

**DOGS BARK, THAT'S A FACT...IT'S NORMAL...IT'S ESSENTIAL
BUT SOMETIMES IT CAN BE EXCESSIVE**

NOISY BUT NICE



Absolute Dogs®

by Team Absolute Dogs

Dogs bark, that's a fact

It's normal, it's essential but sometimes it can be excessive

There are many reasons a dog may bark: **playfulness, startlement, fear, excitement, overarousal, boredom or frustration.** Alternatively, the barking might not be motivated by an emotion but, instead, by a goal the dog wants to achieve: getting another dog to play with them, making a toy move or getting to the food.

Whatever the reason for the barking, it can be a challenge: when you want to quietly talk to someone at your door; when your neighbours are in; when you just want some peace and quiet; or, when you need to sleep.

Games-based training is an awesome resource to turn around this very common challenge.

Our games are based on concepts; the skills and emotional strengths that your dog needs to manage their emotional responses, challenges they face and generally to make good choices. These games are the strategies you can use to improve excessive barking.

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The key to overcoming challenging barking is to identify what emotional strengths your dog needs to deal with the situations that cause barking. Arm your dog with different skills and he won't go to the behaviour box marked 'barking' when he gets excited, overaroused, scared or frustrated.

**Look at the big picture -
what triggers barking?**

**TOP
TIPS**

Is it strange people, unusual surroundings, noise, darkness, movement, confusion, low confidence or is your dog's breed bred for guarding?

Understanding what triggers excessive barking is your first step to reducing barking.

The Door

Teaching optimism and calmness

This is Twig. She generally seems to be an optimistic girl but she doesn't like it when visitors come to the house. For the first several minutes she barks loudly and darts around. Eventually, she settles under the table but her owner wishes she would learn to greet guests more politely.

What concepts do you imagine might be needed to help Twig cope with the arrival of people? Whether or not Twig is worried about people, you may decide that she needs to practice more CALMNESS. If she is worried, she may need some OPTIMISM so that she can see new arrivals as a positive, rather than a negative thing. So, to overcome the barking when visitors arrive, Twig's owner could begin to grow CALMNESS and OPTIMISM in Twig's daily life, to help Twig associate CALMNESS with the arrival of people to the house and to generally be more OPTIMISTIC.

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A perfect game for teaching OPTIMISM and CALMNESS is DMT; Boundary Games or Scatter Feeding are super for CALMNESS; and, Crazy Lady Game associates door knocking, greetings and arrivals with CALMNESS and OPTIMISM.

If Twig's owner tries to play any of these games when her visitor arrives, she may find that Twig can't concentrate on the games and they do not work. She might think that the games will never work. But the trick is to power up the games in advance; really adding value to practising the concepts that Twig needs to grow.

Long before the guest arrives Twig's owner can play some simple DMT sequences to remind Twig of the game: see or hear a distraction, use a calm marker and then deliver a treat. There are 3 stages for developing DMT. The first stage is to mark and reward as soon as you see the distraction whether or not your dog has apparently noticed it; the second stage is to mark and reward when your dog notices the distraction; the third stage is to wait for your dog to notice the distraction and then orientate back to you before you mark and reward.



So, Twig's owner starts by marking and rewarding Twig for events happening in and around the house. Then she knocks softly on something before saying NICE, a calm and gentle marker word. She pauses for a second and gives a treat to Twig: slowly, steadily, nothing too exciting. She does this a few more times and as long as Twig remains quiet, the game can progress and she can knock a little louder. If things continue to go well, she walks a few feet away and knocks on something different or gets someone else to knock somewhere in the house. If Twig barks, her owner goes back to DMT without the knocking. The knack is to go slowly, building up the challenge level for Twig. Her owner never plays this game for more than a minute or two but she does play this game often. Entire meals can be invested in the game.

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While we are powering up DMT, there are, inevitably, going to be knocks at the door and visitors. Twig's owner could use Novelty Scatter Feeding when there are knocks and greetings. Having built some value for Scatter Feeding in a safe place in the house, Twig's owner could simply Scatter Feed into that space whenever there is a knock at the door. Scatter Feeding encourages CALMNESS and OPTIMISM.

When it comes to CALMNESS generally and especially when we have visitors, we love Boundary Games.



