

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

Is it Nuisance Barking or Just Communication?

There are many reasons why dogs bark. Some may think it is excessive when it is a natural part of communication for your dog. If a dog consistently barks for 20 minutes or longer, it could be considered a nuisance. Dogs bark to protect their territory and their owners, when they have anxiety or pain, or it could be a normal greeting or asking to play.

If barking has become a problem, start by determining why the dog is barking. The following pattern helps de-code what the dog is trying to communicate:

- Continuous barking is usually a sign of a problem and your dog is trying to alert you. Someone may be entering the territory. The bark is fast and at a medium pitch.
- If there is an intruder, the bark is continuous and at a low pitch signaling danger is close.
- If it is a fast bark with pauses, it could be a warning of a problem approaching.
- Long and extended, high-pitched barks with pauses in between means "I'm lonely and I need company."
- One or two short high-pitched barks is a normal greeting
- One bark at a normal pitch signals curiosity
- A short, high-pitched bark shows surprise and a request that you "Come look!"
- A brief bark, at medium pitch tells you they are happy
- A hesitant bark with a medium pitch is asking to play
- A howl or short bark with a high pitch means pain, sudden pain
- Repeated howls at regular intervals means the dog is suffering from extreme pain or something is scaring them
- A desperate urgent bark is high-pitched without an obvious reason is just the way some dogs vent excitement or frustration.

If the reason for barking is identified as normal communication but is still annoying, then read below for some ideas to curb the behavior. If the dog is exhibiting serious barking issues he may be in need of behavior modification. If the latter is the case, the following are scenarios of the most common issues and ideas on how to correct the behavior.

Barking Scenarios:

Dog is barking when the owners go to work, and the dog is in the backyard

Typically, this kind of barking is due to separation anxiety, boredom or a change the in home (unfamiliar sounds). In addition, fear, a change in owner's schedule, or the dog's schedule could cause some anxiety. It could also be a neighbor dog barking that starts the "communication;" it could be a new neighbor dog.

Action: Dogs need consistency and structure, so a schedule would help the dog's anxiety. For example, set up consistent times for feeding, potty, and playtime, etc. If there is a new person in the house or an individual has left the household this change can concern your dog and cause anxiety as well. Keep to the schedule and make the daily routine as normal as possible while he adjusts.

Action: If it is separation anxiety while the owner is gone, start a positive association when the dog is alone; a special toy like a stuffed Kong, or another toy the dog really likes. He only gets this when you are gone from the home, so he associates this as a good thing. *For more information, see the article on 'Separation Anxiety' in the Golden Rule Training library.*

Action: A "safety cue" could be used, a word that lets them know you are coming back; it could be as simple as a word "be back" or by leaving the TV or radio on. This has to be consistent to work; you have to follow through every time!

Action: If all else fails, you could crate your dog indoors for no more than 4 hours at a time. Again with a special toy to let him know you are coming back soon.

Dog barks when anyone comes to the door

Some dogs (breeds) bark more than others, but all dogs communicate through barking to greet a guest at the door. This is normal and most dogs see this as their job. Dogs bark, you can't train them to stop barking completely, but you can train them to reduce it if necessary.

Action: To control the barking or limit the duration, the dog can be allowed to bark until the owner gives a cue, such as "Quiet Now." You can teach this by giving a cue and gently holding the muzzle closed (not too tightly), and then give him a treat or his favorite toy until he has the cue down and understands what you want him to do.

Action: Another way to limit the barking is to interrupt the barking and replace it with another activity. Have the dog go to his spot, or go to his bed on cue. The owner could have friends wait a few minutes and come to the door several times so the dog gets the idea of what the owner wants him to do. Then wait a minute or two and release the dog to come say hello in a calm manner. Have the dog "sit" before you or anyone pets him.

Greeting People by Barking

While barking at people outside or at the door (including you and your family), if your dog is also wagging his tail, crying, and jumping, this is a greeting bark, and must be handled differently than territorial barking. Greeting barks are friendly, but can still be annoying to you and your neighbors. Here are a few tips to help control the barking.

Action: Try to keep meeting and greeting under control. When you or a family member comes home, ignore your dog for the first couple minutes. When people come to the door, teach your dog to sit and wait until the person comes to him; this will bring control and anticipation to the greeting rather than barking.

Action: Keep one of his favorite toys by the door and train your dog to pick it up when a guest comes. He will be less likely to bark with a toy in his mouth.

