

## Excited Barking

Contributed by Barbara Brill  
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A member writes: "When we are about to go for a walk, Micky starts barking and jumping at me when I try to put his collar on and continues to bark through the elevator ride and until we get out of the building. I'm not certain if this is aggressiveness or just demanding behavior? Either way, this is driving me crazy. What should I do?"

You're not alone. The good news is: this behavior is easy to resolve.

Follow some of the basic dictates of operant conditioning dog training. That is: Remember that all creatures learn as a consequence of their behaviors. They learn to do what works for them to get what they want.

With that in mind, reward the dog for the behaviors you wish to reinforce. Ignore the dog or prevent the dog from engaging in behaviors you do not wish to reinforce.

Thus, if dog starts to jump and bark as you're attempting to put on its collar, stop. Do not put on its collar. Turn your back to break off any eye contact with dog. That teaches dog "The behavior doesn't work to get what I want."

He's probably doing so in excited anticipation, but you definitely can stop rewarding that behavior. Just walk away, stay away a minute, and then come back to begin again.

Ask dog to come to you to have his collar put on, rather than the reverse of going to the dog. Calmly ask him for a "Sit." Then "Wait." Then fasten his collar.

By the

way, why isn't he wearing his regular collar all the time, the one with the rabies vaccination tag and dog license attached?

If dog begins to bark during elevator ride, here are some suggestions. Push the button for the closest floor to get the elevator to stop. Then get off. Give "Sit" cue to the dog while you wait in the hallway for the elevator again. Practice teaching your dog how to ride politely in the elevator without barking.

This is a separate lesson entirely from taking dog for an outing. First you need to accomplish teaching dog to exhibit good manners at home and in the elevator.

Lots of small and toy-breed dogs bark in excitement. But even the small and toy-breed dogs have brains. They're very capable of learning to show polite manners in our society. Just don't reward the dog for any unmannerly behavior.

It may take a few tries before you are able to accomplish this change with Micky. I mean by that that he may persist in his excited barking until he learns that it doesn't pay off for him as it did formerly, in his other home. The effort may require a few repetitions over days because Micky may persist in trying the barking, not be so eager to give it up. But if it no longer works for him to get what he wants, then the behavior will extinguish.

A while back, when I was living at my former home, I met my next door neighbors and their Yorkie. They'd given me a key to their house to check on it whenever they were away. One time they called me from a nearby spot where they'd taken their teens for skiing. They were delayed in returning home and asked if I could please check on their Yorkie and take it outdoors to do its business, because they were a bit delayed. Of course I would.

But I do such things differently from my neighbors. Many times I'd seen the little Yorkie pulling each one of them on leash, one at a time. But it looked ridiculous. A tiny little Yorkie pulling the very large-sized male owner down the sidewalk.

I went to the house, clipped leash to the Yorkie's collar and then waited at the door until the dog stopped its pulling and eager demand barking. In a moment, the dog looked up to make eye contact with me. At last!!! The dog was acknowledging, "There's a person on the other end of my leash!"

Click/treat for that check in behavior, the eye contact. Then we moved forward together as I opened the back door to go outside.

But I stopped at the top step and waited. Dog could not go down the steps until dog was beside me in heel position and waiting politely, without pulling on leash, without excited barking.

This time, dog acknowledged my presence in only about five seconds. That was real progress.

We descended the porch steps together. Then I halted again. This time, that quick-witted Yorkie turned on a dime to return to my left side, look up at me for my click/treat response.

Then we started into the yard. Immediately as its toes touched grass, the dog urinated. What a gooooooooood dog! I just gave verbal praise this time.

Then the dog began to meander about, but I did not move forward. Soon the dog discovered that the leash was taut. He turned on a dime and returned to my side again. Click treat for that.

Being at my left side and making eye contact ->- (predicts) "We move forward." That was the real life reward. And that's how we began our first walk together. The entire lesson lasted only about three to five minutes.

Dogs *\*are\** capable of learning. They *\*are\** capable of changing their behaviors. We need to be patient, fair, consistent, and kind. If we're able to take all of the emotion out of it, the dogs learn even faster than normally.

Let them learn what is expected of them. They will learn as a consequence of their behaviors, but only *\*if\** we are consistent in rewarding the dog for its desirable behaviors, and consistent in preventing or ignoring the behaviors we do not wish to reinforce. The ignoring unwanted behavior idea will work if the dog does not receive environmental reinforcement for its behaviors.

Set a reasonable, attainable objective for each lesson. That way the dog achieves quickly and you may measure your own progress.

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