Boundary Games and DMT together are a super powerful combination. By playing DMT along with Boundary Games Twig's owner is teaching Twig that visitors are cool, something to be OPTIMISTIC about and that visitors mean rewards for CALM and controlled behaviour on the boundary.

Soon, after practising DMT and Scatter Feeding, with or without Boundary Games for a few days, Twig will be ready for the next game, Crazy Lady. Like before, it begins with a game of DMT with knocks. This time Twig's owner goes to the door opens it and says

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'HELLO' even though no one is there. She's teaching Twig that the knocks, the door opening and greeting her guest are all non-events. And the best part is that Twig is learning that by choosing SILENT she earns a reward and that visitors are not something to worry about or become overexcited about. Instead Twig responds with the emotions of OPTIMISM and CALMNESS. Dogs are efficient creatures and will do the thing that earns a reward more often than the thing that doesn't; plus Twig's owner is pairing the very thing that caused excitement and over arousal with a different, incompatible behaviour. The knocking and the greeting at the door are becoming paired with a CALM reward. Twig's owner uses a CALM reward delivery; this transfers to Twig - creating CALMNESS in her too.



Boundary Games... zero to hero

Boundary games are our secret weapon to creating and promoting much calmer behaviour at home and elsewhere. So many concepts for life are practiced when we teach boundary games and calmness is one of them.... to get started straight away here's a free ebook teaching boundary games from zero to hero... Bonus Training Resource click the button below.

Make household noises normal

Through Boundary game training we can incorporate household noises in to the training:

- Knocking at the door
- Saying "Hello"
- Telephone ringing
- People arriving
- Cars driving past
- Gates opening
- Washing machine spinning
- Doorbell ringing

Pair these every day noises with positive reinforcement of calmly remaining on a boundary.

Bonus game - DMT + Boundary

With your dog on a boundary and calm, say a word, e.g. 'hello', and reinforce remaining calm with a calming marker word, e.g., 'Nice' and a calm delivery of food.

Add in other noises, increasing the challenge, as confidence and calmness grows.

The Car

Flexibility and arousal up

This is Bear. He loves to go places but he doesn't seem to like riding in the car. Bear begins barking the second he jumps in and doesn't stop until they reach their destination. Bear's owner is frustrated because he can't both drive and play games. He doesn't know what to do and going out in the car has become a miserable experience.

This could be a case of Bear predicting what comes next, if so, Bear needs to learn some FLEXIBILITY. Bear is, also, overexcited and has trouble calming down; he would benefit from developing AROUSAL UP, AROUSAL DOWN.

FLEXIBILITY and AROUSAL UP, AROUSAL DOWN are the concepts that will help Bear's owner decide what games to play.

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To develop FLEXIBILITY, the solution is to mix things up and Ditch the Routine. Predictable events, for dogs, create anticipation. For example, the car journey always leads to something exciting (a walk on the beach) or something scary (a vet visit or a walk where Bear sees things that might frighten him). Anticipation causes stress related chemicals to increase in the brain before the event happens leading to higher and higher arousal levels in Bear's brain as the predictable sequence of events continues. If Bear learns to be more FLEXIBLE then he will not suffer from the effects of anticipation.

One day, Bear's owner walks over to the car with Bear and turns around, returning to the house and calmly scatter feeding at the door. The next day Bear's owner puts him in the car. Bear is very excited and starts to bark but, this time, his owner backs out of the driveway and stops the car. Next, he opens the door and begins to play Reward Nothing in the back seat. Bear is confused but eager to play along; it's a game that he is familiar with playing in the house. When the game is over Bear's owner puts the car back where they started and they both go inside.





Later, they go for another “trip” but this time they don’t even make it to the car before turning around, maybe doing some Figure 8 Walking and Ditching that Routine. The next day they go a little further. Bear is, again, excited and he may be barking but he’s not certain what might happen next. He’s beginning to learn some FLEXIBILITY. When his owner stops the car Bear hops out to play Scatter Feed in the grass before going home.

The next time, Bear thinks he knows what will happen but his owner has decided that the next ride will be around the block with no stops; and maybe they can play some Mouse

Game and Boundary Games at the end of the ride, before Bear get’s out of the car.

The point is to keep it unpredictable. Ditch the Routine so there is no anticipation, no overarousal and therefore no picking the behaviour box that includes a big dose of ‘barking’.