Action: When walking, a "sit/stay" command until people pass will help. The command "wait" is good for gaining his attention and control.

Dog barks at the owner when he wants attention

If the dog has been rewarded for barking by getting the attention he wants (which could be positive or negative attention he is still getting attention), that habit needs to stop immediately.

Action: Ignore the dog, do not give any eye contact and move away as if not to notice the dog. No attention, either positive or negative while the dog is barking will let the dog know he gets no reward for barking.

Action: If the dog is barking, give the dog a "time out", and if the barking stops for 3 seconds, then he comes out of time out until he gets the idea of that barking is not desired by their owner. Time out could be a cue to go lay down, or to put them outside for a few seconds.

Action: Another option is to redirect his barking to an activity. The owner can also teach the dog another activity to get positive attention; such as, teaching them to sit (with no barking) and then they get praise.

Territorial or Defensive Barking

This is also known as alarm barking; it can be in reaction to people coming to the door, people or animals walking by your house, or other sights and sounds that

alert the dog to the presence of someone or something crossing their territory. Territory can be your house (the front door or window where your dog can see or hear the stranger), your back or front yard, or even in your car while driving.

Action: Watching your dog's body language and behavior can tell you a lot; whether he's barking to say "Hi, I'm over here! Visitors are here to see me!" This is an example of a greeting bark. However, if he is moving to a much more aggressive behavior you may want to curb that behavior.

If you want to reduce defensive barking, you can create a positive association with strangers at the door and passersby with positive reinforcement. You can desensitize your dog's reaction by providing a positive experience, such as treats, praise and attention. *For more information, see below or the article on "Desensitization" in the Golden Rule Library.*

If your dog is displaying a more aggressive behavior his bark is typically a different pitch and his body language changes. He believes he is warning or protecting his territory and/or defending you and your family from intruders. If this is the case, seek advice from a professional trainer. *For more information, see 'How to Read a Dog's Body Language' in the Golden Rule Library.*

Play Barking

You don't want to discourage your dog from playing, but play barking can get annoying at times. If you have more than one dog and they bark when playing together, build a set routine of times and places where it is okay. When you are playing with your dog, encourage the use of toy-based games to decrease the amount of barking.

Attention seeking or request barking

This type of barking is a form of normal communication which often developed through positive reinforcement from the owner. If your dog barks to let you know he needs to go potty, this is usually a good thing. When he barks because he wants your dinner or to play or go for a walk, this is less positive.

It's unlikely that your dog became a noisy, insistent pest on his own; your family inadvertently had a hand in this during his upbringing. For example, perhaps you thought it was cute when he barked at you while you were cooking chicken and you slipped a piece to him. Dogs are pretty good associative learners and if they make the connection that barking equals food, they won't stop just because you no longer find it cute; be careful of what you reinforce with a reward.

To bring attention barking under control, you need to start by stopping your behavior. Do not reward the barking and stop paying attention to the barking.

Action: When your dog barks for attention or for food, cross your arms and turn your back on him. If he continues, walk out of the room. Once he stops barking, call him to you, praise him, and fulfill his request, as long as it's reasonable. However, if he is barking for food, do not reward him with a dog treat. This will

simply reinforce begging and instead of barking, he will switch to pawing at you or some other attention getting behavior.

Action: If your dog only barks to let you know he has to go potty, you need to change the behavior. Train him to ring a bell installed by the back door, or install a dog door which allows him to go when he needs to. However you go about it, changing behavior is much tougher than preventing it in the first place. With a puppy, start off on the right foot and don't encourage or reward barking behaviors.

Excitement or frustration barking

Many dogs bark when they get excited or when they are frustrated by an inability to get at or do something. For example, the dog who runs through the backyard barking and whining when he hears his buddy out in the yard next door, or the dog who barks at the ball that rolled under the sofa a bit too far for him to get.

Action: The best way to reduce excitement/frustration barking is through basic and intermediate obedience training. "Sit/stay" and "down/stay" are commands that say to your dog he must wait until you release him to go play, for a walk, or to meet his buddy.

Social barking

Dogs are pack animals and social barking is just part of that fact. Dogs bark in response to other dogs barking, whether around the neighborhood or even on the TV. You will never stop it, but you can control it somewhat.

Action: Start by changing your dog's environment, minimizing sound from the source of the barking. If he can still hear it, try using a radio or TV to drown it out.

