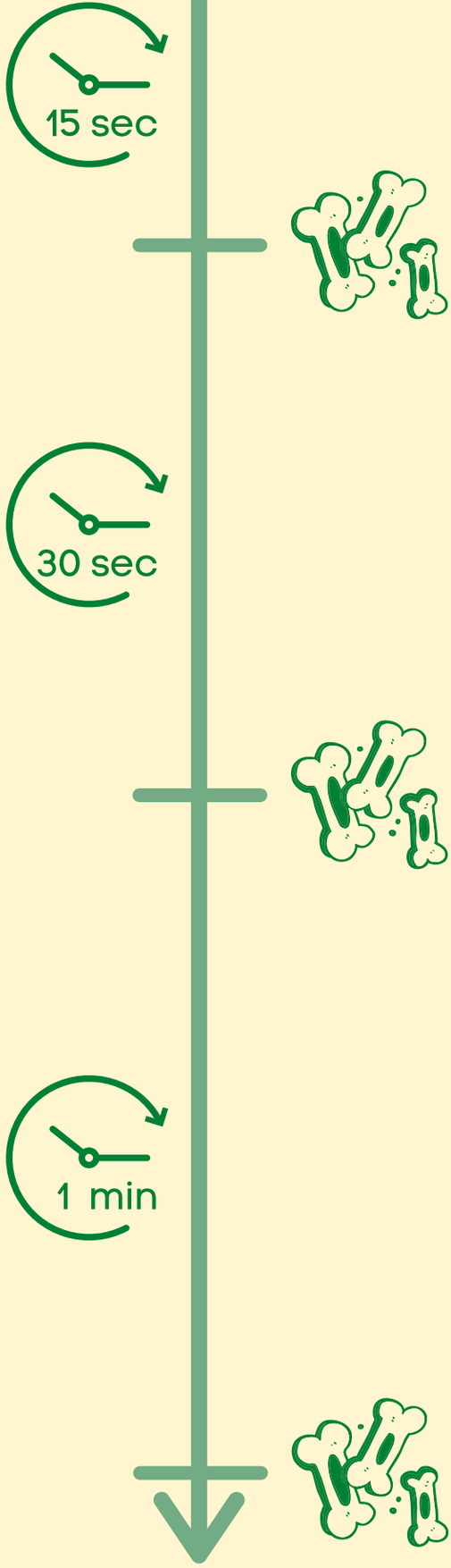


Barkalot's mom noticed that if dogs were barking on TV and the volume was almost completely turned down, Barkalot would not bark. She used this to get success when dogs were barking on TV and when Barkalot did not bark she would **give him cookies**. Initially this was a LOT of cookies. Mom used a method called "**rapid fire**", once she had success with feeding him nearly constantly, she started to insert **tiny pauses**. As he became more successful, she **increased these pauses** and **gradually increased the volume**.

This is called:
Counter Conditioning with Systematic Desensitization (CCDS) – this process of **"rapid fire", to pauses, to**



bigger pauses is scientifically proven to be successful and is something that professional trainers use. The “rapid fire” phase uses a lot of treats so mom made sure that she had a large Tupperware container next to her bed with tiny, tiny treats in it. She found this training fun and joked with her friends that she is so good at training her dog she can do it while laying down. This tool **reduced Barkalot’s barking** at dogs barking on TV to almost zero. Mom was able to accomplish this in only five training sessions, all while laying down and eating popcorn herself!



5 Train Quiet

Training quiet is a **fun** activity. People who want to teach their dogs quiet should charge money for people to come and observe or participate in this activity. The first step in teaching quiet is to **be quiet yourself**. You can't engage in "barking" if you are teaching your dog to be "quiet". Barkalot's mom noticed this early on when she started to train "quiet". Before hiring a dog trainer frustration would get the best of Barkalot's mom and if Barkalot barked she would shout: "Quiet!" or something like, "For crying out loud! Do you have to do that! It is so annoying!" Almost immediately she noticed that Barkalot appeared to **answer her vocalizations** with more of his own. Once she hired a pro, she was asked to record number of barks and ignoring the barking resulted in less barks than when she "joined in". **Tracking barking** with tick marks on a sheet of paper **empowers good training** decisions and ultimately control over barking problems. Empowered, mom made a note, **no more shouting**.