This will take a few days of driving around, sometimes to nowhere, but it pays off. A short trip, a longer one, a short one, a drive with a break for a simple game or without any break or maybe just getting into the car, playing a game and then going indoors again:

the more random the better. Getting into the car is no longer a predictor for excitement and Bear has learnt to be more FLEXIBLE.

You may have noticed that the games Bear’s owner decides to play on ‘routine ditching’ car trips are CALM games. Reward Nothing, Figure 8 Walking, Scatter Feeding, Mouse Game and Boundary Games. This means that Bear gets excited about the car trip and then has to calm down to play the games. Bear is learning AROUSAL UP, AROUSAL DOWN and is learning to manage his emotions.

Soon, Bear’s barking in the car will begin to

reduce, journeys will become easier and so much more pleasurable. Bear will learn FLEXIBILITY and AROUSAL UP, AROUSAL DOWN.

This has become possible by playing games that build concepts.

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Ditch the routine so there is no
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The Coat

Playing calming games

This is Sophie. Every day at 5pm, when her human moves towards the door, Sophie barks. When her human touches her coat she barks even more. You might, already, be able to see that Sophie is barking as a consequence of predictability and needs to learn some FLEXIBILITY. Perhaps Sophie is overexcited and needs to embrace CALMNESS.

You already know how this is going, right? To develop Sophie's FLEXIBILITY her owner can Ditch the Routine and to develop CALMNESS, she can play games like DMT (using a calm marker and slow feeding), Scatter Feeding, Reward Nothing, Figure 8 Walking and, of course, Boundary Games.

So, Sophie is predicting that the coat will lead to a walk but her owner now has something else in mind. She's going to Ditch the Routine. She tosses some kibble on the floor to Scatter Feed while she slowly puts on her coat and grabs the leash. Sophie returns to barking because she's certain a walk is imminent but her owner pops the lead on and they begin to Figure 8 in the house.

Figure 8 walking is super for inducing CALMNESS. Some minutes later, the game ends and the coat and leash are put away. Sophie settles on her bed perhaps wondering why, today, the predictability didn't lead to where she expected. Instead she had a calm game rather than a walk like every other time her human put on her coat at 5pm.

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The next time, Sophie's human may or may not take Sophie for a walk. She may put her coat on at different times of the day, clip the lead on and immediately take it off again or just pick the coat and lead up and move them to another hook. Sophie's owner plays lots of different games with Sophie when she starts to demand bark. She will particularly pick games that generate CALMNESS. Sophie will learn that barking is a waste of energy and she would rather invest that energy in playing games with her owner, especially CALM games.



Low Arousal Calming Activities...

In your calm zones use part of your dogs daily food amount by providing chewing activities or filled kongs.

Licking and chewing can bring arousal levels down and help your dog to become calmer and more relaxed.

Bonus Idea

Filled Kongs and scatter feeding ideas....

These feeding strategies promote calm and are great for bringing arousal levels back down, whether that is after a 'reactivity episode' when out walking in the park; or after being at an agility training session. They are also a great way to add value to boundary games and for those occasions when you have a lot going on around the house. For example, you have tradesmen: pop the dog on a boundary and give them a stuffed kong or other interactive feeding toy and allow them to chill.

There are a few simple steps you should follow when introducing stuffed food toys to your dog.

1.

Start by allowing your dog to eat out of an open ended hoof (or something similar) – this is simple and your dog will easily succeed!

2.

Then make it a little bit more challenging by freezing slightly (remember the longer you freeze, the more challenging it becomes).

3.

Once your dog has mastered the above with progressive levels of difficulty, start on something that has a more complicated shape to interact with. But, whilst making the shape harder, you should make the filling easier so that the dog doesn't have to work too hard.

4.

Now you are getting amazing results! Gradually increase the challenge by using different fillings or start to freeze for a little longer each time.

By following these simple steps you are teaching your dog how to successfully finish eating those long lasting rewards. This will build up your dog's tolerance to frustration and ensure they don't give up. AWESOME!

Build up your dog's tolerance to frustration and ensure they don't give up



The Cat

Boundary games and building tolerance of frustration

This is Hank. He's mostly wonderful on walks but he has a problem with the cat that lives in his neighbourhood. Every time Hank sees the cat he barks like mad. Hank loves chasing cats and he loses control when he sees this cat, he gets very frustrated when he can't give chase immediately.

