

3. Leave a radio or TV on as "white noise." In many households, the stereo/TV/radio is on from morning 'til night as long as someone is home. Imagine how "loud" the silence is when everyone is gone and the sound-system is turned off! Beyond masking outside noises, leaving the radio/TV/stereo on gives the aural appearance of your presence.

4. As you leave, give the dog an "only-when-I'm-gone" chew toy with your scent imparted on it. This toy should be something spectacular --a sterilized beef bone stuffed deeply and thoroughly with canned dog food or cheese spread (served frozen or chilled) or a flavorful beef-basted knotted rawhide bone. Give it to the dog upon leaving; rub it between your palms several times before you go. Not only is this a diversion tactic, it actually makes being left alone not so bad, as this is the only time the "most-wonderful-thing-in-the-world" appears!

BARKING SET-UPS

If you have tried all of the above and you are still finding noted from your neighbors, you must desensitize the dog to your departures with "barking set-ups." Set-ups take time; slow incremental progress is a necessary part of the program. Be prepared to use a long week-end or some vacation time before beginning the program.

First, imitate your daily departure routine. Do you usually put on make-up, search about for keys, gloves, etc, pack a gym bag or throw out the garbage. Make the dog think that this is just like any other daily departure.

Second, while giving him his special goodbye toy, get eye contact and tell him in a firm and matter-of-fact manner to be quiet until you return. Please, no long-winded emotional scenes; no begging, pleading or whining for him to be quiet. It will only serve to emotionally charge the situation and further stress-out the dog.

Leave --for a brief period of time. Just a minute or two to start out with. If you normally lock the door with keys, make the right noises, but don't lock it. You must be able to enter quickly if the dog begins to bark; this is not the time to fumble around with your keys. If you wait for an elevator, ring for it and get in. Go one floor down and come back up using the stairs. If the dog has not barked, return and gently praise. If you hear him begin to bark, burst back into the house hollering QUIET! Then turn and leave again.

This time, if the dog barks, punctuate your command for silence with the rattle of a shaker can (empty soda can filled with 15 pennies, fewer for fearful dogs) to startle the dog into silence. Praise the dog when he quiets down and leave again.

The goal, of course, is to be able to stay away for longer and longer periods of time without having to go back in and correct the dog for barking. The time away must be built up in small intervals. Set goals (5, 10, 15 minutes) and go back in and praise the dog if he remained quiet for the set amount of time. Don't wait for an undetermined amount of time and only go in to correct the dog for finally barking. Silence must be praised. Appropriate behavior must be acknowledged.

Most dogs who can remain silent for two hours can usually stay quiet for an 8 to 10 hours work day. It is building up to that first hour or so that may take several days of set-ups to achieve.

For the dog who believes that negative attention from you is better than no attention at all, you will have to intensify your response. When you return, do so quietly, do not shout QUIET, but instead toss the shake can near him (not at him); do it without the dog seeing you take aim. Do not do this with a fearful dog. The dog gets an "environmental" correction for barking, not a correction associated with you (verbal). A throw chain aimed at the dog's rear below the tail can have the same effect, resulting in a startled silence which you then praise.

Barking set ups can be tedious, but they usually work if you take the time to do them properly; barking problems are rarely solved in a day. Let your neighbors know that you are not ignoring their complaints; that you understand their discomfort and you are taking steps to correct the problem. Quite often, they will cut you a little slack if they know that their complaints have not fallen upon deaf ears.