

## Barking

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As some of you are aware, I adopted a tiny mixed breed adult dog named Ajax last year. He is little and sweet and super great with my two year old daughter, but lurking behind his fuzzy little exterior was a dirty little (dog) secret. He is a barker! Since adopting Ajax I have learned from many of you that you too have been dealing (or trying to deal) with this problem. For those of you with dogs who hardly bark or only bark when it is appropriate you may skip this month's article as long as you agree to go and give your wonderful dog a kiss of appreciation. For the rest of you, read on....

Barking is a normal dog behavior. With the exception of Basenjis, all dogs bark. Dogs bark for several reasons: protecting things, people and places, during play, to get attention, and sometimes during times of fear, anxiety, or frustration. Most dog owners expect and even desire some barking. But when barking becomes out of control it can be a real problem, and a difficult problem to fix because it *is* a completely normal behavior.

There are a few things you can try to help control your dogs barking. Different options will work with different dogs. Ideally every dog should learn to "quiet" on command. Just like your dog learned to "sit" s/he should also learn to stop barking whenever you say "silent" or "hush". This can be harder than you might think. There are basically three ways to accomplish this: 1. when your dog is barking place a tasty treat near his/her nose and when the dog stops barking to sniff you say "hush" – repeat, repeat, and repeat. 2. Teach your dog to "bark" on command by using a stimulus to get him/her barking, then remove the stimulus and use the "hush" command when the barking stops – repeat, repeat, and repeat. 3. Use a remote punishment device such as a collar that sprays an unpleasant liquid like citronella, or emits a small electric shock to stop the barking. When using these remote devices it is nice to try to use a "hush" command too so eventually you can just use the command without the device.

There are also a few things you shouldn't do if you want to decrease your dog's barking. For example, don't punish the dog for barking. It rarely works, and some dogs will actually bark more because they become more anxious. While still other dogs love any kind of attention, even bad attention. Also, don't just yell at your dog to "Be Quiet!" First of all they don't speak English so they won't understand you, and secondly, yelling just increases the noise and stress level for everyone involved. Another thing not to do is to try to calm or reassure your dog by patting him/her; your dog will interpret this as a reward for barking and will bark more and more.

Barking can be an extremely frustrating problem, so don't get discouraged and try everything, and KEEP TRYING. Your only other option is to move out to the middle of no where and buy some earplugs for you and your family.