With the help of games-based training, Hank's owner can teach Hank the concepts of SELF CONTROL and TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION. He might, also, build some FOCUS and VALUE FOR PROXIMITY.

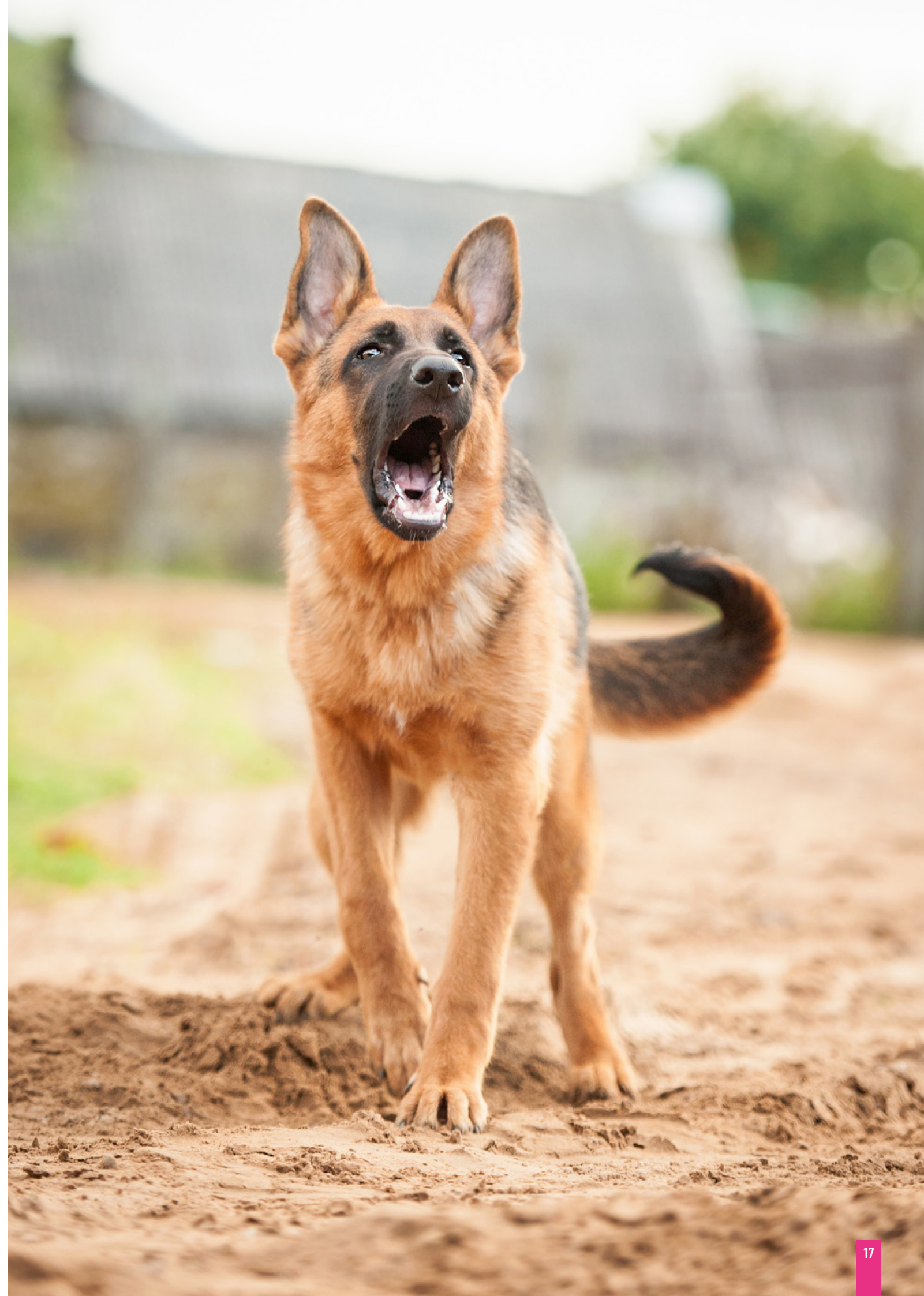
With the help of games-based training, Hank's owner can teach Hank the concepts of SELF CONTROL and TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION

Boundary Games are awesome for teaching SELF CONTROL. As Hank's owner works his way through the stages of Boundary Games he will see that Hank's ability to control

Boundary Games are awesome for teaching SELF CONTROL

himself improves. Hank's owner can be creative about the challenges that he builds up when playing Boundary Games. Mouse Game is, also, a super SELF CONTROL booster on its own or when played together with Boundary Games. Hank's owner will keep the sessions short and build up challenges slowly – this makes sure that the SELF CONTROL develops solidly.

