

Why do dogs bark?

This is their way of communicating which, accompanied by their body language, and is their way to let you know that there is something that needs to be dealt with.

This could be an attempt to get your attention, to "tell" you they want to play, distress, or the most common situation, to let you know that they perceive danger.

Dogs do not think like humans, so will not "speak" unless absolutely necessary as they rely on body language and actions to do the talking, however, if they are living in a human environment and they are not familiar with the everyday "dangers" like cars, washing machines, planes, hot air balloons etc they will think that their pack or family is at risk.

All we need to do is to let them know that there isn't a problem, but we need to make sure that we're telling them this in their language and not ours.

How many times has your dog barked at something you think is silly, and no matter what you do or say, your dog will sometimes continue to bark? For example a grill pan?! Yes, something as simple as that, I know because my English Mastiff Turkish used to do that. As soon as I got it out of the oven he would start barking, he has a very deep loud bark, and at the time I made a big fuss of it, telling him not to be stupid, to shut-up or sent him out of the room.

He'd then do it again and again until I realised that what I was saying and what he was "seeing" were two completely different things.

He needed to know that the grill pan wasn't a threat, just like someone coming into the "den" was also not a threat.

When your dog barks, firstly you thank him and call him over to you.

If he does not come, you go to wherever the dog is (e.g a window/fence/washing machine etc) have a good look, thank the dog and call him away. Make sure you're not looking at the dog when you do this because all you're doing (as eye contact is a form of communication) is asking the dog to do something about it.

If your dog refuses to come away, you can either pop a lead on him, if he is aggressive always do this (without eye contact or speaking – otherwise you are asking him to do something) or by the collar and take him into a separate room and leave him there until he calms down.

When your dog is calm you can then let him out of "time out" and rejoin the rest of the family, however you need to ensure that when you let your dog out, you do not speak or look at him because otherwise you will be communicating with him again, he needs time to "get it right", so when he has left you alone and does not repeat the behaviour, you can call him over for a cuddle.

If he chooses to go straight back to the "danger" and bark, then you do exactly the same thing, take him to a separate room, without speaking or looking at him, pop him in there until he calms. The most important thing here, to show him that you are dealing with the "danger" is for you to remain calm.

If you talk to him, tell him to shut-up or shout at him, all you're doing is joining in, and he's looking to you to deal with the danger.

The Bouncer Scenario

Dogs are not bouncers, so why do we expect them to act like they are when someone comes into our home? We need to remember that dogs live in the "now" and anyone seen to be "infiltrating the den" could be a valid threat, so....

When someone knocks at the door or rings the bell, just "thank him" for barking to let you know there's danger.

If you have visitors, don't expect your dog to answer the door, especially if they are not calm. Simply pop them in another room before your visitor arrives; take the focus off your dog and don't expect him to be your bouncer, especially if he gets himself into a state. If you choose to have your dog around when visitors come always make sure you ask your visitors to pay no attention (this means no eye contact or words) to him at all until he's calm, settled and left them alone, only then can they call him for a cuddle.

By greeting the dog first, what you're telling him is that he is the head of the family, now that would be fine if he paid the bills, did the housework and went to work. But he doesn't, it isn't his job.....so why expect that of him?

Attention Barking

If your dog is barking at you for attention, then just completely ignore it. Don't look or speak to him because you will be communicating with him. If it gets too much then just get up and go and make a cup of tea or any other simple activity, when he's calm, settled and left you alone, you can then call him over for a cuddle. If you are playing with him and he does this, then again, wait until he's stopped "asking" and you initiate play. If you find that he is 'getting on your nerves', again, take him by the collar (or use a slip lead if he is aggressive) and give him some time out.

If you believe that your dog may become aggressive in situations like this then for safety and so that you don't go into the dogs personal space, in a calmer quieter moment, call your dog to you and attach a 'clip lead' to its collar and leave it on. This way if you need to remove the dog you can safely and calmly take hold of the end of the lead. You can also remove 'yourself' if you don't even feel confident doing this, the result is still the same, the dog is separated from you for a 'time out'

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