

Dog Behaviour

Dogs with Wings Assistance Dog Society | December 2014

Does your dog now have a ‘new trick’ to show you? Is he trying to get your attention with demand barking or whining? This can be very annoying. Unfortunately this is something we have nurtured and shaped inadvertently by rewarding this behaviour.

Here are some tips for curbing these behaviours.

Ignore It

This is difficult, but ignoring an unwanted behaviour is one way to fix it. It’s important to realize that barking or whining at you is demanding attention. So even if you correct him, this is attention. Saying “shhhhh” is attention, giving eye contact is attention, laying your hand on him is attention. Talking to him in a sweet voice is attention and worst of all giving what they want is attention while reinforcing the bark or whine. Anything you do that makes the dog think you are communicating with them when they bark is attention.

Reward Positively

If he’s barking, immediately turn away from the dog and walk away. This is puzzling to the dog when you bail on him, but it works. It doesn’t have to be walking away to the other side of the house, room, or yard but walking away 5 or 10 feet is enough. As soon as the dog is quiet give him positive verbal reinforcement and treat him.

Have Patience

Let’s say the dog’s toy rolled under the couch out of reach and it barks. Walk away, reward silence, as above. Then retrieve the toy, have the dog do something like sit. When he sits, reward him with the toy. You will need patience for this as barking has worked for the dog in the past and when you undo a behaviour it can get worse before it gets better.

Stick to It

Here is the list of the reframed behaviours and their rewards:

Sit = toy retrieval

Sit = opening the door to go

Sit = a treat, verbal praise or touch

Sit = a greetings from you

Undoing undesirable behaviours is hard work. So also make sure you nurture and reward the behaviours you like with praise, touch, or treats.

About Dogs with Wings:

Dogs with Wings is a leader in the international community of assistance dog training schools. The organization exists to serve people with disabilities. They work collaboratively, and in partnership with other organizations that provide assistance dogs to people with disabilities.

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