To help build TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION, Hank's owner can make sure that Hank knows how to be CALM and has plenty of rest. All of the CALMNESS games will help with this. Hank's owner could, also, play games that involve a delayed reward and problem solving: Cardboard Chaos, Bottle Games and Mini Assault Courses can all be used to develop TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION. By starting with easy challenges and gradually increasing their difficulty, Hank's TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION will grow and grow.



To help a dog who loves to chase to learn to control that desire we think that the Whipit game is awesome. In this game, it is important to build up value for the Whipit before beginning to ask for SELF CONTROL. You are trying to recreate the emotional rollercoaster that your dog goes on when they see something that they want to chase. Once the dog has that desire, then Whip-it is an amazing tool for teaching that SELF CONTROL simply by asking for cued behaviours when your dog wants to chase; and the reward for responding to the cue? The opportunity to chase of course.

To build FOCUS and VALUE FOR PROXIMITY, Hank's owner will play Orient to Me, DMT, Proximity Vortex and Middle – little and often.

After playing the games, Hank's owner can be ready for the next time Hank sees the cat. Hank's owner has a pocket of kibble because he's been playing games with Hank everywhere they go. As they round the corner to the house where the cat is often seen, Hank's owner uses his attention noise and Hank swings his head around to receive his kibble. Then they begin to play a focus game of Orient to Me or Middle and Hank doesn't even notice the cat sauntering across the road.

If Hank had seen the cat before his owner, they might have played DMT as they watched the cat. If that wasn't enough, Hank's owner would have been ready to spin around in place and head off in the other direction,

A-B: because sometimes the best thing we can do for our dog is leave. If Hank sees the cat and begins to bark, after A-B, his owner might want to default to some calming Figure 8 walking.

A-B takes a little practice, but once you have it, it's like dancing. To play, hold the loop of the leash in one hand and slide the other down the lead to a few inches above the dog while spinning on your heels, ending up facing the opposite direction. Don't stop to speak or reward. Move away quickly but smoothly and once a few steps away, pull a kibble from your pocket and give it to the dog.

When you and your dog can do this movement smoothly, add a cue as you begin to slide your hand. Make it something easy to remember in the situation where you will need it, like TURN. Say it in a happy voice to show the dog that it's nothing to worry about; it's great fun to turn about and walk in the opposite direction. Practice A-B a lot, anywhere and everywhere. Don't just use it when there is something to avoid. Like Crazy Lady, it looks strange to others but it's really a lot of fun.

You are trying to recreate the emotional rollercoaster that your dog goes on when they see something that they want to chase



Understand arousal levels and how to read your dog

Situations that can trigger barking can often be spotted and managed much earlier if we learn to read our dog's body language.

Early recognition of body language changes means that early intervention can be made, reducing the chance of arousal levels increasing to a point where things get out of control.

Understanding how our own behaviour and energy levels can increase and decrease our dogs arousal levels can be a simple strategy useful for reducing the chances of excessive barking.

One simple strategy to employ in an emergency can be to scatter feed on to the grass or ground.

Observation Challenge Game....

Observe your dog over the next week and note any body language you notice several steps prior to barking.....scatter feed before the barking starts and mark with a calming verbal marker eg. "Nice"

You will be amazed how much more you notice about your own dog.

The Loneliness

Practising independence and confidence

This is Diva. Diva is great when her family is home but when she is left alone, she barks and barks and barks. Diva's owner knows about her barking because neighbours have complained and she worries about the neighbours getting upset every time she leaves the house.

Diva's owner might think that Diva needs to practice INDEPENDENCE and grow some CONFIDENCE.

Boundary Games are super for building INDEPENDENCE. By giving Diva a really valuable place to be, her owner can begin to create more time and distance for Diva even when she is at home. Diva's owner will place the Boundary out of sight or, gradually, in a different room. She will then leave Diva for short periods of times, returning often and rewarding Diva's choice to stay CALM and to stay on the Boundary. Diva's owner might even use a remote treating machine

so that she can treat Diva for staying on her Boundary when she's not in the room.

