

Woof! Woof! WOOF! Too much barking?

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*We all know that barking is a natural behavior for dogs.* Dogs have important things to communicate like alerting us to potential danger by responding to sudden changes or exciting stimuli in the environment. This alarm system is one of the reasons humans and dogs have developed an interdependent relationship.

*Unfortunately we don't always know what to do about excessive barking.* Changing any behavior usually requires not only stopping the behavior but replacing it with something more desirable to us that also meets the dog's needs. Teaching is the key because using punishment such as shock collars often causes aggression, neurosis, and undesirable replacement behaviors.

Some management techniques include disconnecting the doorbell, temporarily blocking the dog door, restricting access to any stimulating area such as a window, or asking for a behavior they know like a 'sit'. To help calm your dog, you can play the CD 'Through a Dog's Ear', use a Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) collar or Thundershirt, or add 4 drops of Rescue Remedy to the water each time you change it.

Then teach the behavior you prefer like chasing a ball, going to bed, or bringing you a toy. There isn't any one correct solution because yours should fit your dog and you. Learning occurs when the desired outcome becomes a fun game that you have practiced over and over.

One success story is the German Shepherd who learned to bark twice, acknowledge her person's 'Thank you!' and then laid down on her bed to 'guard'. Another is the Border Collie mix who couldn't respond to the old cue 'sit' but was able to meet visitors politely when he heard the new cue, 'greet-sit'. My own dogs rush into the house if barking erupts because I will be waiting for them with treats and an original congratulatory song!