

Training quiet (barking)

Training the “quiet” command

1. Training a dog to be quiet on command requires that you anticipate when the dog will bark (e.g., children playing, knocking at the door) or that you can provoke the dog to bark. Quiet training is unlikely to be effective if you begin your training when the barking is highly motivated or intense.
2. First, attempt to use a verbal command to which your dog has been trained to get a behavior, such as “come,” “sit,” or “lie down.” Use high-level rewards to reinforce the behavior if the dog is quiet.
3. If the dog does not respond to your command, interrupt the barking with a sharp noise (loud enough to startle the pet mildly without causing anxiety). As the dog stops barking, immediately say “yes” (or use a clicker) to mark the quiet behavior and then give a small tasty food reward. Repeat this step until the dog quiets reliably for rewards. Once this happens, add the word “quiet” just before the sharp noise.
4. Eventually, the word “quiet” without the noise should successfully stop the barking.
5. Another alternative is to have the dog wear a head collar with a leash attached. When the dog is barking, say “quiet” and immediately pull out and up on the leash to close the dog’s mouth. Release the pressure on the leash as soon as the dog is quiet and give favored treats as long as the dog remains quiet.

Encouraging quiet behavior

1. Watch your dog for calm, quiet behaviors and provide attention, affection, play, or food as rewards.
2. When the dog is barking do not give any attention or any form of reward until it is quiet. Mild attempts to discourage the barking may reinforce the behavior by giving the dog attention.
3. If barking cannot be successfully stopped with quiet command training, it should be ignored until the dog is quiet, and then that quiet behavior immediately reinforced.
4. Verbal corrections, yelling, punishment, or your own anxious behavior may further aggravate your dog’s barking and anxiety.
5. Use of a bark-activated device (audible alarm, citronella spray, bark-activated collar) may inhibit barking in some dogs. Once the barking stops, you should wait for 5–10 seconds of quiet behavior and give a treat, toy, or play to reward the quiet behavior and keep the dog distracted.
6. Avoid leaving dogs outdoors unsupervised if they have barking problems. The dog may be motivated to bark by passing stimuli (other dogs, strangers) or may bark to attract your attention. Going out to the dog will serve to reinforce the barking behavior. Unless you are present when the dog is barking you cannot train quiet behaviors.

Anxiety-induced barking

When barking arises out of anxiety, the first step is to seek help as to how to reduce the anxiety. Simply attempting to stop the barking is unlikely to be successful unless the underlying motivation for the barking is addressed and treated.