Gradually, very gradually, Diva's owner might leave the house for a minute or two and then more. If Diva gets worried, then her owner might go back a few steps and build up Diva's INDEPENDENCE slowly.

At the same time, by working on Diva's CONFIDENCE her owner will reinforce the work that she is doing to build INDEPENDENCE.

Games for building CONFIDENCE include: Reward Anything, DMT, Cardboard Chaos, Noise Box and Bottle Games.

By giving Diva a really valuable place to be, her owner can begin to create more time and distance for Diva even when she is at home

TOP TIPS

Build confidence and optimism with some cool games...

Your dog doesn't have to experience every single sight, sound, person or circumstance for them to become more confident with life.

Yes, life experience is important but it can be complimented by building confidence with games that teach the concept that novelty is normal.

Cool games incorporating noise, novelty and reinforcement for making confident steps to explore novel surroundings.

Bonus Game:

Noise Box

Fill a large box, play pit, laundry basket or washing up bowl with items that make a noise: balls, plastic bottles, cans, paper, plasticthe list is massive..... scatter feed and allow your dog to explore at their own pace. Let them choose.....when they choose to explore, scatter feed some more in to the noise box.

Bonus Game:

Cardboard Chaos

Make a pile of cardboard items, large, small, different shapes and heights and scatter feed....as they choose to explore scatter feed some more, reinforcing the choice to explore and growing confidence and optimism



Always Training

Calmness strategies

All of these examples require powering up the games and working on concepts when the dog is not barking. Some days they may not work at all, they may even seem to make things worse. In those cases, remember that rest is important for both of you and throughout all of these scenarios, CALMNESS strategies are an important element of keeping your dogs making good choices when they face challenging situations.



Help them feel safe...

Some dogs feel threatened in certain situations, people, other dogs, children, sounds. The strategies they use to deal with that feeling can often be inappropriate... barking, lunging, spinning to name a few.

We can help them feel safer and able to choose other strategies... Through some of our games from our naughty but nice programme including:

- Middle
- A to B
- DMT
- Magic Hand
- Figure of 8 walking

You can find these games on Naughty but Nice programme!

You can get started right now with one of our favourite games....

Middle

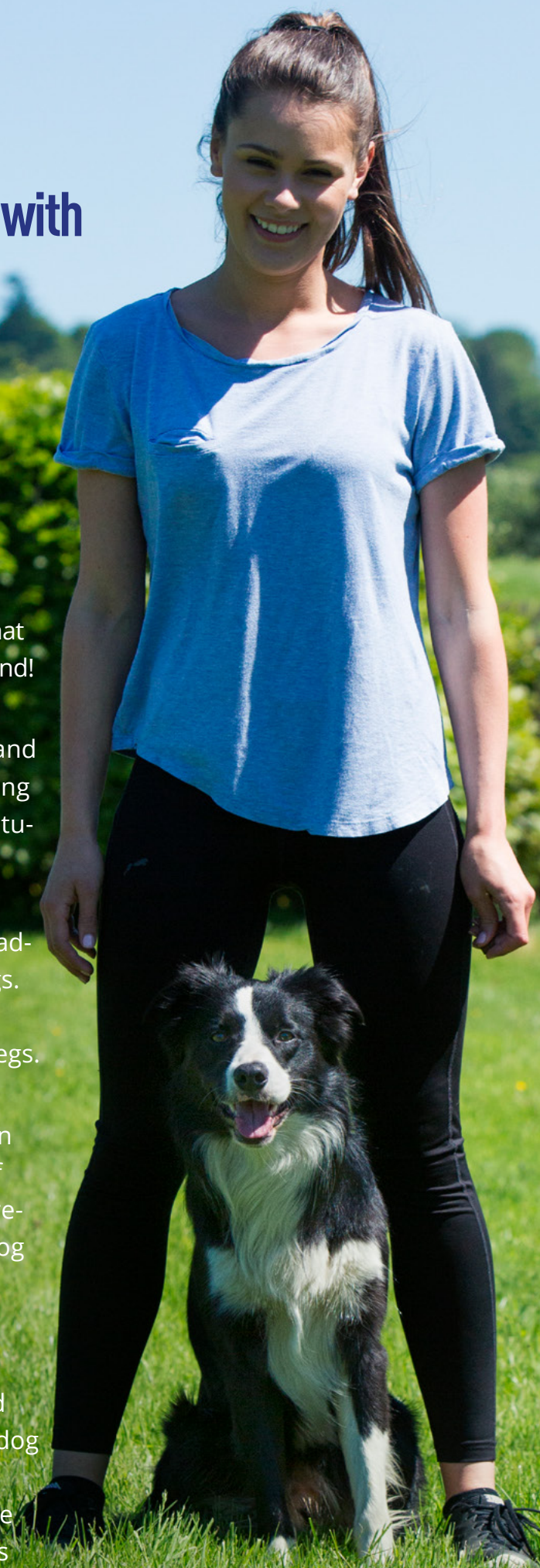
Step 1: We like to shape this trick, which means rewarding successive approximations of the final behaviour - or rewarding things your dog does that are closer and closer to the final behaviour in mind!