Next, for more fun, she learned that rewarding Barkalot for doing absolutely nothing increased the behavior of him doing absolutely nothing.

Doing "nothing":

- Barkalot is sleeping
- Barkalot is dozing

- Barkalot is laying down fully relaxed
- Barkalot is very calmly walking across the room
- Barkalot is breathing deeply or sighs

Please note all of these behaviors are calm and all of them do not include barking.

Behaviors that are excluded from doing "nothing":

- Looking out the window
- Any body position that includes a suddenly raised head
- Any behavior that includes ear twitching
- Any body position that includes scanning of the environment

Mom loves giving her dog a cookie for “free” for doing **absolutely nothing**. Giving cookies for “nothing” became a fun game and one that she found relaxing. To make the activity more **zen**, Barkalot’s mom started to breathe deeply when she would notice her dog doing nothing, she then would **slowly** reach for the cookie container and give him a **treat**. At first Barkalot would get all excited when she reached for the treat container, but soon he would **settle back to doing “nothing”** very quickly. Unwanted barking decreased even more as Barkalot started to learn to do more of “nothing”. Another way to think of this is that Barkalot's mom was **capturing relaxation**. More on relaxation training below.

Now that 'Team Barking Less' had more success they were ready to add an actual cue to the behavior of being calm and quiet.

First, capture quiet

The first thing mom's trainer recommended was to give the cue **when the behavior of calm and quiet was actually happening** and most importantly to give the cue quietly.

Second, use cue when barking

The next step was to use it when Barkalot was **actually barking**, mom noticed that if she almost whispered the cue, Barkalot had a curious head tilting response. It was like a very calm "quiet" cue was actually helping her get the behavior of quiet. The trainer explained that this is because of a phenomenon called **Emotional Contagion**.

Emotional contagion

Emotional Contagion is the process of **one being infecting another with their emotions**. So, if a dog parent is calm, they can "infect" their dog with calm. If a dog is anxious, they can "infect" their dog parent with this emotion. Emotional Contagion is always happening, but people and dogs **vary in how**

susceptible they are to being infected with another's emotions. Dogs that often bark are frequently more prone to being infected with even more anxiety. This is empowering information to understand.

It is extremely helpful to model the desired emotional state when training something like "quiet". After only three short sessions Barkalot appeared to be recognizing the pattern: being calm and quiet + mom saying quiet = cookie. They were ready to start using the actual "quiet" cue in a more difficult setting.

Quick Recap on Training Quiet:

1. Train the word "quiet" by associating it with quiet (no barking involved).
2. Use the word "quiet" in a calm and whispering fashion when your dog is barking at something that is triggering soft barking (a situation of minor startle or reaction to a somewhat familiar sound not connected to a lot of excitement.
   Examples: (will vary depending on the dog)
   a. Something was dropped
   b. Someone lightly knocks on your interior door
   c. Someone enters the room saying hello in a calm fashion

3 The high excitement situation. So, the moment came, the doorbell rang and Barkalot barked! As usual his mom was ready, she had a Tupperware container with small high value treats next to the door and she began counting his barks. One, two, three, four, five, by the fifth bark the intensity was down, and mom was willing to bet $50 that it would work, so she calmly and softly said, "quiet". Drumroll please, it worked, Barkalot stopped barking. She immediately gave him cookies and they had a joyful petting and praising session. She told him he was a genius, and he gave her kisses and happy wiggles. 'Team Barking Less' decided that five barks was a good number and from then on five barks became the rule. This consistency helped Barkalot learn and now at times if his mom forgets to say "quiet" he will stop on his own after five barks.

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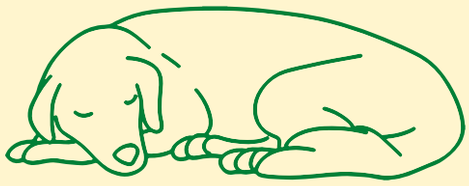


