

The Tellington TTouch Method: Simple Remedies for Excessive Barking

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Excessive barking is one of the most common behavioral complaints that I hear from clients about their dogs. Barking to excess takes many forms, from simple attention-seeking barking to alert barking, to compulsive barking due to lack of stimulation or extreme stress. Resolving barking issues can be a simple or complex process depending on the circumstances involved. Regardless of the root cause of the barking issue, there are several techniques from the Tellington TTouch Method that can be helpful in effectively resolving excessive barking.

The Tellington TTouch Method is a gentle approach for influencing behavior, health and performance with bodywork, body wraps, and balanced movement exercises. TTouch can easily be used in conjunction with other non-invasive, reward-based methods and behavioral modification, thus enhancing and accelerating treatment for excessive barking in just a few minutes a day. Unlike other methods, TTouch directly addresses some of the key issues that contribute to a variety of forms of excessive barking, such as chronic stress and tension in the mouth and muzzle. TTouch can also empower clients to practice the techniques anytime and anywhere to positively influence their dog's behavior. I will most often talk clients through the steps of these simple touches and techniques, building on the trust that is already established between the dog and their person.

Mouthwork

Obviously, the first area on the dog's body that is related to barking is the mouth. It is not unusual to discover that dogs who bark excessively can be highly destructive chewers, be very mouthy with people, and also have issues with whining. These same dogs are often reluctant to have their mouths and muzzles touched, a good indication that this is an area where they are holding tension. A series of soothing TTTouches on the mouth, called mouthwork, not only brings awareness to and releases tension from the mouth, contributing to reduction of barking, but can also positively influence the dog's overall emotional state.

It is interesting to note that there are several key acupressure points in the mouth. GV26 (Governing Vessel 26), in between the upper lip and gums, influences the central nervous system. CV24 (Conception Vessel 24), on the lower lip, regulates the peripheral nervous system. The peripheral nervous system includes the divisions of sympathetic (fight/flight responses) and parasympathetic (relaxed, resting state) and can greatly influence how a dog responds to his environment. This may explain why TTouch mouthwork not only calms the body, but also the mind, rebalancing the dog's emotional state.

Holistic veterinarian and Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist Dr. Doug Knueven explains how these specific points, all along the

same meridian running from the base of the tail, up the dorsal midline, and ending inside the mouth, can influence behavior. "One of the several Traditional Chinese Medical (TCM) indications for the use of all three of these GV points (GV 26, GV 27, and GV 28) is 'mental disorders.' So from a TCM point of view, massaging this area would have an effect on behavior. Also, the end points of meridians are considered especially potent. It is well documented that stimulating acupuncture points causes a release of endorphins which have a calming, opiate effect on the brain".

With TTouch, one does not need extensive knowledge of acupressure point locations to reap the benefits of mouthwork. You simply need to introduce mouthwork at your dog's pace. For many dogs, having human fingers in their mouths occurs only during veterinary exams or while being given medications. In addition, a dog's mouth is an area that many people aren't necessarily comfortable with touching. Therefore learning and accepting TTouch mouthwork can be a process for the dog and their person. It is important to take things slowly and work the dog's mouth in short sessions, perhaps only a few minutes at a time.

First, position yourself next to the dog, not looming over him, facing the same direction as he is. Have a glass of room temperature water nearby so that you can dip your fingers in the water. This will allow your fingers to slide easily in the mouth and over the gums and teeth, even if the dog is nervous dog and has a dry mouth.



Photo 1: Start by cradling the dog's head in one hand and gently using your other hand to stroke the dog's muzzle, sliding the skin of the dog's lips back (Photo #1/Mouthslide on Bernie).



Photo 2: After several strokes, use the pads of your fingers to make small circular touches along the outside of the mouth on the skin of the lips



Photo 3 & 4: Dip your fingers in the water and slide your fingers into the mouth, applying slow, circular touches with the tips of your fingers to the entire gum line. Pay particular attention to the areas above (upper jaw) and below (lower jaw) the

gum line at the front of the mouth where there are acupuncture points associated with nervous system function



Photo 5: You can also position one hand under the muzzle and slide the fingers up into the opposite side of the mouth. If your dog resists or pulls away, allow him to move away. Try some circular touches on other, safer areas of the body, moving back to the muzzle and mouth when he relaxes.