Step 2: To do this, we mark and reward turns and steps towards behind us to start with, rewarding by placing the treat or toy behind us and eventually between legs.

Step 3: Do this until your dog is consistently heading around your leg and then between your legs. At this point, placement of the reward should always be in the final position - between your legs.

Step 4: Build duration into maintaining position between your legs by providing a rapid rate of reinforcement in this position. Then work on reducing the rate of reinforcement while your dog stays in one place.

Step 5: Now work on the final behaviour, a sit! You can: 1) Shape the sit by marking and rewarding weight shifts backwards until your dog sits. 2) Cue a sit, repeat a few times and then wait your dog out for him/her to offer it. 3) Cue a hand target with your hand above your dog's head such that he/she sits when targeting.



Toolkit

Pick the games that support development of the concepts

You will see that there isn't a single game that will instantly change a barker. Every dog is different and the reasons for barking can vary. The truth is the solution is up to you and working with the dog in front of you is key.

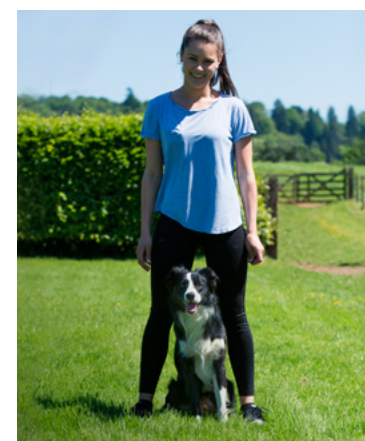
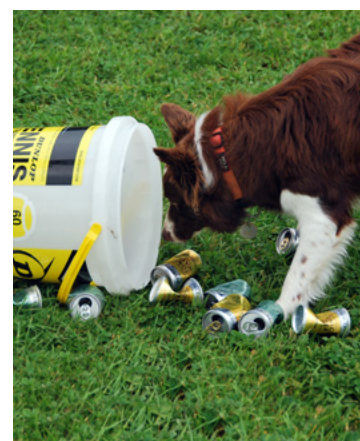
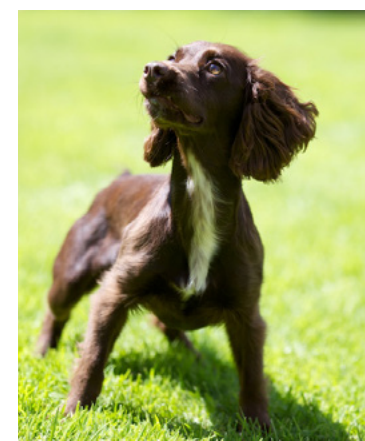
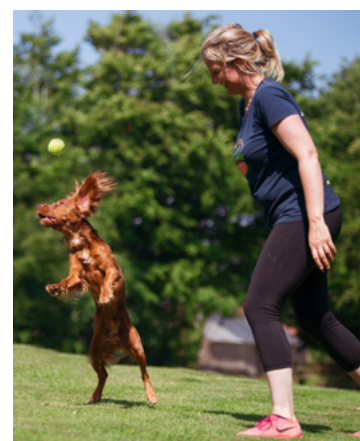
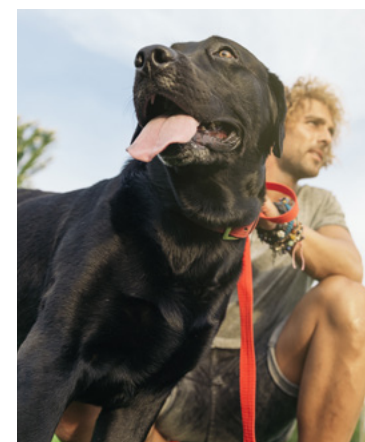
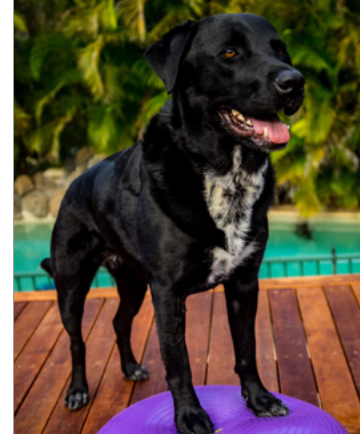
When you have a dog training challenge, start with the concepts.

