

Excessive Barking

Recently, I have been watching a lot of dog training shows on television. One of the major issues in a lot of the episodes seems to be dogs that bark at everything. When our schnauzers bark, in most cases, it is because they hear something and they want to alert us. If they are barking more than they should, I can think of several reasons why.

Is your dog barking from boredom or to alert you to something outside? The first step is to listen to your dog and understand what causes the barking. You might consider the sound of the bark. An alert bark sounds a great deal different than the dog that is barking because they have nothing else to do.

If a standard schnauzer does not have enough to do, they may resort to barking to get you to pay attention to them so that they won't be bored anymore. The more they bark, the more attention you are paying them. The dog who is bored is thinking "When I start barking, my owner pays attention to me!". Since their goal is to have their owners attention as much as possible, this will trigger them to bark in order to get your attention. If this is the reason for so much barking, the fix seems rather easy, but might get annoying for your neighbors. First, you need to ignore the barking and only praise or speak to the dog when they are quiet. Rewarding the dog only when they are being quiet will change their thoughts to "When I am silent, my owner pays attention to me, so I need to be as quiet as possible." Don't expect this change to happen overnight and don't expect the dog to be quiet if you stop paying attention to them. The dog will also need to have some other thing to do. Perhaps do some obedience training for several minutes. Try to teach your dog a new trick. Give them a bone or toy to keep them busy. Take them for a nice long walk or jog. Dogs who bark to get attention have to have something else to do to keep them busy.

An alert bark is usually sharper and stronger than the bored bark. Some dogs just don't know how much alerting to do. The dog is thinking, "There is something outside and I need to let everyone know about it!" The first step is to find out what makes your dog bark. There can be many reasons for an alert bark. My second standard schnauzer used to drive my mother crazy as she would bark every time a bus stopped two streets over. Since this was a major bus route, the barking was a bit excessive. When a dog is alerting you to something, you probably don't want to suppress the behavior completely. So, what choices do you have?

First, you can try to reduce the amount of barking by teaching the dog that once they have alerted you and you have acknowledged their alert, they should be quiet. With our breed, it takes a good bit of training to get them to alert bark only once or twice, but it can be done. First, you need to not speak to them until they are quiet. Then thank them for letting you know. Second, you need to reward them with something when they only bark a few times rather than barking for minutes on end.

Another way to stop them from barking at something you don't want them to bark at is to desensitize them to the issue. Training a dog to ignore a certain noise, person, or type of animal can be tough, but it can be done. You need to figure out the source that is causing the barking and then use it to teach the dog that you don't care about that particular noise. I have seen trainers on television teach a dog to not bark at the doorbell or a knock on the door. This takes a lot of repetition. The way I was most impressed with was the owner not even moving toward the door or speaking to the dog until they were quiet. In fact, they would not even leave the

room if the dog barked at all. In this way the dog learned that the owners did not care about the doorbell or knock and that barking at it did not get any response or attention. Believe it or not, it worked!

So, with a little hard work and some extra effort, you can stop your noisy dog from taking barking from a quick notice to an annoying habit.

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