

DOES YOUR DOG=S BARKING DRIVE YOU CRAZY?

Does your dog bark at visitors or passers by? Does your dog bark when you=re not home? Is the noise annoying your family and neighbors? Don=t despair, there=s hope for your dog!

The best treatment available right now is an ingenious collar called the ABS Anti-barking System. It is a safe, humane behavior-modifying training tool. When it senses the dog bark it emits a puff of citronella scent, which is offensive to dogs. It doesn=t shock them or hurt them, it just smells bad. Most dogs very quickly learn to associate the barking and the bad smell and will soon cease barking when they wear the collar.

The collar has a battery operated vibration sensor. It is available in two sizes. The citronella comes in cartridges that are replaced as needed. The company reports an 88% success rate with use of the collar alone and almost 100% success if the collar is combined with assistance from a behaviorist.

The cost of the collar is about \$180 to \$200, and refill cartridges are about \$22. Call 1(800) 627-9447 to order one from the manufacturer. If you don=t want to invest the money for an anti-bark collar there are other things you can do to discourage barking. First, do not bark@ back at the dog. Shouting only increases the barking and its volume. When the dog barks in your presence, call him to you as quietly as the barking will allow. If the barking is about something unusual that you think needs attention, go investigate, but do so quietly. AShush@ the dog with a whisper and hand signal (like putting your finger to your mouth) if he starts to bark again. Then go back to where you were and settle down. Call the dog, ask him to sit and keep him close by, praise and pet briefly if he stays calm and quiet. Leaving a leash on while you are practicing allows you to pull the dog toward you if he does not come and sit readily.

You may need to keep a leash on your pet in order to pull him toward you and distract him from barking. Reward him with praise or a treat as soon as he stops barking. Another trick to get your dog to stop barking is to put a treat on his nose. In looking up at it he will usually sit down and stop barking to get the treat, at which point you can reward him with praise. If you say “shush” at the same time you give the treat he should learn (after many repetitions) that the phrase “shush” means to stop barking.

Be persistent with this routine for six weeks. You are trying to teach the dog an alternate behavior, sitting and staying by you, for which you can reward him. During the course of the six weeks you should start to notice the dog sound his first alarm bark, then turn and look to you. If you are out of the room, he will seek you. That is ideal watch dog behavior - to let you know of a problem or visitor and then look to you for direction on what to do next.

Barking when you aren=t home is more difficult and complicated. This is where use of the ABS collar is ideal, but there are other ways to train a dog to be less territorial and reduce the noise your neighbors are complaining about as well. You may want to consult a behaviorist or a dog trainer who specializes in problem behaviors in dogs. Be careful who you choose. There are no licensing requirements for dog trainers. Anyone can hang out a shingle and proclaim themselves a trainer, even with no experience or qualifications. Stay away from anyone who espouses training methods based on fear or punishment.