

My dog barks all the time. What can I do?

Answer from CLEAR Dog Training

There are eight ways and eight ways only to change undesired behaviour. Karen Pryor, in her groundbreaking book, *Don't Shoot the Dog* describes the eight possible methods of changing undesired behaviour, both in humans and in dogs. There are four negative methods for STOPPING unacceptable behaviour and four positive methods to TEACH an alternative, acceptable behaviour.

Method One:	Shoot the Dog	No
Method Two:	Punish the Dog	No
Method Three:	Negative Reinforcement	No
Method Four:	Extinction	?
Method Five:	Train an Incompatible behaviour	YES!
Method Six:	Put the behaviour on cue	YES!
Method 7:	Shape absence of unwanted behaviour	YES!
Method 8:	Change the motivation	YES! YES! YES!!!

Let's look at all of these methods.



Method One: *Shoot the Dog* Firing an employee, divorcing a spouse, selling a dog or having his vocal cords cut are all variations of the same method. If you make it impossible for the behaviour to happen in your presence then the undesired behaviour, as far as you are concerned, is forever eliminated. Even when used as a last resort, surgically de-barking a dog is ethically questionable. In some Australian states and several overseas countries, it is illegal. Putting a dog to death is severe and very final. With both these methods, the unfortunate dog learns nothing.

Method Two: *Punishment* Hitting the dog, spraying him in the face with water or giving him an electric shock may temporarily suppress ongoing behaviour. However, again the dog learns nothing more than to distrust people and be confused, fearful and, sometimes, defensively aggressive. When the dog re-offends, punishment is often escalated to the point of violence and abuse. Violence begets violence and a vicious cycle can evolve where the dog may cause harm to a human and his life is cut short. This can be avoided – keep reading!

Method Three: *Negative Reinforcement* always includes a punisher and often has undesired side effects such as avoidance, resistance and passivity (learned helplessness). An example of negative reinforcement to stop barking is shining a torch at night into the eyes of a barking dog (a punishment) and then turning it off when the dog stops barking. Again, this does not tell the dog what you want him to do.

Method Four: *Extinction* Bad behaviour that is totally ignored for long enough usually tends to disappear or extinguish, as in a dog that has developed a habit of begging for food

at the dinner table. However, a dog that barks at the disappearing postman is self-rewarded. The behaviour will likely remain unless one of the four much more practical, positive methods of changing behaviour is used – keep reading!

Method Five: *Training an incompatible behaviour.* A dog who has learned to sit instantly on request cannot jump onto people. Similarly, playing with a chew toy is incompatible with barking.

Method Six: *Put the behaviour on cue.* Using reward based training it is easy to teach a dog to *bark* or *speak* on cue. In the absence of the cue, the dog sees no point to barking.

Method Seven: *Shape the absence of unwanted behaviour.* If the absence of barking (in other words, being quiet) is frequently rewarded, the dog will enjoy being quiet. Saying the word *quiet* or *shush* while the dog is not barking, will auto-train the words so that the words soon become a meaningful and instantly complied with instruction to be silent.

Method Eight: *Change the motivation* and the need to bark is eliminated. Dogs who bark excessively are usually lonely, frightened or bored. This method is the best as well as the easiest of all the methods to implement. All family members can use this method safely.

Some points to ponder about changing motivation

- 🕒 A dog who is adequately exercised sleeps well at night and doesn't bark aimlessly
- 🕒 A dog who is allowed inside the house, with the rest of the family group (dogs are social animals) is less stressed and has fewer behavioural problems than an outside dog
- 🕒 A dog who has lots of mental stimulation, such as challenging home-alone toys and well stuffed Kongs, has no need to find his own amusement!



[Comment from CBS Head Instructor: This is a problem that often needs the assistance of a professional dog trainer. However, speak to your instructor about the methods below and ask for greater clarification and you may be able to do this for your dog, your family and your sanity. If you need help, also speak to your instructor and she will let you know how you can get at home help.]