

Speak and Shush (Bark on Cue - Shush on Cue)

By Sandra Kruczek

FACT: Dogs communicate in many different ways. They use their eyes, they wag their tails, they posture with their bodies, they can make their hair stand on end, and they can use their voices; they **bark** or vocalize. We view barking as a nuisance when we feel we cannot predict it or control it, or if our dogs bark when we are gone from our home or if they are outside in their yard too long and bark because they are lonely or excited by a squirrel or some children playing, or when the mail man comes walking by or has just been to our front door.

NOTE: Sometimes **we** want it both ways. We want our dog to “alarm” bark if there is a prowler outside but we don’t want him to bark at every passing person during the day. Be particular about what it is you want your dog to do. We encourage him to bark and act up when we feel like playing, but get grumpy when we want to watch TV or read a book and he wants to initiate our rough housing noisy play time.

BEHAVIOR: Here’s a hint: In any activity you wish to do with your dog, such as tug of war or hide and seek and you encourage your dog to engage in boisterous barking, start taking the role of leader of the pack. You own the toys, tugs, treats and you initiate the game and you end it and put the toys away. You may be surprised at how your dog respects these rules and boundaries. He actually will be less stressed than if he felt he had to be the one who took charge of these activities. He likes having you as the activity director.

TRAINING: An easy way to start taking charge of “people walking by” barking is to move in on him as he races to the front window, calmly check out the window and say “that’s enough”, take a hold of his collar, displace him (move into his space) on the couch or where he stands by the window and move him away. If you have to put his leash on and tether him to you so that he doesn’t rush back to the window, so be it. But take charge and let him know that you are okay with his letting you know he saw something, but **that is where his responsibility ends.**

You can set up a training scenario and be prepared to put a bark on cue and put a shush on cue. (Have a toy and training treats ready) If your dog is especially willing to bark at the drop of a hat, encourage him to bark or vocalize in any manner (holding a favorite toy for example) or use a hand gesture of your own design, and when he does speak, stop him immediately with a word such as “yes” “good boy“. Immediately have a treat ready and **hold it very close to his nose.** (Do **NOT** give it to him) Use a visual gesture such as we would normally do when we say “shush” to quiet someone. Simultaneously hold the treat so that he can sniff it. Your dog cannot sniff and bark at the same time. Be very calm and quiet and softly say, “shush”, “yes” “good boy” as he waits and is silent. Then quietly give him the treat. Repeat this scene at least five times and then give him a rest.

MANAGEMENT: Dogs that bark incessantly outside usually are telling us that they are spending too much time in the yard, alone. When I get calls from families who are being threatened by their neighbors for keeping them awake during the day or night, the first question I

ask is, “How much time does your dog spend in your yard during the day?” Almost always the answer is, “all day” or “all night”. This is not a barking issue. This is a management issue.

Dogs are pack animals and will try in any way they can to tell us that they need help. It is not natural for a dog to hang out in the yard alone (and by the way not eat the trees and tear up the garden). They will find something to do and recreational barking is high on the lonely, bored dog list.

Exercise is a huge part of keeping dogs happy during the day. It is not an option. It is a necessity. Our modern dogs are healthy, well fed and ready to go with us in our active lives. It is unreasonable to expect a dog to just wait and do nothing all day, without coming up with some solutions on his own. Set up his inside home environment so that he wins. Read on.

When I counsel pet owners about the “outside barking dog” problem, I get them to commit to serious pet exercise before going to work and coming home at lunch time to let the dog out to exercise before going back to work. (You might hire a reliable friend or young person to take the dog for a walk or play with him after school.) I recommend keeping the dog inside the house, in his crate (or using baby gates when appropriate) with freshly stuffed chew toys. I recommend using “white noise” when you are away from home such as leaving the radio or TV on. Try to recreate what your house environment is like when you are at home.

I have discovered that if I can help pet owners realize that their dog doesn't **need to be outside for his happiness** in their absence, that the whole neighborhood is happy and most especially the dog wins because he will keep his happy home. My dogs spend very little time in our yard. They basically want to be with me. They are house dogs.

If I am in my yard, gardening or playing, my dogs are with me, enjoying the yard under my supervision. They don't bark very much either. I have set them up to win.

Good boy, good shush.