

## **BARKING DOGS or How to Become Your Dog's Best Friend & Have a Peaceful Neighborhood**

Let's say you have a dog that barks, a LOT. You *want* your dog to bark to let you know when there is a possible intruder, but out of control continuous barking, especially when it's of a shrill tone, is very irritating to everyone, *especially to your neighbors*.

Some neighbors will become so fed up they will call the police or worse, try to poison your dog. As responsible dog owners it is up to us to pro-actively deal with this problem and protect our dogs at the same time.

Enough complaints to the police and you will be fined and/or ordered to get rid of your dog.

It is your duty as a member of the community to get this barking under control. The steps you need to take will not only make your neighbors happy but *your dog will be happier too* if you become the respected leader of "the pack" also known as Alpha.

### **WHY DOGS BARK**

Dogs will bark for many reasons. Dogs will bark when they play or try to protect your property. They can also bark if they are anxious, bored, lonely or frustrated.

Dogs are social pack animals, and when you bring one into your home you become an extension of the pack. There is always a hierarchy in the pack order and ideally you will become the Pack Leader/Alpha.

Dogs that are forced to take on the roll of Pack Leader by our own negligence in understanding pack dynamics are often under a tremendous amount of stress, especially if the dog is one of the smaller breeds. They know they are small and therefore have to take greater measures to do the job of Pack Leader.

This is often demonstrated by any combination of excessive barking, territorial marking and destructive chewing. Many "potty" accidents are actually the result of a dog that feels he must take charge and protect the pack and territory because *you* don't seem to be the leader. Dogs that are stressed by being in charge can become overly sensitized to every little sound and start barking at the drop of a pin. This is *not* a happy dog.

### **TAKING CHARGE AND BECOMING PACK LEADER**

What you need to do is let the dog know that you appreciate his help but that *you* have the situation under control. You need to communicate to your dog that you are a competent and fair Pack Leader.

How do you do this? By being consistent with your commands and actions! If your dog always barks at the front door or when put out into the yard, *restrict the dog's access to these areas unless you are there to take charge*. Your dog will need to *earn the privilege* of accessing these areas on his own by showing that he understands *your* rules and respects *you* as the Pack Leader.

You need to be CONSISTENT with the **command** you use *and* the **consequence/correction** you follow up with when the dog **doesn't** mind the command.

When starting this training **always** have the dog on a 6-foot leash or a 15-foot cotton web long line. You must be able to deliver an immediate and emphatic correction if the dog ignores you.

You most likely have already trained your dog to ignore you by giving repeated commands and/or threats of corrections that are never or belatedly delivered! The time to stop this inconsistency is NOW!

## **THE TRAINING PROCESS**

It is natural for dogs to vocalize which is why you should never say “NO” to a barking dog. “No” means “*never*” and that would be unnatural and silly, not to mention, pointless. However, this does not mean that you need to accept, or subject your neighbors to, nuisance barking.

The beauty of this method is that you can easily set up the situation to work on the problem at a time when you are prepared to be in control.

If your dog barks at the front door when people are just passing by ask someone to pass by, making some noise while you work with the dog on leash. When the dog learns to respect your authority in this situation increase the dog’s ability to mind you with greater distraction, such as having someone ring the doorbell.

1. When your dog barks first PRAISE the dog for sounding an alarm. He is doing his part of the Pack duty. Remember, you want him to let you know if there is an intruder.
2. Then use the command “ENOUGH”, *once*. “ENOUGH” means “*stop what you are doing now*”. Use a serious but not angry tone and say it with emphasis: “*EEE-NUF!*”
3. The correction will be a swift, short tighten/release on the collar. Some dogs are responsive to these corrections on a regular buckle collar but you might find a chain slip collar delivers a “cleaner” correction.

Dogs naturally understand a neck correction: this is how dogs correct each other! They do not correct each other by hold their muzzles closed or nagging threats.

If the dog doesn’t stop barking, follow up with an *immediate* correction. The correction should be performed as a matter of fact, without anger. The correction should be as light as possible *while still being effective*. Initially, start out with lighter corrections until you find your dog’s attention threshold. Be careful to not keep the collar tight on the neck. The tightening should always be followed by an immediate release of pressure.

