

Training an "off-switch". Only when an extinction programme is in place, is it time to think of ways of stopping the barking that remains. It is worth considering how many dogs are regularly told to "shut up" and how many know what "shut up" actually means. A system of training for non-vocalisation has been established following the principles of learning theory (Lieberman, 1993).

The 8 Point Plan for training dogs to stop barking

1. Find a way of encouraging the dog to bark. You may find it will bark out of excitement in response to the door bell or if you hold its food bowl up in the air, or you may only need to use a food reward or a toy. (Tying the dog up safely may also increase frustration, and so stimulate vocalisation).
2. When, with a bit of friendly teasing, your dog does bark, praise it and start to repeat the word 'speak!' during the vocalisation.
3. Repeat the exercise until the dog associates the word 'speak' with the act of barking and is vocalising merrily for rewards.
4. Reserve praise and rewards for times when the dog has barked only after having heard the command to speak. This places the bark under stimulus control (i.e. puts it on command).
5. Introduce the word 'quiet!' or 'stop!' while your dog is barking on command, and give it a toy or food treat as soon as it stops barking.
6. Reserve praise and rewards for times when the dog has stopped barking only after having heard the command to be 'quiet!' or 'stop!' This places the termination of barking under stimulus control.
7. Repeat step 6 whenever the dog is barking without being told to speak. This links the signal to be quiet with the cessation of spontaneous barking. Reward liberally for all appropriate responses at this stageof course!
8. Issue the neighbours with a supply of rewards and instruct them to repeat step 6 whenever the dog is barking.

References

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