



Behavior Modification Handout

Excessive or Uncontrollable Barking

Barking and vocalizing is a normal behavior for your dog. A certain amount of barking is to be expected however excessive and uncontrolled barking can become a problem if left unattended. Having realistic expectations about your dog's vocalization will help you to manage and understand this behavior. Determining what is motivating your dog to bark will help to create a behavior modification plan to redirect and control undesired behavior.

Why Is My Dog Doing That?

Determining what is stimulating your dog to bark or vocalize will take a bit of detective work. You may even come up with more than one stimulus or reason for the barking. Targeting the reason or reasons for barking will be the critical first step in addressing this behavior problem. Don't be tempted to skip ahead and try different things to stop the unwanted barking until you have identified the cause. Some common reasons that dogs will vocalize:

- Aggression – territorial, protective, predatory
- Alert or greeting
- Soliciting play
- Attention seeking
- Boredom or social isolation
- Comfort seeking
- Fear or anxiety
- Pain
- Frustration
- Compulsive behavior or cognitive dysfunction

Gathering information about your pet's barking and vocalizing behavior should start with: what, when, where and how in order to get to the why.

1. What does the vocalizing sound like?

- barking
- growling
- crying / whining
- howling
- yelping

2. How does he look when vocalizing?

- friendly
- fearful
- threatening
- playful
- painful

3. What is he barking at?

- you
- strangers
- other dogs / animals
- something new in the environment
- inanimate objects
- atypical behavior (abnormal, strange)

4. Where is he barking?

- inside
- outside

- at the fence or tied up
- in the car
- on walks or on the leash

5. When is he barking?

- certain time of the day
- only when alone
- when he is with you
- only certain days of the week (garbage day)

It will also be important to observe your dog's body postures. The way your pet holds and carries his body will give you some insight to motivation, especially in cases of pain or aggression.

Managing Your Environment

There are no quick fixes for an excessive barking problem. Trying to control this behavior can be frustrating and stressful for you and your pet. Often managing your dog's environment can be a reasonable and simple solution for a barking problem. Restricting your pet's visual exposure to an outside stimulus can eliminate triggers and create a calmer environment. If your dog can see out a large window of your home and barks all day at life passing by, then blocking his view will decrease and possibly even eliminate the stimulation causing the barking. You should also consider noise and certain sounds as a stimulant and control or eliminate these if possible.

You should not encourage patrol type behaviors by teaching your dog "watch-em", "whose that" or any other guarding cues. You should encourage calm behavior such as sitting quietly when anyone approaches your house by offering food treats and verbal praise.

If your dog barks while unsupervised in the yard or at your fence you will need to supervise all yard time and interrupt and redirect any barking episodes. Barking should not be left unattended for prolonged periods of time. Uncontrolled barking will quickly become a bad habit and make re-training more difficult.

Encouraging Appropriate Behavior

There are lots of things you can do to help your dog make good choices. It is up to you to train your dog or puppy and start him off on the right paw! Limiting his

ability to make mistakes will prevent bad habits from forming. Set him up for success.

- Always supervise your pet when he is outside.
- Sign up for a basic dog obedience class
- Be aware of breed characteristics. Some dogs will naturally be more vocal than others, for example hound breeds (beagles, bassets) and some working breeds (huskies, malamutes). Be realistic in your expectations.
- Provide plenty of one-on-one time with your pet.
- Ensure your dog or puppy is getting enough exercise and playtime (see the exercise handout for more info.).
- Provide plenty of interesting toys and activities to keep your dog busy when he is alone (a KONG stuffed with peanut butter and kibble!!).
- Doggie day care may be an option for a dog that barks when left alone during the day.
- Never inadvertently reward your dog when he is barking by giving him attention or giving in and letting him have what he wants (a toy, to be let out of his crate, your attention). Always wait for quiet to reward, or redirect and reward for a cue like sit or down.
- Teach your dog or puppy a “speak” cue. This will actually put vocalization on cue and more under your control. You can then work on the “quiet” or “hush” cue. When your dog barks at a stimulus allow an appropriate response, 3-4 barks, then get his attention (interrupting the behavior will normally stop barking) and reward non-barking or “quiet” with a food treat. Keep your interruption low key and non-stimulating.....no yelling or punishment. Once he starts to anticipate and connect the food reward with the quiet behavior add the verbal cue “quiet” then offer the reward.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Using physical punishment will not correct the undesired behavior and may result in other behavior problems emerging.

- Your dog or puppy may learn to be afraid of you.
- He may become defensive and develop aggressive behaviors.
- He could shy away from physical interactions with you, like not wanting to be petted.
- Fearful behaviors will influence future training and make learning difficult for you pet.

