



## **Demand Barking**

“What is Demand Barking and why do dogs do it?”

Dogs sometimes learn that barking gets them things. Once they have learned this, they will often bark when they want something: attention, food, play, pats, etc. It may start out small, but can grow into a frustrating pattern.

“I don’t reward my dog for barking, but he still does it”

Demand Barking usually persists because we are unintentionally rewarding the behavior. Many times, we don’t even realize we are reinforcing our dog’s barking. Looking at, talking to, or touching your dog can all be accidental reinforcers. For most dogs, good or bad attention doesn’t make a difference, *any* attention will quickly establish and strengthen the barking behavior.

Ways we reward them might include:

- Eye contact
- Smiling
- Talking to the dog (even telling them “no”, “stop”, or “shhh” can be rewarding)
- Giving the dog the food or toy that they want (including the tennis ball that they rolled under the couch for the 15th time)
- Allowing the dog to gain access to the thing they want (like the outdoors after barking at the door)

“How do I STOP the Demand Barking?”

Since we now have a long list of things not to do when our dog barks, what do we do?

### **1. Ignore the Barking**

When we say ignore, we don’t mean just sit there and let your dog bark, we mean do not engage with them. Do not verbally correct by saying “no” or any other verbal admonishment. You can actively leave the room if your dog begins Demand Barking, or turn your back if leaving is not an option. Once they stop barking, turn back around or return to the room. If they start up again, leave once more and repeat as needed.



## 2. Teach an Alternative

Ask for an alternative behavior like Sit, Touch, Down, or Go to Bed and praise for the behavior. If your dog resumes barking, simply repeat step one of the process.

Examples of alternative behaviors:

- Touch
- Place/Go to Bed
- Fun Tricks

## 3. Manage the Barking

The more your dog practices barking, the more they will “perfect” it. In situations when your dog often gets into a fit of barking, give them something else to do. For example, before you get on that business call, give them a frozen Kong to play with. This requires being proactive. It is important to NOT do this if your dog has already begun barking. Give them a task or activity before the barking starts. Keep a journal about when your dog is barking if you are unsure what your dog’s barking triggers are.

## 4. Enrichment

Make sure your dog is getting enough mental and physical exercise each day. A dog whose needs are not being fully met may resort to barking much faster.

Examples of mental enrichment:

- Sniff games! Hide treats for your dog to find. Get creative with it!
- Snuffle Mats
- Frozen Kongs
- Puzzle Toys
- Practicing Fun Tricks
- Going on a “Sniffari” (sniff safari) somewhere new
- Setting up boxes with different scents for your dog to explore - for example, rub some pine needles or leaves in a box or a single drop of therapeutic grade 100% essential oil (make sure to research which oils and plants are safe for dogs and don’t leave plant matter in the box - only residual smells)
- Dog Sports like Agility or Rally



## 5. Play/Interact On Your Terms

Start play (or whatever your dog demand barks about) on your terms. If your dog starts barking to initiate play or interaction, ignore it. Walk away. End play on your terms as well. Add a cue like “All Done” or “Finished” when you are done interacting.

“My dog is barking even more than before!”

As you begin ignoring the unwanted behavior, something called an Extinction Burst is likely to occur. It’s sort of like a last ditch effort before they change their tactic. It will get a bit worse before it starts getting better. Remember, barking has worked for them to some extent up until this point and we are suddenly changing the rules on them. Their normal level of barking is no longer working, so they may try a more intense or louder bark to see if that works. It is extremely important not to give in and provide attention at this point because then that will become the new baseline. We know extinction bursts are rough, but stay strong!

Stopping Demand Barking doesn’t happen overnight, but with time, repetition, and consistency, it does get better!