Your dog could need more CALMNESS, OPTIMISM, CONFIDENCE, FLEXIBILITY, AROUSAL UP AROUSAL DOWN, SELF CONTROL, TOLERANCE OF FRUSTRATION, FOCUS, VALUE FOR PROXIMITY, INDEPENDENCE.

And then pick the games that support development of the concepts that you need to work on.

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| ✓ DMT | ✓ A-B |
| ✓ Boundary Games | ✓ Orient to Me |
| ✓ Scatter Feeding | ✓ Middle |
| ✓ Crazy Lady | ✓ Proximity Vortex |
| ✓ Ditch the Routine | ✓ Whip-it |
| ✓ Reward Nothing | ✓ Cardboard Chaos |
| ✓ Figure 8 Walking | ✓ Noise Box |
| ✓ Mouse Game | ✓ Bottle Games |

You can see that many of the games and concepts overlap and that they can be used individually or in combination to arm your dogs with the concepts, the lifeskills, that they need to deal with any challenging situations that they may face.



Improving your skills and knowledge

TOP TIPS

With improved skills and knowledge you will know what to do and how to do it when you and your dog are faced with a situation that triggers high arousal and barking.

Your confidence helps your dog to feel safe and able to cope far better than they otherwise would.

Bonus free ebook resource

Not every game is for every dog—or every owner. Just keep observing and playing games when your dog barks and, more importantly, before the barking begins. You will begin to notice which games work best and in which situation. This is your toolkit. Keep your tools sharp with practice and they will be ready when you need them. If one game doesn't seem to help try another, combine them, think of a new way to play them or decide it's time to rest. Importantly, don't over face your dogs and don't expect too much too soon.

Learn the games...build confidence and calmness for YOU!

Some real world situations can often be stressful, embarrassing, confrontational and upsetting, especially if you feel things have spiralled out of control.

If you can learn our games and gain confidence, it helps you to remain calm in the face of a stressful situation.

Your calming energy will help the situation and help your dog to be calmer.

Rehearsal

Teaching them rest and calmness is important

Once you begin to see some results, it's time to think about preventing rehearsal. You have the tools to help your dog avoid barking, and at this point, it begins to be important to prevent rehearsal. Keep playing the games, keep them guessing and remember that teaching them rest and CALMNESS is important.

Create calm chill out zones at home....

TOP TIPS

Depending on your dog, the home environment can be a stressful place. Creating calm chill out zones at home where your dog can choose to go can promote that sense of safety and tranquility that some dogs really need help with.

In a busy family household this can be a great solution for everyone. It gives the dog a safe space to retreat and allows space for those who live in an active, lively household.

A Quieter Future

It's unreasonable for you to expect your dog to never bark, but it is possible to lessen the frequency and duration of barking by implementing these strategies. Some days it might seem like you've slid back to the beginning, but don't give up.

Dogs will be dogs and they have a bad day now and then when their buckets are full (and sometimes you'll have no idea why their buckets are full that day).

The difference is that you have a greater and earlier awareness of the cause, strategies to deal with the behaviour and the basis of a better relationship with your dog.

Rededicate yourself to managing your dog's day. And keep playing because you are sure to both love the results.

Now, go take a nap to process what
you've just read, **practise calmness
and dream of a quieter future.**



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