Repeating infective/mushy corrections are cruel and will desensitize your dog to fair corrections. Your goal is that the correction will be just emphatic enough that the one correction will stop the barking.

4. As soon as the dog minds your command or correction, give calm but attentive PRAISE. This should be with your warm tone of voice and pats or strokes.

**DO NOT USE FOOD AS A REWARD** for good behavior. Why? Because the pack leader doesn’t do this! Dogs will give up food to their superiors in the pack or to pups that can’t fend for themselves. You don’t want to let your dog think he is above you in the pack order! You want your dog to *respect* you as pack leader, not expect you to provide bribes for his compliance. It is *your* job to earn that respect by learning to communicate clearly and effectively with your dog.

DO NOT give commands when you can't follow up with a correction! It's not a bad idea to have squirt bottles filled with plain water strategically placed throughout your home for long distance corrections when the dog isn't on lead.

5. Consider whether you might have given your dog more responsibility than they can handle. You can humanely restrict the dog's area of guarding to a single room or a crate if the single room is too much for them to calmly be in charge of. Additional freedom must be earned, and earned gradually. Be sure that you are consistent and fair with your confinement and supervised exercise schedule. Feeding your dog in a crate of his very own is highly recommended. Remember, they are den creatures. They like caves!

### **REINFORCING YOUR POSITION AS PACK LEADER**

Dogs like and need direction. They thrive on having defined boundaries. Call it a "job". Dogs left to their own devices to define their "job" frequently make decisions that we don't find acceptable. A major part of being a responsible dog owner/ pack leader is to define the dog's position within the pack and define their duties for them. It is also natural for dogs to periodically test their leader's authority and competence so you will want to reinforce your position on a daily basis.

Basic reinforcement of your and the dogs position in the pack should include:

1. Making the dog get permission for *everything* you would normally let him do anyway. Teach "WAIT" and "OKAY" and use these commands all of the time:

WAIT to eat/OKAY to eat.

WAIT to jump in the lap/OKAY to jump in the lap.

WAIT to walk through the door/ OKAY to walk to the door (After you!).

WAIT is not a STAY command. STAY formally means "for a while". WAIT means "wait until I give you permission".

2. Teach "TAKE IT" & "DROP IT" with toys. After your dog has taken the toy or ball, say "DROP IT" once and remove the toy from the dog's mouth. Do not tug on the toy, which would only encourage the dog to hold on to it. Simply and calmly pry open the dogs mouth and get the toy. Let the dog know that this is not the end of the world! Tell the dog to "TAKE IT" again and let him keep it.

3. Teaching the basic obedience commands: HEEL, SIT, STAY, DOWN, COME, is an excellent and stimulating job for your dog. At the *very least* you should train your dog to walk politely at your side on a loose lead! You set the pace and the dog should be walking at your side, *not* in front of you!

4. Take control of the barking by teaching the dog to "SPEAK" on command! You know what will rile your dog up to bark. Do it and give the command "SPEAK". PRAISE the dog when he "speaks" then say "ENOUGH" followed by PRAISE when he complies with your command.

### **WHEN TRAINING DOESN'T WORK**

There are some breeds that are notorious exuberant and shrill barkers, especially when you have more than one. Shetland Sheepdogs (Shelties) come immediately to mind. If you make an honest and concerted effort at training and removing sources of anxiety for your dog and you still have a problem with nuisance barking please consider having your dog de-barked, as a last resort.

This is a legal and humane elective veterinary procedure. It is no more cruel or painful than having your dog spayed or neutered (also an elective procedure) when performed by an experienced, licensed veterinarian. Debarking performed by a competent veterinarian does not result in

respiratory or other health problems, nor does it silence them. It merely reduces the volume of barking.

What would be cruel would be to ignore a dogs signs of anxiety, frustration or boredom, to constantly nag and get angry at the dog or worse, dump the dog because it has become inconvenient. The dogs that I've encountered that were debarked were quite happy and seemed in no way distressed by the reduced volume of their barking.

With the current climate of animal rights propaganda you might find it difficult to find a vet who will perform a debarking, especially in large urban areas where Politically Correct Morality Minders have become especially outspoken. I would suggest contacting a local breed club of Shelties or small terriers via the AKC or your state Veterinary Association to help you find a veterinarian that has experience with this procedure.