



Yap-Yap-Yap ... "QUIET!"

Dogs Bark for a Variety of Reasons

This is problematic when the barking becomes excessive or the owner cannot stop the dog from barking.

People expect dogs to bark, and nobody minds that they do when it is appropriate (such as, temporarily, when someone comes to the door); what all of us would like is that our dogs be still when we ask them to do so.

Much of the barking I see in my clients dogs arises from attention seeking behaviour. In agility class the dogs often bark at the handler because the dog is frustrated with the handler.

(The handler's cues are mistimed, usually late.) By the way, just for the record, I do not think this is okay. When we allow the dog to bark and "yell" at us, it is construed as reinforcement by the dog. The emotion that is currently being reinforced in this case is frustration towards the handler. I do not think that is the attitude that handlers would wish to reinforce. Even if the barking is, on one level, caused by us (our cues are late, we are not giving the dog the attention HE thinks he should be receiving) it is still not good for the relationship to foster the sort of "snotty" and demanding attitude that is inherent in this kind of barking. Dogs in this situation may also bark from a behaviour that began as a way to "bleed off" some stress, then it just becomes a habit. One of my "Sheltie" friends says the problem with even joyful barking in agility is this: "When the dog's mouth is open his ears are closed!"

Barking is an Indication of Arousal

A dog can keep himself in a chemically reactive state by continuing to bark. Let's face it, when dogs are calm and relaxed, they are not barking. Barking can cause other dogs in the area to become reactive as well, escalating the probability that defensive or redirected aggression will occur.

A dog who begins to approach another dog and is barking directly at the other dog is certainly indicating that this encounter may not be a peaceful one. If the second dog reciprocates with vocalization, the chances that this will be a peaceful encounter just took a very big nose-dive. Same goes for person approaches. If a dog is barking, she is not at peace. Quite the contrary, in fact, if the barking is involving an approacher (whether human or dog) the barking is most likely defensive or territorial in nature.

Your dog already does both silence & barking, you just don't have stimulus control provided by YOU. Both behaviours are currently on cue from the environment only, or from some internal stimulus from the dog herself.

Teaching Silence

Blessed Silence already exists, you just need to install a cue for it and then reinforce the heck out of it.

One of the biggest errors people make is that they wait for annoying barking to occur, then they try to stop it BEFORE training the dog about the cues or words that the person is going to use. This assumes that dogs speak our verbal language and inherently understand it. So, first, let us understand that dogs do not speak our verbal language, nor do they come with an understanding of it. Now you can stop behaving in a naive manner and start to be effective!

Opportunity Training

Like barking, quiet behaviour is also naturally occurring!

When your dog is already being quiet, go up to him and give a different, VERY OBVIOUS hand signal or a sudden verbal cue (like "Quiet!"). I use both. I tap the dog's head firmly with my fingers and follow that by a "Quiet" word. Then I have both at my disposal and can use one or the other as the situation dictates.

After you give your new cue for silence, immediately Mark It & Feed It. Do this several times.

Your dog will be puzzled at first, and will probably have absolutely no clue about what he is being reinforced for, but he will still eagerly eat the cookies you are handing out!

Once you have the training in place, wait until he barks at something. The quicker you are in interrupting the behaviour, the more successful you will be, especially at first. My latest acquisition, a mini-poodle breeder return, is one of the worst barkers I have ever had (and that from a veteran terrier owner.) Particularly when I first got her if I let her get into full cry it was truly a desperate struggle to put a lid on the barking. So interrupt after a half, one or two barks at the most if possible (don't let him really get going!) and give him his "Quiet" cue.

Initially, especially if your dog is kind of excited because he is barking at something in particular, you might have to use the head tap to surprise him out of barking.

Once you give the head tap, and he, in surprise, looks up at you and ceases barking for a second, you must very promptly Mark It & Feed It.

Step by Step

1. It is best if you can get the dog faced AWAY FROM whatever he is barking at before you feed. A loud startle noise such as a wooden spoon hit against a pan works pretty well,

too, as does two pans slapped together. I have also been successful with a magazine slapped against a table.

2. Use the food as a lure to turn the dog away from the Object Of Interest and then deliver the treat to the dog
3. At first, have several treats handy, because you will give a slow, steady constant feed for the silent behaviour, while continuing to repeat your cue, as long as the dog is quiet. This is so he can associate the new cue with his silent behaviour.
4. Repeat if required.
5. Reinforce the quiet behaviour.

Do remember to reinforce the quiet behaviour.

Helping Your Dog Into a Quieter State

If dog is alarmed at the startle noise and behaves in frightened manner. Do not validate the frightened behaviour. DO encourage him to come over near you, then ask for a Sit, say "Quiet" again, and reinforce it. Soon your dog will understand that, if he complies, the air horn does not sound.^[P]_[SEP]

The verbal "Quiet" (or what generally comes out of my mouth, "Shut It!") and the tap on the head is meant to startle the dog out of his barking frenzy, into a quieter state. It is not a punishment. It is meant to get the dog out of a reactive state, and to manufacture Quiet Behaviour, so you can use Positive Reinforcement.^[P]_[SEP]

Again, be sure to be serious and CALM when using these startle techniques, not angry or punitive. As with other exercises, it is prerequisite that the target behaviour be practiced in a controlled setting first. Only after the dog has at least some fluency in the behaviour is it appropriate to Challenge the dog by raising criteria and placing the dog in situations with increasing difficulty (those that typically elicit barking).

If a situation comes up that the dog would normally be barking his fool head off, and the dog barks a couple of times then is silent, Jackpot! Or if the dog is silent in a context in which he is normally barking, again, heavily reinforce the absence of barking. It is important that First Correct efforts are generously reinforced. Notice the really good decisions your dog makes!

Barking AT the Window At Innocent and Distant Passer's By^[P]_[SEP]

You can try your "Quiet!" cue and call the dog off the window, and then have her lie down for a short time (10 seconds to 60 seconds). Give her a cookie following the quiet, lying down behaviour. If you cannot call the dog off the window, you will have be more irritating, and use a bigger signal to "get through" the dog's currently adrenalized state.

Get between the dog and the window and walk towards her, slowly and carefully (don't step on tender toes!) until the dog is quiet. Then you can just return to daily life.

The first couple or, perhaps, several times you do this, as soon as you leave, the dog will rush back to the window in a barking frenzy. Repeat until the dog stops barking and you can call her away from the window and do the lie down and reward after the lie down period. Yes, the first times, whatever the dog is barking at is long gone, and that is why you were finally successful.

However, after 5 or 10 repetitions, the dog will be easier and easier to interrupt. You must be persistent and consistent if you want to modify this behaviour, because barking at the window is, as far as the dog is concerned, requisite territorial behaviour.

It will take some real "I am going to succeed and you will do it my way," attitude on your part to change your dog's mind about this matter. In this manner, you will, over a week or two, gain control over the dog's behaviour. You will no longer reinforce barking behaviour, nor cue for it unless you want to practice quiet behaviour. Instead you will continue to reinforce the quiet behaviour and never, ever reinforce the barking behaviour.

This is an extremely effective way to manufacture a dog who is quiet on cue and who offers quiet behaviour voluntarily.

Reprinted from Brendaaloff.com