Another technique to address tension in the mouth is the use of a face wrap. A face wrap is a non-restrictive, figure eight loop of elastic that rests lightly on the dog's muzzle and around the back of the head (Photo #6/Royal in the face wrap).

The dog can bark, and eat and drink easily, but the elastic gives the dog sensations and feedback each time he opens his mouth to bark. Face wraps can reduce tension in the face and mouth and bring a new sense of awareness. Not unlike the calming effect that many dogs experience while wearing a head harness, the face wrap is positioned to provide gentle pressure to several acupressure points below the dog's eyes and ears. A face wrap is applied for short periods of time when barking is most likely to occur and should only be used when the dog is under supervision. The face wrap is also a useful tool for preparing a dog for a head harness.

Tailwork

Perhaps surprisingly, the other specific area of the dog's body where we can effectively use TTouch to reduce barking is the tail. The tail is useful for providing information about a dog's emotional state, but it can also be used to change that state. Specific TTouches on the tail, called tailwork, can be very useful for reducing reactivity, diffusing fears, and addressing other issues that contribute to excessive barking. Many times if we calm the tail, we can also calm the nervous or excited dog. Since the tail is an extension of the spine, relaxing it can have

an effect on the dog's entire body. And additional acupressure points CV1 and GV1 are located just below the base of the tail⁵.

Tailwork can be done while the dog is standing or lying down for a few moments each day. It can be easily done on tails of different lengths and types, from natural bobtails, docked or amputated tails, curled tails, and long tails with flowing hair.

There are three touches that encompass tailwork: touches around the base of the tail, circling the tail, and a gentle tail pull.



Start by making circular touches all around the base of the tail with your fingertips. Next, using one hand as a support on the dog's side, gently take hold of the tail near the base with your other hand.



Slowly rotate the tail clockwise, then counterclockwise (Photo #7/ Circling Bernie's Tail).



Then, gently pull the tail, pause, and slowly release. (Photos #8 and #9/Tail pull on Bernie)

Body Wraps

Lastly, TTouch body wraps or pressure wraps such as the Thundershirt can be another technique that reduces barking and overall arousal⁴. Body wraps are non-restrictive lengths of fabric in a figure eight configuration around the chest, shoulders, and abdomen. Application of body wraps can assist in shifting a dog from over-reacting to their environment or stimuli to being able to better process information and learn new behaviors.

Body wraps can be applied prior to known barking triggers, such as the arrival of visitors coming into the home. Pressure wraps, like the Thundershirt, are easy for clients and provide a custom fit.

Case Study: Elli and Emma

Elli and Emma are two year-old female Shih tzus that bark non-stop when visitors are in their home. They become more reactive as visitors move from the foyer into the home. Both dogs typically refuse food as their arousal levels heighten. If a visitor attempts to relax and sits on the couch, both dogs will jump onto the couch and bark directly in the visitor's face until he or she leaves. Elli and Emma's owners have managed the dogs by putting them into another room when guests were expected. They simply wanted their dogs to be able to greet and interact with visitors in a calmer way with reduced barking. It was obvious that Elli and Emma were unable to calm themselves once the reactions began and the non-stop barking became self-reinforcing. I also saw that one dog's arousal fed into the other dog. We needed a technique that could be used on both dogs at the same time. Wrapping each dog in a Thundershirt created an immediate change in posture and attitude. Their bodies relaxed, their hyperactive movements slowed, as did their respiration rates. Not only was barking reduced, but both dogs approached visitors and accepted petting. I also suggested mouthwork and tailwork on both dogs before visitors were expected, to reduce arousal levels and set both dogs up for long-term success. You can see before and after video of Elli and Emma at: www.Thundershirt.com/#barking

In conclusion, the Tellington TTouch method complements behavioral modification and reward-based training techniques for reducing excessive barking. Adding TTouch mouthwork, tailwork and body wraps can enhance your work with challenging barking-related situations. For more information, Linda Tellington-Jones offers several books and videos available at www.ttouch.com and there are two TTouch channels on YouTube with useful demonstrations: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TellingtonTTouch> and <http://www.youtube.com/user/bluedogcc>.

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