

Be Right Back! Podcast with Julie Naismith

Episode 018 Transcript – How To Fix 3 Common Types Of Barking

<https://julienaismith.com/episode-18/>

So today I want to talk to you about how you can tackle home alone barking, but also how you can tackle different types of problem barking. Because barking isn't just a problem when you're gone. Barking can also be a problem when you're at home with the dog. So that's what I'm going to do today. I'm going to go through three types of problem barking, and I'm going to tell you what you can do about each one of those.

First off, I'm going to talk about something called watchdog barking. Now, this is where your dog is basically doing his job. It's your dog raising the alarm, letting you know that something incredibly scary and threatening is going on outside. As far as the dog's concern, that is. Now, that could be something as scary as the delivery guy approaching the house. It could be something as scary and as worrisome as somebody closing a car door. But as far as your dog's concern, he's letting you know that there's a threat to your survival right outside the door. Now, this is a very common problem. Many of us have seen this in our own dogs or maybe experienced it in our friends or the dogs of our family when we've been around at their homes. It's the dog who lets us know if anything is happening outside with a big roller wolf.

And with this kind of barking, the first line of training, the first line of changing the behavior for this dog is you're going to block out sights and sounds. So in other words, you are going to give your dog less opportunity to rehearse this unwanted behavior, this unwanted barking, if we can stop the rehearsal, sometimes even just doing that can reduce the problem behavior. So when I say block out sights and sounds, what do I mean? Well, to block out sights, you can obviously pull curtains, you can obviously draw blinds. But for most of us, that's not ideal. We don't want to live in a home where we can't see out of the windows. So what a lot of people I work with do is they use frosting. So you can buy online now it's plastic stick on frosting, which comes in kind of a plain frosting, or you can get patterned frosting. It's not terribly expensive. And my husband tells me it's fairly easy to apply. We use it in my house, too, because I'm a big believer in stopping behavior from being rehearsed. So that's a really good go to for blocking out sights.

We know that dogs are very sensitive to sounds as well. So we need to work on that. My favorite for that is using something like White Noise and you can find White Noise app in the app store. You can find white noise, playlists on things like Spotify. And if you don't want to use White Noise, you can use music. Just play music. Leave the TV on, leave the radio on. White Noise, though, is something which is really quite neutral. It's designed to deaden to reduce the impact of sounds in the environment. So it's designed to do that. Some dogs don't love it, some owners don't love it. And actually my preference is I use something called Brown Noise. It's just a different frequency. I find White Noise is a little bit high pitched for me. So we use Brown Noise, but we also use the radio or we use a playlist. And in fact, I prefer playlists sometimes to the radio because there's no gap between the music, so there's no talking where the volume

can go down. I'm a big, big fan of this approach, blocking sights and sounds for watchdog barkers. Like I say, sometimes just stopping them, being able to do the behavior can help improve things on its own by the mere act of doing that.

But your second line of changing watchdog barking, your second line of training is you're going to get your dog to do something else other than bark. The easiest thing to start to do is to teach them a really solid recall away from the window or away from the door. Now, you won't be able to teach your dog to do this in the heat of the moment. If your dog's barking at the window and you ask for a recall, chances are your dog's not going to return to you. If you've been following my training approaches, you will hear me talk about incremental plans where we use tiny, tiny steps to gradually increase our dog's ability to do something. And if you want to train your dog to come away from barking at the delivery guy, you need to start by training your dog to come away when there's nothing going on.

You need to start with a much easier step and gradually increase the difficulty. Don't start with calling him away from the doorbell because he ain't going to be able to handle that. First off, you need to start with an incremental plan, gradually increase the difficulty. Get him up to a level of proficiency where he can come away from that exciting stuff that he's trying to alert you to. You could also ask them to go to their mat. Again, you're going to start with a really, really easy criteria. It could be go to your mat when absolutely nothing else is going on in the house and you would gradually build up the difficulty. Think of training a dog as more like learning a musical instrument or learning a language than knowing something or not. So it's not like I know the capital of France is Paris. I either know that or I don't. That's not how dogs learn to do behaviors. They learn to do behaviors incrementally. So as I said, think about it like learning to play the piano, or maybe learning to ski or play tennis, or learning a language where you gradually, gradually get more and more proficient and you do it in incremental steps. Okay?

