

Pack of Pomeranians Won't Stop Barking

It's harder to train a pack of dogs, but there are several things you can do.

By September Morn

Q. I have eight Pomeranians and their barking is ruining our household. I've read about training, but no one seems to address having a herd of dogs that need to be trained.

A. When one dog in a pack starts barking, it alarms and alerts the other dogs to notice whatever the first dog is barking at. It's natural for other dogs in the group join in -- it's a dog thing.

Pomeranians as a breed tend to be especially quick to bark, whether there's something bark-worthy or not. Their excitement increases as they bark, causing more barking. Group bark-fests tend to be self-reinforcing because the dogs get a thrill from barking as a group, and teaching a "Shush" cue to a herd of dogs is more complicated than when there's just one lone barker.

This group barking behavior has undoubtedly been going on for some time, so don't expect a quick miracle cure. It will take some time and dedication on your part to change your Pom pack's noisy habit, but it's definitely possible to do.

Start by teaching your dogs to come when you call by rewarding them with small treats when they get to you. Keep doling out yummy tidbits to the dogs who arrive until all eight of them are there, then stop. Teach this first when they're not barking.

When they're all coming quickly when you call, teach them to follow you into a different room as you continue to hand out treats to all the dogs who follow. The treats should be tasty and tiny -- the size of a Pom's toe is about right. This way you can give out many treat rewards without overfeeding your little guys.

After they've learned to follow you this way, teach them to come to you for treat rewards when you call them during their bark-a-thons. Interrupt their barking by calling and having them follow you into a different room, moving them away from whatever they're barking at. This won't end their tendency to bark as a group, but you'll be able to control it by moving them away from whatever triggered their frenzy.

Another tactic that may help is teaching them to bark on cue when you say "Action!" Get them revved up so they bark when you say that -- they'll enjoy that. Once they're all barking on cue, teach them a cue to stop, like "Cut!"

Toss a handful of treats into their midst when you say "Cut!" They'll stop barking to gobble the yummys.

Play a game of turning their barking on and off by cueing "Action!" and then "Cut!" Soon you'll be able to use the "Cut!" cue to stop the bark-fests they begin on their own.

Always reward the group when they quit barking on cue.