



Wausau Animal Hospital

Barking and Your New Puppy

The first time most people find a new puppy's noise bothersome is when they confine the pup at night in a crate, exercise pen or small room with a baby gate across the doorway. It's natural for a pup alone to call out for someone to come. Pups alone in the wild would not survive! The puppy is following instinct.

The first thing you need to know about helping your new puppy learn to remain quiet in confinement is NOT to go to the puppy in response to noise. If noise does not work, the puppy will eventually give up that method of communication.

If you have responded to the noise by going to the puppy, you have now reinforced this instinct. The process of conditioning your puppy to relax and remain quiet in confinement is going to take longer. You will need extra patience. Remember, this is not your puppy's fault, and getting mad at the puppy will not help. Be consistent about going to the pup ONLY when the pup is quiet.

In particular, do not wait and wait while the puppy makes more and more noise, and then you finally go to the puppy. By doing this, you would teach your puppy to be especially PERSISTENT about making noise! If you have done this already, remember you are going to have to be very patient indeed to give your puppy time to unlearn this unfortunate reinforcement. If you stop reinforcing a behavior, eventually it will fade. But the more strongly it has been reinforced before you stop reinforcing it, the longer it will take to fade.

Punishment would NOT speed your puppy's learning to be quiet, and more than it would help your human infant learn not to cry. Punishment would greatly increase stress on the puppy, create more behavior problems, and seriously damage your relationship.

You can help your puppy accept confinement more quickly by introducing the confinement area gently, giving the pup treats while in the confined area. You can also make confinement less stressful for the puppy by placing the crate or exercise pen in your bedroom at night. This lets your pup get used to the confinement without at the same time having to deal with being alone.

It's a good idea to always give a pup or dog a treat upon entering the confinement area, along with high-quality chew toys. Make sure, of course, to use only treat consistent with your dog's diet as recommended by your veterinarian.

Your goal is for the dog to rest calmly in confinement. Since dogs sleep fourteen or more hours a day it's reasonable to use confinement if that time will be sleeping time. Excessive confinement is physically and mentally unhealthy for dogs.

There are adult dogs who cannot tolerate confinement to crates. Some of these dogs can be trained without crates to the point of being able to be safely loose in your house. Those suffering from severe separation anxiety may require the help of medication from your veterinarian during the adjustment process.

The ability of rest calmly can mean life or death to your dog at some point in the future, so it's extremely important to help your puppy develop this skill. Situations where a dog needs this ability include recovery from medical problems, travel, emergency evacuations, and adjustments to a new home or a new family. It will never again be as easy for the dog to develop the ability to rest calmly in a crate as it is in puppyhood.

Article is written by Kathy Diamond Davis and is courtesy of veterinarypartner.com