So watch dog barking, you're going to block sight and sound. You're going to teach them something else instead. Do that incrementally. And one other thing you can do, so don't do this with an anxious dog. Do it with a dog who's just barking for kicks or barking to let you know that there's something going on outside. One thing you can do is if they give you a wrong answer, you can use a timeout. So in other words, if they continue to bark, you can warn them and then pop them into a timeout. Timeout can be they go into the powder room or timeout could be you leave the room. What happens there is the dog just loses access to the thing that it wants. I e you or the window or the room. You really need to be careful though. Don't make this aversive. Don't go slamming your dog into his crate or slamming your dog into the powder room. You can use a crate for timeouts, but you're just going to gently encourage your dog to go into the crate. We're not doing massive collar grabs. We're not rough handling our dog into the timeout space. That's really important. We want to make this a penalty. We're not using an aversive technique, okay? So we don't want the dog to be fearful when we do the timeout. All right, that's watchdog barking.

Let's talk about spooky barking now. And spooky barking is different than watchdog barking, although it can look very similar. So as with watchdog barking, you're at home, your dog barks

at something outside. But what's going on? Instead of your dog doing an alarm call or alerting you to something, he's actually really quite upset by the noises outside. It could be that he finds those noises actually really quite aversive and that's why he barks in response. Maybe he's nervous because he doesn't love people. And so when he hears people in the street or people coming towards the house, he gets upset. So that's the difference between watch dog barking in the first problem barking that I explained to you and this one. So spooky barking is your dog being upset and barking as a response to being upset.

So how do we tackle spooky barking? Well, first of all, we're going to block out sights and sounds again, I know sounds obvious now, doesn't it? And sounds like it's too simple, but sometimes simple things can deliver a ton of return in dog training. So don't ever underestimate the power of just managing the dog's environment to make it less easy for the dog to do the thing that you struggle with to do the problem behavior. So block out sight and sound. Second, change how the dog feels about the outside noises. So notice here we're not necessarily getting our dog to do something different. We're accepting that our dog is upset by outside noises, and we're going to change the way the dog feels about those noises.

And here we can use a technique called counter conditioning, if you follow me, for separation anxiety training. You'll know all about Desensitization, where we gradually get the dog used to something that it's scared of by showing it's a non scary version of that thing. And sometimes, though not in separation anxiety, we can combine Desensitization with something we call counter conditioning. And counter conditioning is just using food to change how the dog feels about something it doesn't like. So instead of being scared of a noise outside, we use food to make the dog feel better about that noise. And in fact, what happens with counter conditioning is that scary thing, that noise starts to predict food. So every time the dog hears a car door slam, if we do our Desensitization and counter conditioning really well, if we do it well, when that car door slams, the dog starts to go, OOH, I know what happens now. I get chicken. And that helps to change how the dog feels about the thing it was previously scared of. And I've linked to an article in the show Notes that goes into more detail about how to do counter conditioning.

Okay, number three, let's move along to talk about home alone barking. So what if your dog barks the whole time you are gone? Well, we need to figure out what's causing it. And what's causing it could be a continuation of the watchdog barking or spooky barking that you see when you're at home. It could be your dog getting frustrated that you've gone out and waits a minute. Somehow you've forgotten to take him with you. And he's barking out of sheer frustration that if he barks and barks and barks, you might come back, pop his leash on and take him to the park. Or it could be barking that's caused by your dog's fear of being left alone. And how can we tell? Well, as I always say, video is your friend here. Whether your dog is barking when you're around or whether your dog's barking when you leave, video him. Why would you video your dog when he's barking when you're home alone? I tell you what, you can miss so much stuff, particularly in the heat of the moment when you're getting really agitated by your dog's barking. So having a video running and going back over it can really illuminate and help you see things that honestly, you just miss, whether it's because you're too busy trying to sort out the problem, or whether with a home alone dog, you're not there. So of course you need video. And so if we

set the video up on our dog when we go out and we discover that our dog is barking the whole time, how can we determine whether that's frustrated barking or whether that's fearful barking?

So I'm going to come on to in a second some tips for you as to how to look at that video and determine which of those is going on. Just coming back to watchdog barking and spooky barking while you're out, you might be wondering, well, how on earth am I going to fix those if I'm not there? I get the training plan when I'm around, but how am I going to do that when I'm not there? So if the barking that you discover on video when you leave your dog, when you review the video and you discover it's just a continuation of the watchdog or spooky barking that he does the rest of the time, you'll know that, by the way, because you'll see him barking at noises or barking in a pattern that's very similar to the barking that you see when you're with him. Well, obviously you can't train those behaviors when you're out, can you? So you've got to rely heavily here on blocking out sounds and views. And what you'll often find is that if you can work on this unwanted behavior when you're at home by stopping it being rehearsed and by asking your dog to do something different or changing how it feels about the noises outside. If you work a lot on that when you're home with your dog, it can actually help change the behavior even when you're not there.

