

Behaviour Modification

Barking for Attention aka "Demand Barking"



Rewards Drive Behaviour

Barking for attention is a learned behaviour, i.e. at some point, the dog has learned that barking gets him their attention, or whatever else it is that he is asking for. He will not have started asking for things by barking, but by simply coming up to you and looking at you, perhaps whining if the look didn't work, and so on until he has learned to escalate to barking in order to get your attention.



Rewards strengthen behaviour and make it more likely to occur in the future.

Rewards for demand barking can include any kinds of attention, including what we think of as a correction ("be quiet!"), grabbing the dog to put him in his crate (a few seconds of attention there!), etc.

WARNING: No Corrections!

Corrections ('punishment') actually drives anxiety and excitement, and it breaks down the communication, thus it may well make the barking worse. As punishment necessarily also involves giving the dog attention, it may actually also function to reward the barking, thus making it worse. Punishment also has many other undesirable side-effects, see: [Corrections \(pdf\)](#). DO NOT USE PUNISHMENT / CORRECTIONS.

To solve barking for attention, we need to do three things, all of which are EQUALLY IMPORTANT:

- 1) Make sure to **increase your dog's mental and physical stimulation** on a daily basis to the level where he is satisfied. See: [Emotional Cup by Lili Chin \(pdf\)](#);
- 2) Make sure to notice and **reward all other attention-seeking behaviours from the dog**, e.g. when he comes up to look at you (which by this time may be a very fleeting moment before he starts barking). Reward those behaviours with your attention. Not for ever, of course, but until your dog has learned that these silent ways of asking for your attention actually work, and work better than barking! This means you have to be very attentive to your dog during this learning phase, however long it may be.
- 3) When #1 and #2 fail, make sure to **never reward the barking with any attention**: Do not look at your dog when he barks at you, do not tell him to be quiet, do not give him a treat to buy a few seconds of silence. The moment the dog barks at you for attention, you must not react in any way whatsoever. This prevents the barking from getting worse. In saying that, a sign that your ignoring the barking actually works is that the barking seems to get worse for a short period of time. This phenomenon is known as the "extinction burst": Before a behaviour extinguishes, it is likely to get stronger for a while – "it gets worse before it gets better". When the dog's usual attempts at getting your attention no longer work, he will at first try harder to get the usual reaction. When he does, it is very important to stick to your guns and not give in. This "extinction burst" is a normal part of the process and its occurrence confirms that what you are doing is affecting the dog's behaviour! Good job! Ride it out!

If you have any questions or concerns about the application of this behaviour modification programme, please do not hesitate to contact Cowichan Canine. ■