

Petpros Behavior Services

Behavior Modification Plan

Lilly Ratzlaff

6/11/20

Presenting complaint: Excessive barking, anxiety

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Whenever possible, avoid reinforcing barking in any way. If she starts barking, say a very mild “Oops” or “nope” and stop petting or making eye contact with her. If you can, even turn your back on her and walk away. Even yelling at or physically restraining her in any way can be taken as reinforcement and can encourage more of the behavior. If she stops barking in response, ask her to sit and if she does so quietly, calmly praise and pet her.
2. Leadership exercises- both Tanner and Kaylee should spend individual time training her during short sessions each day so she can learn to listen to both of you and regard you both as leaders. You can put yourselves in a position of leadership not through force, but by controlling access to “good stuff”. Have Lilly sit or lie down and eventually even stay for a few seconds in order to have the door opened, have her toy thrown, have her food bowl put down, receive attention and petting, etc. This is sort of the dog equivalent of saying “please” and politely asking for what she wants instead of being demanding. Ignore any “pushy” behavior.
3. Work on building a good “stay” command, as this is excellent practice in impulse control/self-control and will help build her patience. Teach stay in three steps. 1) With few distractions have her sit or down and tell her to stay with you standing still right next to her starting with just two or three seconds, then release her and reward her. Gradually build the time she will be still, up to a minute in a sit and two to three minutes in a down. Do these exercises on a comfortable surface for her. 2) Still with few distractions, begin to move away from her, starting by just backing up one step, then coming back and releasing her. Gradually increase how many steps you back away before coming back. Then start moving a few steps to the side and gradually increase distance that way. Work up to turning your back and walking a few steps away, circling her, and even disappearing around a

corner, again, for just a few seconds at first, then building up time she will stay when you are at a distance from her/out of sight. 3) Finally, practice the above exercises with gradually increasing levels of distraction. Do all of these stay exercises with her both in sit AND down. Anxious dogs often don't like to lie down and stay on command so really work on helping her succeed with this and begin to feel relaxed and safe. If she's ever struggling with a step, go back to some easier exercises for a while and let her take a break. You don't want training to be frustrating or anxiety-provoking for her. Lots of praise and small treat pieces for success!

4. Work on "Settle" exercises. Starting when Lilly is already pretty mellow, take a deep breath and get yourself in a relaxed, centered place. Pet Lilly very slowly and repeat whatever word you want to use to calm her. If she stays mellow or even relaxes a little more, quietly praise and give her a treat. Begin to practice this when she is a bit more active. Again, calm yourself first and no matter how active she is, continue to say your calming word in a soft voice and pet her very slowly. The minute she starts to wiggle less or is standing and sits down or is sitting and lies down, use your clicker or marker word to show her that it is that calm behavior that has earned her the treat. Your eventual goal is that no matter how worked up she is, you will be able to get her to settle down and relax with your calming word and light physical contact. This command is great when she is being wiggly during vet exams, too, or if she needs some grooming and needs to be calm and still.
5. To keep from only doing "boring" stay and settle exercises, continue to teach her new fun tricks. Lilly is a very bright dog and the more you can do to exercise her mind, the calmer she will be in general. You also give her lots of ways she can please you and ask for some attention and petting in a polite, fun way.
6. Continue to kennel Lilly when you are not home as long as she seems to be tolerating it well. Consider getting a Kong toy to stuff with peanut butter or wet dog food and kibble or treats to give her something to work on to avoid boredom while she's on her own. The Kong should be her special toy she only gets when you have to leave her. This gives her something to look forward to, rather than just feeling anxious about you not being there.
7. Try to give Lilly as much exercise as you can through playing fetch or walks or allowing her to run free in secured, safe areas. A tired dog is a lot easier to live with than one with a lot of pent up energy. Unspent energy also contributes to anxiety, for both people and dogs.

8. I would urge caution with having Lilly off-leash right now outside, especially in an unfamiliar neighborhood, which could make her more anxious. She does come back when called at this point, but not always quickly and if she really is involved in chasing something or someone at her age, she may begin to completely ignore you and could be hit by a car or knock down a child on a bike or perhaps get into a fight with a leashed dog walking by. She is also showing some growling and territorial-type behavior which should get better as she learns to relax and look to you for leadership about who is ok and who is not. So many bad things could happen with her loose right now that I strongly urge you to make her earn any off-leash privileges through obeying commands quickly and consistently and accepting your leadership so that you telling her one time to leave something alone and come back is quickly obeyed. It's just not worth the risk.
9. Other services you might consider: I would be happy to do a follow up appointment at any time to check on progress and adjust the plan as needed based on how things develop. I would also be glad to do a lesson package to specifically work on tricks or other commands like "leave it", waiting at open doors, "drop it", polite leash walking without pulling, heeling, and other basic commands. Since these would not be custom services (the curriculum is already written), a three lesson package would be \$100 or a 6 lesson package \$175 (as well as 15% off if booked in June). Further work on her custom plan, such as rechecks or maybe a session to help her be less reactive when she sees dogs on a walk would be \$60 per session, \$160 for three sessions, and \$245 for six (plus 15% off in June). Each of these sessions, you receive a custom email like this one with instructions specific to the problem you are addressing. In the meantime, please reach out with any questions or concerns. You can message me through the Petpros page or call (435) 210-4703. It was a real pleasure to meet you and Lilly. She is a sweet girl!