

Controlling Barking When the Door Bell Rings

Goal: Teach an alternative behavior other than rushing the door and/or barking

Benefits: Calmer dog when people arrive at your house and no barking or jumping on/at visitors.

Your dog needs to know: Sit, Stay, Touch to the hand

Time required: 10-15 minute sessions 3-5 days per week

Step 1: Decide on the behavior you would like your dog to do that is more appropriate than barking or jumping. I would suggest either a nice sit or go to your “mat/crate/bed”

Step 2: Figure out what triggers your dog to bark. Is it grabbing the door handle or just even the sound of the door bell or the knock?

Step 3: Move towards the closed door and invite your dog to come over with you. Pretend like you are going to open the door but don't, just give the handle a jiggle. Reward your dog by tossing the treat towards her when she moves away from the door. Even if it's the smallest move or even if she walks away. Repeat this exercise several times. When your dog is moving away from the door when you touch the door handle, you can move onto the next step.

Step 4: Practice the same exercise above only coming at the door from different angles from different rooms so that she learns to generalize that no matter what direction you come from the rules are still the same. Reward each time your dog moves away from the door. When your dog continues to move away, regardless of which angle you approach the door from you can move to the next step.

Step 5: Adding a verbal cue. Add a cue such as “Just a minute, Hang On, I'll be right there”. Repeat the steps above with the cue added.

Step 6: Once you have walked to the door, touch the door handle, and have said your cue word, walk away from the door and lead your dog to follow you using a “touch” command. The goal here is to move 5-6 steps away from the door then reward. Cue to sit and stay, then reward that behavior. You will know to move on to the next step once you are able to walk up to the door, touch the door handle and your dog walks away and sits with only your cue word. Make sure that you release your dog before starting the game again. Otherwise, the dog will learn to predict that when you say sit, stay that you will be calling them over again to start.

Step 7: Take step 6 a little further, and direct your dog to the spot that you have been working at that is about 5-6 steps away from the door, then turn back and go to the door again, touch the handle, return to your dog and reward. Continue this exercise slowly building the amount of distance between your dog and the door.

Step 8: Adding an open door. Your dog should now be going to her spot when you touch the door handle and give the verbal cue. It should look like this, you approach the door, say your cue words, direct your dog to her spot, walk back to the door and jiggle the door handle. Now try adding opening the door from different areas of the house, open the door just a little bit and then close it again. If your dog stayed in place go back to her and reward. Continue this until you can open the door completely. Once you are able to open and close the door completely with your dog staying put, you are ready for the next step.

Step 9: Adding a visitor. Have someone help you by standing outside the door. Start the exercise again: touch door handle, give verbal cue, direct dog, open door. When you open the door, have the person walk in. If your dog gets up from her spot, the person walking in the door, should stop and back up. You may even have to have your helper go back outside and close the door. In the meantime, use your body to block your dog and redirect her back to her spot. Start the game over again. Move to the next

step when your dog is able to accept someone coming in the door without coming off her spot.

Step 10: Adding the doorbell. Have your helper stand outside so they can ring the doorbell for you. When the bell rings, walk to the door, touch the door handle, give your verbal cue, direct your dog to her spot, and reward! Don't be alarmed if your dog's behavior slides back or you still have some barking going on a bit during this step. Adding the doorbell is huge for some dogs. These behaviors should correct themselves as your dog is reinforced for the alternate behavior. Just keep practicing. Keep repeating this exercise until your dog is continually going to her spot and staying when the door bell rings, then you can move to the next step.

Step 11: You may want to ask the help of several different people for this next step so that your dog learns to generalize that it doesn't matter who comes through the door, there is still an expected behavior. This step is a little different as now you are going to first ring the bell, then say your cue word, direct your dog and open the door, let the person in, go back to your dog and reward if she has stayed for this process. Release your dog and start the exercise again. Continue this step until your guests are able to walk in the door and close it and walk past your dog with your dog not moving.