

Excessive Barking

All dogs bark, that's how they communicate with other dogs and their owners. However, when this barking becomes excessive, it can and does cause problems with neighbors and sometimes even the owners themselves.

First you must figure out why the dog is barking. Is it at someone passing by, other dogs in the neighborhood, rabbits, boredom, or have you rewarded it for barking. Now I am sure that you will all say "I sure haven't rewarded it", but maybe you inadvertently have done just that not realizing that you were rewarding it.

If a dog barks and we go to it to, even if it is to yell at it to "Be quiet", the dog is being rewarded because we gave it attention. If we start to "pet" it and say something like "It's okay," again we are rewarding it by petting. If the dog is in the house and barks, we let it out, when it is outside and barks we let it in. All of these things, in your dog's little world of reasoning are rewards. The dog learns that if it barks, we will come.

Don't worry, with persistence and patience, in most cases we can correct the problem. There are several ways to attempt this and not every way will work with every dog, so you may have to try more than one technique before you find the solution. We will not stop all barking, nor do we want to, most owners want their dog to bark a warning if someone approaches or there is a reason to bark, but we need to have our dogs respond to a simple command such as, "Good girl, that's enough".

In a large percentage of cases, a dog barks out of boredom. More exercise and not leaving the dog alone for long periods of time may be all it takes to correct the barking issue. A young healthy dog needs at least one hour of running or play time every day. Putting the dog in the yard and expecting it to exercise itself is not enough, you must take the dog for a long walk, play fetch or other fun things with your dog such as agility training. A tired dog that is sitting or lying down will rarely bark.

You can also try obedience training. A well trained dog will exercise its mind as it executes commands, which in turn takes his mind off of what he was barking about.

If possible, ignore the barking, but be prepared to reward the quiet behavior. To do this, go to the dog and use a strong "No" then patiently wait until the dog stops barking. Do not give a reward or pet the dog until it is quiet for at least 5 seconds. If it starts to bark again, repeat the "No" command and wait again before rewarding. Each time you use this procedure, wait a few more seconds before giving a reward until the dog learns that "No" or "Quiet" means to stop barking and if he is quiet, he will get a reward. It does not always need to be a treat, but praise and petting can be very effective.

If the dog is outside alone and barks, bring it inside with the family. The barking is most likely due to boredom and if your dog is housetrained, being with the family instead of being left alone will be enjoyable to both you and your dog.