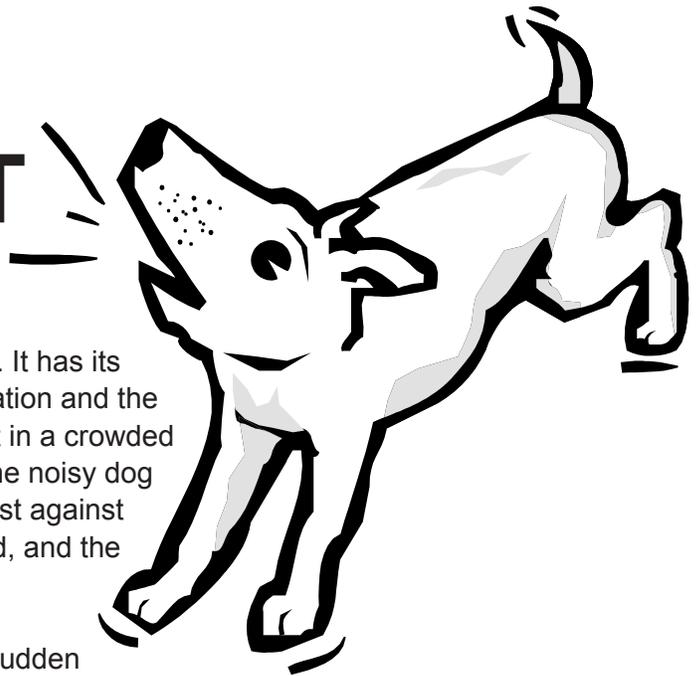


BREAKING THE BARKING HABIT



Barking has become more of a problem than ever before. It has its time and place. It serves the dog as a form of communication and the master as a warning of possible approaching danger. But in a crowded world where men and their pets occupy close quarters, the noisy dog can be a major social nuisance. In fact, murmurs of protest against this form of ear pollution are being heard through the land, and the dog owner had better take notice and do something.

The dog that barks at strangers and others dogs, at the sudden sound of a doorbell or footsteps in the driveway, even at the passing fire engine is performing a natural and valuable service. These are habits you don't want to break. If the dog continues to bark after the threat has disappeared or after you've told him to stop, it's time for a little discipline. An even worse offender is the dog that whines, howls or barks incessantly when he's left alone. It may be complaining against boredom and neglect or it may simply be untrained and spoiled. In either case it is a pest.

STARTING YOUNG

The best time to attack the problem is when your pet is a puppy. When it barks in play or protest, you need to put a stop to it--after a reasonable length of time. Firmly command "Quiet" or "that's enough." If it doesn't get the idea, demonstrate by holding its mouth shut for a moment. Remember that you're teaching, not punishing, so don't further excite it by yelling or hitting it. If it doesn't respond and seems to be developing into a habitual noisemaker, douse it in the face with a little water. This is an effective shock treatment. Use a spray bottle or keep a water pail close by as a reminder of the consequences.

The older dog that barks or howls when it is alone is a more complicated problem. If your dog spends much of its day in solitary, try to set aside time to exercise it before you leave and after you come home. This will go a long way toward keeping it quiet and content. However, if it is still inclined to howl or yap in confinement, you will need to teach it to be quiet when it is alone in the house.

ISOLATION TREATMENT

Start your lessons some weekend morning after a walk or playtime, when your dog is feeling relaxed and assured. Put it in a room with some familiar toys, tell it to stay, then shut the door and go away. If it starts to howl or bark, go back immediately and scold it sternly. Usually verbal punishment is enough, but if your dog begins its commotion when you leave again, bang loudly on the door as you say "No" or "Quiet." Let your dog know you mean business when you say "Quiet," and as soon as this takes effect be sure to really go away. You won't fool him if you stand outside the door or go into the next room. After a half-hour of silence let him out for an hour of liberty, and be sure to praise him for his good behavior. Then shut him away again, extending his stay to an hour this time. Repeat this process throughout the day, making it clear you're firm and serious, even though the here-again gone-again act may seem ridiculous to both of you.

THE BACKYARD BARKER

Use the same training, with a slight variation. If your dog is a backyard dog pound loudly on his kennel roof or on the back door to shock him into silence. Use the water treatment if he persists. You may have to get into the car and drive away during the first few sessions. In time you should be able to silence him with a command called from the house. Two simple lessons should come from this training. One is that he is expected to be quiet when he is alone and the other is that you don't always come back and praise him for good conduct. Don't ever let him down on your part of the contract, and don't ever let him lapse into the old yap habit. Another form of training, to be considered, is the Citronella Spray Collar. This is a very effective form of training for the barking dog. It works on large or small, inside or outside dogs. The collar simply sprays a small amount of nontoxic citronella each time the dog barks. The dog smells it and stops barking due to the scent, which he does not care for. The association with barking and the scent is not favorable to him-- he will stop barking. This type of collar should only be used for limited periods of time (i.e.- at night). These collars can be purchased at your local pet shop or by catalog.

Most dogs soon accept being alone, especially if they get a reasonable amount of companionship and exercise when the family is at home. If yours is the exception, you may have to hire someone to walk him during the day. Pet sitting is a common service in most cities now. There are always children in suburban areas that will serve as paid dog companions. A second animal -- a cat or another dog -- sometimes works. With the latter you run the risk of the new pet learning bad habits from the old one. If your pet resists all other solutions, seek the help of a professional trainer.

BREEDS VARY

Some breeds are harder to train to be quiet than others. Ironically, the smaller breeds, which are those most adapted to city life, are the ones most prone to yap or howl in confinement. Terriers, nervous and energetic by nature, are often noisy. Some of the hounds are inclined to bark. Toy breeds are very vocal but low in lung power. A learned habit can usually be unlearned. Highly civilized animals, such as the Seeing Eye Guide Dog, communicate the complicated signals to their master in silence.

Thousands of complaints about noisy dogs pour into animal regulation departments annually. The barkers give a bad reputation to all dogs and they pose a very real threat of strict laws governing pet ownership. Don't let your dog be one of the guilty few, train it to join the silent majority.



San Bernardino County
Animal Care & Control Program

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