

BARKING MAD

Dogs bark for a number of reasons. Some of them wanted and others not. So, when do dogs bark?

- 1 . To alert you to strangers or intruders.
2. Because they have heard something unusual.
3. Because another dog is barking in the distance.
4. Someone has arrived home or at the door.
5. Because they have learnt that it gets them some attention, or worse still.
because they are lost and very frightened when you are out.

So what can be done about excessive barking?

If you leave your dog in lying in front of the main entrance, or by a street facing window, then the act of barking may become self re-enforcing. For example. let's assume that the dog starts its day by barking at the postman. So, along comes postie, who only stays long enough to push a few bills through the hole in your front door before returning to the street and the neighbouring house Well, that's how we humans see it, but the dog has a completely different idea of what reality consists of

"What? A noise? My house ... oh no you don't because this time I am going to get you. Woof, woof, woof, bang – crash, got you, you 'orrible pieces of paper, now I am going to tear you to shreds!" So the dog launches its tirade ... kills a few letters in the process and then the postman, who caused this entire rumpus in the first place, has gone ... he must have been really scared. So, there you have it in a nutshell, the dog thinks the postman disappeared because it did such a wonderful job, therefore if you want to get rid of anyone who arrives at the door, just kick up one hell of a din and they all disappear ... the poor dog doesn't understand that the postman was going to leave anyway in the course of his duties. From the dog's point of view things get even hotter when the humans start shouting "SHUT UP" from another room, because it thinks we are joining in the tirade too.

There are a number of ways of tackling this type of problem:

1. When Nalle was a puppy, he threatened to become a persistent barker, so I armed the postman with some dog biscuits, and asked him to wait each morning until I opened the door. He then made a big fuss of Nalle, and gave him a biscuit. Nalle now LOVES ALL postmen, dustmen, recycling men, and even road sweepers, because we had one of those who, from time to time. walked up and down the street where we used to live and he was armed with biscuits too. Apart from this, I have taken hold of Nalle's collar and yelled "quit it" at the top of my voice, and then restrained him until he calmed down. Once he becomes calm, I thank him, and perhaps reward him with a treat.

2. You can try throwing a can with a few pebbles in the bottom (so that it makes a loud rattling noise) against the door where the dog is barking. If you are going to try this method, then please ensure that you have placed sellotape across the hole of the can, otherwise the pebbles are going to fly all over the place and could pose a risk to the dog. Also if your dog is very sound sensitive then this method should be avoided at all costs.
3. Condition the dog to the sound of 'Training Discs'. If you would like to know more about discs, then please ask and I will test your dog for suitability, as they do not work for all dogs and again can cause problems for those who are very sound sensitive.
4. For persistent barkers, an anti-bark collar may be necessary. This is called an Aboistop, and like the training discs, it doesn't work on all dogs. So please ask before you decide to buy one because it is an extremely large outlay for something which might be ineffective, or inappropriate for your dog.

Lotte is a completely different kettle of fish from Nalle. She is more likely to bark in the form of attention seeking. Many behaviour enthusiasts suggest that this type of problem is best resolved by refusing to reward the dog with attention i.e. by completely ignoring it ... well, my response to this is "try living with Lotte!" Ignoring her makes her even more persistent. She may have learnt this from her previous owner. So, I have another strategy for her. If she is going on and on at me, then she is placed on the lead, and then restrained until she calms down. Once she has calmed, and has remained calm, then I reward her with the attention she so desperately sought.

Finally, with respect to dogs that bark or howl whilst you are out. This problem is discussed in the section concerning canine/human relationships, as it generally relates to the way you are interacting with the dog whilst you are at home.