More Hints

- First, remove any stimulus from the dog's environment that may cause undue excitement.
- Block your dog's access to doors and windows while he is indoors so he cannot see outside if possible.
- Play music or turn up the TV to hide noises that may trigger barking.
- Change your doorbell ring so as to disassociate him from the ring he is used to accompanying with barking.
- Call him inside from the yard at times he is prone to barking, such as when school lets out and kids are noisily making their way home.

If your dog continues to bark after you have taken these steps, it may be time for counter-training.

Desensitizing -Bark Training Method #1:

- When your dog barks at people passing by or at the door:

- Allow a limited number of barks, three or four, and then give the command "quiet."
- Call your dog to you or go to him and gently hold his muzzle and say, "quiet" in a calm but firm tone.
- Release his muzzle and call him to you, then redirect him and ask him to "sit." Praise and give him a treat only if he submits.
- If he comply he may be too wound up, so try again.
- Continue to give him praise and treats until the people are have passed by completely.

Use these same steps when he barks at people from the yard.

Desensitize-Bark Training Method #2:

Only if the first method is not working after at least 10-20 sessions, add a startling noise to the "quiet" command, such as a loud single clap of your hands may work. You are trying to turn his attention to you so you can redirect him. Banging to metal bowls together or an air horn works as well. *This technique is really more punishment than positive reinforcement, so please use this as a last resort.*

Then go through the remaining steps of calling him over, asking him to sit, and giving praise and treats until the person or noise is gone. If he begins barking immediately after you release him, repeat the steps. If after 10-20 more tries the barking hasn't diminished you may have an obsessive or anxiety situation and should seek the advice of a professional.

Desensitizing-Bark Training While on Leash:

If barking is a problem on your walks, using some of the same methods utilized in loose leash training may help. Hold treats in your hand, giving some out as you walk along. Encourage your dog to focus on you and not any distractions by letting him sniff the treats in your hand a couple of times so he knows what you have. Use a special treat that your dog doesn't normally get and keep the pieces small so your dog can chew and swallow them easily while walking. Ask your dog to "sit/stay" while people pass, allowing him to say hello if allowed. Praise, reward, and consistency are very important, and after a few days or a week, you should see a marked difference and can start spacing the use of treats farther apart.

Last resort, deterrent products:

Citronella Spray Collars: Humanely & effectively deters excessive barking. The Collar's effectiveness comes from an innovative technology that simultaneously engages a variety of senses to harmlessly interrupt the animal's unwanted behavior. A unidirectional microphone picks up the dog's bark which triggers a harmless burst of scentless spray delivered from under the jaw. Unlike electric shock, this technology distracts the animal and effectively redirects behavior without painful consequences. It's safe for all dogs, including puppies. The feedback from use is mixed. Approximate Cost: \$20 – 30.

From Dogtra®, The No Bark Collar: This collar features a highly developed sound recognition and filtering microprocessor that is able to distinguish between your dogs' barking and the surrounding ambient noises around them! This intelligent no-bark collar is equipped with the only self-activating micro processing sound analysis software that responds to your barking dog and your barking dog only. The anti-barking dog collar is also fully-waterproof for those adventurous pups! This collar is available for small to medium dogs or medium to large dogs. These bark collars are not intended for use on dogs weighing less than 12 pounds or less than 6 months of age. **Approximate Cost: \$79.00.**

From Good Life™ The Ultimate Dog Silencer collar

The Ultimate Dog Silencer emits a high-pitch ultrasonic (inaudible) sound frequency in response to the dog's barking. The proprietary Bark Recognition Technology™ detects barking over all other external sounds. The Ultimate Dog Silencer ensures the sound frequencies only activate while the dog barks and turns off the precise moment the dog stops barking. The dog associates the annoying sounds with its barking and stops to avoid the irritating frequencies. **Approximate Cost: \$59.00.**

Tri-Tronics – The Bark Limiter: Bark Odometer™ “counting feature” reports correction activity, it counts how many times the dog barks in a day, and you can see the device working as the barking activity goes down. The collar has 5 intensity levels; it can be used with a very low to high intensity, designed for comfort and a correct fit. **Approximate Cost: \$99.00.**

Barking is normal but nuisance barking can result in a call from a neighbor or Animal Control. If you have serious concerns please contact Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue Training Department for consultation.

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Source:

ASPCA