

Upper Valley Dog Behavior Consulting and Training

BARKING

Some dogs get extremely worked up when visitors ring the doorbell or when people walk by the house. It is easier to teach your dog to shush when it shows little interest in barking. But it's impossible to teach a dog to stop barking if it's already quiet. Teaching your dog to "speak" on cue is the first step in shush training, so that you may train when you are ready to teach instead of at inconvenient times when the dog decides to bark. Also, it is easier to teach "shush" following "speak", because your dog is not barking uncontrollably - barking was your idea!

Station an accomplice outside your front window to ring the door bell whenever you instruct your dog to bark. Ask your dog to "speak" and praise profusely when it barks (precipitated by the doorbell). Be enthusiastic and maybe bark along with your dog. After a few good woofs, instruct your dog to "shush" and then waggle a tasty food treat in front of its nose. Since it's next to impossible to sniff and woof simultaneously, your dog will stop barking as soon as it sniffs the treat. Let your dog sniff quietly for just one second and then offer the treat.

Repeat speak/shush trials, progressively increase the length of shush time necessary to receive a food reward. By alternating speak and shush requests, the dog is praised for barking on request and praised and rewarded for shushing on request.

Remember to always speak softly when instructing your dog to shush, and reinforce your dog's silence with whisper praise. The more softly you speak, the more your dog will be inclined to pay attention, listen and not bark.

Invite a few friends over to help you teach your dog when, and when not to bark. Instruct your visitors (some with dogs) to walk by the house a number of times before ringing the door bell. When the first person walks by the house, it will take all of your attention to keep your dog shushed. But persevere; it will be easier when the same person walks by the second time, and again easier on the third pass by.

Eventually your dog will habituate to the same person's street walking and will no longer bark. Profusely praise your dog, offering treats for silent alertness. Repeat this several times on subsequent passes by. When the visitor starts up your garden path, eagerly and urgently instruct your dog to "Speak! Speak! Speak!". Then instruct your dog to sit and shush at the front door while welcoming the visitor. If your dog exuberantly barks at this point, simply have the visitor leave and come back until your dog greets them in silence. This procedure becomes easier with each new visitor, as the dog learns to watch passerby in silence, to give voice when they step on your property but to shush when invited indoors.

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