Okay, but what if you find its frustration at being left or fear of being alone? How is video going to help you? The big thing you're going to see on video is body language. You're going to be able to see also what else is the dog doing? Do they look bored? Do they look like they're just looking for something to do? They're kind of a bit at a loose end and they're looking for some fun. And also video is going to tell you how long the behavior, how long the barking goes on. For anxious dogs, by and large, it's not entirely 100% the case. Nothing ever is with behavior. Anxious dogs tend to persevere more with their behavior. And that makes sense, doesn't it? If you've ever been extremely fearful or extremely anxious at something, your adrenaline will have kicked in and you'll have noticed that you feel like you just have more energy to keep going. And that's biology that's helpful to us and to any species that when we're in a fight or flight situation, a fear of death situation, adrenaline will help us keep going. Even when we feel tired and our body is getting drained and we feel like we can't go on, adrenaline keeps us going and keeps us doing the right thing to get us away from the thing that's scaring us.

So the same is true with dogs. Anxious dogs are more likely to persevere with barking than frustrated dogs. So those are the clues you're looking for when you're reviewing video, looking for anxious body language. We're looking at what else the dog is doing and we're looking at how much your dog is persevering if your dog is frustrated. So if you decide your dog's frustrated when you leave him home alone, try giving him more to do when you go out. Anything from puzzle feeders to foraging toys, to choose to hide and seek of treats around the house, anything. See if you can up the amount of fun stuff you give him to do when you go out. And also see if you can increase his exercise no matter how much you currently do, see if you can up the amount of exercise because that can really make a difference. I find with the frustrated guys that upping enrichment and really upping exercise can help reduce that frustrated home alone barking. With the anxious guys, we can't tie them out and more than likely they're not

going to be interested in games or fun or feeders when you're gone. So for the frustrated guys, upping exercise and enrichment can really help.

Now, if your dog is barking because he's frightened of being home alone, he's a classic separation anxiety. You need to remember I say it all the time, but I don't think I can say it too often. You need to remember that this behavior is emotional behavior, not thinking behavior. And the way that you're going to stop this home alone barking is to change the way your dog feels about being home alone. We've got to teach your dog that home alone time isn't scary and we do this by gradually exposing him to safe amounts of alone time. We increase duration, we go up ever so slowly in duration, we go at the dog's pace, we don't rush him. And if we think we're not going fast enough, we're probably not going slow enough. And that whole process is what my subthreshold training protocol does. And I've linked to a video of how sub threshold training works in the show notes. So keep reminding yourself that to fix separation anxiety barking, you have to stop the fear. Now, the common theme with all of these fixes for the different types of barking that I've mentioned today is that we are not physically stopping our dog from barking. We're either getting our dog to do something that's incompatible with barking, like going into a downstay, or if you're barking at the window, come away from the window so you could no longer bark at the window. So we're either getting the dog to do something different or we're changing the dog's desire to bark by changing their emotion. And that's why methods that try to physically stop the dog barking don't work.

What methods do I mean when I mean things like shock collars, citronella collars, or muzzling a dog to stop them barking? Because none of those change your dog's desire to bark. None of those teach your dog another way of behaving. All they do is suppress the bark. If they do, more often than not, I see issues with all of those where you think they're going to stop the dog from barking and they don't even do that. And actually when it comes down to things like the citronella collar, like the shot collar, and even the muzzle, to a degree, if you use those on an anxious dog, you're using a fear based training method to deal with fear based barking. That doesn't make any sense. So not only is there a really good chance that those tools aren't going to stop the barking, there's an excellent chance, sadly, that you're going to make the fear worse. So you stick a shot collar on the dog who barks at home alone. You set it so that the collar goes off when the dog barks. And now what's happening is a dog who's petrified of being home alone is also getting a shock, an electric shock, when he's home alone. So now he's thinking, oh my gosh. Not only is it really scary when mum goes out because, I don't know, the sky's going to fall on my head or something, but now I get this awe, this pain thing in my nerve. I don't know. I hate it when she goes out. So can you see how treating fear with fear just doesn't make any sense at all? Don't use these tools. I don't want you to make your dog worse. You've got enough to deal with as it is. Okay.

Anyway, to summarize this whole barking conundrum. To stop the barking, the first thing we need to do is work out the cause. If the dog isn't upset, we can use an incompatible behavior. We can get them to do something different. And if the dog is upset, we're going to change how the dog feels in order to stop that emotional barking. And if in doubt about what's going on with your dog, always use video. Even if you're with your dog when he barks, video is going to show

you things you will miss. Okay, I hope this helps and I look forward to seeing you on next week's episode. Bye for now.