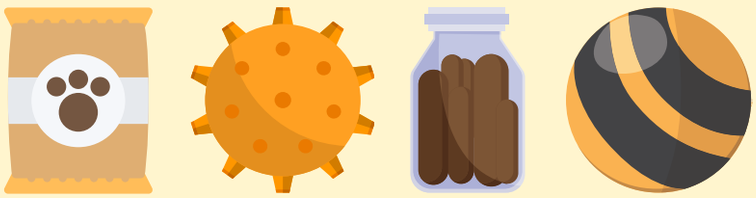
Relax Game

This game was referenced above as part of training "**nothing**". Expanding on this concept, we can teach dogs to **physically relax** their bodies and to assume certain **positions that contribute to relaxation**. Teaching dogs to relax is fundamental not only to reducing unwanted barking but just for the quality of life. All of us love touching our dogs, so notice what gets your dog relaxed. Tip: **a relaxed dog is on his side and looks like he is melting into his bedding**. Dogs that are **upside-down** feel safe and are relaxed. Using your hands, your own calm breathing and by relaxing your own muscles you can set your dog up for relaxing. Once you have a consistent method for getting your dog to relax, you can name the behavior: **relax**. You can then use this cue to help your dog relax. A relaxed dog is much **less likely to bark**.

7 Socialization / Habituation

Dogs that have lacked normal exposure to people, dogs, and normal households are referred to as under socialized. These dogs, often rescues, need extra TLC to learn about the world. The process of exposing dogs to new things and beings and letting them explore is called **habituation**. But here is the tricky thing, habituation only works if the dog had *some* socialization in the first place. So, the dogs that need socialization, the **under-socialized** ones, can *not* just be exposed to new things and beings and be expected to be ok with it. Instead, these dogs will often become more worried and even fearful. Exposing dogs to new things and triggering worry or fear is not socialization. **Socialization should be fun.**

So how do you make exposure to new things fun? You just add some food and toys. Get the dog's tail wagging and you are socializing. No wagging tail, and you are probably shooting yourself in the foot.



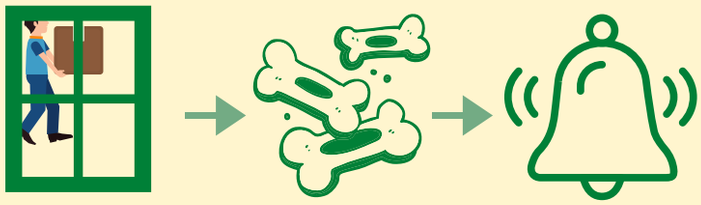
So, what does socialization have to do with barking?

You probably have already guessed it but if a dog is not socialized or is improperly socialized, they may bark at **new** things or beings. So proper socialization is a way to prevent unwanted barking. For dogs that have not been socialized you can still socialize them properly and this will reduce unwanted barking.

Please note that dogs with **extreme** worry or fear do not need socializing, they need behavior consulting and may also need to see a veterinary behaviorist.

8 Antecedent Control

This is an absolute favorite tool for unwanted barking because it starts the training process BEFORE any barking occurs. Let's go back to 'Team Barking Less'. Here is how they used Antecedent Control, training before the barking happens. Doorbells are a trigger for Barkalot, but luckily there is something that happens **before** doorbells ring and that is people walk down the sidewalk. Barkalot's mom home office faces a window that looks out on to the street. Mom noticed that she could easily get treats in her hand and call her dog to her before any delivery people would ring her doorbell. This entire process, she timed it, took less than five minutes: look out window to notice truck, grab treats, call dog, rapid fire treats to get no barking.



When mom did this training something interesting happened: Barkalot seemed to **recognize** the process and started to display more **relaxed** behaviors. Since mom started to feed before any barking happened, she was actually able to **prevent** barking. After only ten sessions of delivery drivers Barkalot would not bark providing she was feeding him. Mom decided that she does, in this situation, want Barkalot to bark so she stopped the antecedent control for doorbells, but she agrees this is a valuable and powerful tool.

9 Veterinary Behavior Interventions

Some dogs have deeper problems than what dog training can address, **separation** related issues, **phobias** or other **mental health** issues. These issues don't just disappear, no matter how much we wish they will. Thankfully, there is help. If you think your dog has a mental health issue, please don't waste time, get your dog the help they need. It is worth it, not just for your dog but for your own wellbeing

Conclusion

By reading this article you have made an investment, clearly you are motivated and desire to help your dog be successful. When you bring openness and curiosity to your dog's barking problem you will find the secrets to success: attention to detail, generous rewarding and compassion. We are here for you to help find your path to less barking. Both you and your dog will have a better life. Happy "quiet."

Courteous Canine, Inc.

Results the FUN way!

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