OHLONE HUMANE SOCIETY

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Troubleshooting

Cause

Dogs often go berserk and become uncontrollable when specific things happen – when someone comes to the door, when you come home, when visitors come over, when children walk by the fence, when a neighbor cat or dog passes by your house, yard, or even the car. Dogs will bark, jump, lunge, madly dashy around, growl, and even urinate when excited.

The key to eliminating this behavior is to convince the dog that the events that set off the behavior are really not exciting at all.

Many times this behavior was accidentally taught to the dog. When she jumped up she was rewarded with a pat and attention. When she barked or acted territorial, you might have said, "Oh Alice, it's okay, there's nothing to be excited about, now you be a good girl." The dog didn't understand your words, but she did know that she was getting positive and rewarding attention, so she thought she must have been doing the right thing. If you shout and get excited, she might think you're encouraging her by joining in on the excitement and barking too!

Treatment

The first step in stopping this type of behavior is to stop reinforcing it. The next step is to isolate whatever sets the dog off and repeat it over and over again until the dog is totally bored by it.

For example: If the dog goes bonkers every time your neighbor's son walks by the fence, ask your neighbor's son if he'd like to earn a few dollars by spending a Saturday morning helping you to train your dog. All he has to do is keep walking by your fence over and over. At first, Alice will charge and bark at the fence as usual and you may think she'll never stop. After your neighbor's son has passed by the fence over and over (maybe 10 or 20 times, maybe 100 or 200 times, depending on the dog), Alice will eventually lose interest. If she looks up at all, she'll probably just think, "oh, you again". You need to continue exposing the dog to the upsetting stimulus until she is completely uninterested in it.

Keep in mind how many weeks, months, or years she's been doing this, and don't expect the problem to disappear in an hour. You must devote some time and patience to solving this problem.

When the dog is behaving appropriately, don't forget to reward and praise – she'll learn much more quickly.

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