

Things to Practice Outdoors

Speak

This is not on the command list because it is not a command that the future recipient will need to exercise regularly. However, it is one of those transitional commands that may be required to perfect two other vital functions. The first is that the dog may be required to bark quietly when alerting for the child's problem (Allergen, hypoglycemia or seizure onset). The second application is teaching the dog to bark loudly when hearing the "Help" command.

Depending upon the dog, this can be quite difficult. For most commands, the trainer can put the dog into the desired position, or otherwise show the dog what they intend. It is hard to tell a dog how to bark. In general, the best procedure is to stimulate barking by getting the dog highly excited. This can be done by teasing the dog with a favorite toy, or treat. When the dog barks, quickly say "Speak", and reward them. This doesn't always work.

Sometimes you just have to wait until the dog barks spontaneously, such as when another dog barks, there is a strange noise, a stranger appears, etc. Again, take advantage of these occurrences, by speaking the command and rewarding them.

In Casey's case, none of the above worked. However, one day, I was working in a pit by our hot tub. Casey could see me but could not reach me. I kept encouraging him to come to me, which greatly frustrated him to the point that he barked. He was immediately rewarded, and after just two sessions in the pit, he then responded reliably to the "Speak" command. So, it is sometimes necessary to invent a frustrating environment.

Help

The intended function here is to get the dog to bark continuously until help comes if the child becomes ill with no adults around. I use a dual trigger for this action. I teach the child to put their head in their lap and say "Help". Eventually, the dog should respond to either action.

To teach this, I select a very special toy, or substance, which the dog loves to play with. This toy is reserved for training sessions only, and put out of reach all other times. I have found a piece of fake fur to be quite effective. They naturally want to attack it. Let them play with it for a minute, or so. Then using "To Me", get it back and tease them a little. This may provoke barking. Then quickly give the "Help" command and reward. If this does not provoke barking, continue the alternate teasing and playing to get them totally fixated on the fur. After a dozen, or so, of these procedures, tease the pup, as usual. However, instead of giving the pup the toy, tuck it in your lap and put your head in your lap. The pup now knows where it is, but can't get to it, which is almost guaranteed to produce barking.

After a few of these repetitions, you should be able to induce barking without the fur, with just the head down and the “Help!” command. Gradually extend the time you have your head in your lap, and if necessary, repeat the “Help” command to keep them barking. Our ultimate goal is for them to keep barking, without repeating the “Help” command, until you raise your head. Because this is such an important function, I almost always treat after a successful sustained barking session.