

# Desensitizing Your Dog with the Doorbell

When someone rings your doorbell, does your dog change from the loving laidback companion into some crazy out of control stranger? This is such a common problem. Many people feel that if they can control their dog from losing their mind when people arrive than they would have the perfect dog. But how do you change this behaviour?

The first thing to understand is the behaviour itself and how it got out of hand. Dogs learn at a very early age that when the doorbell rings, someone is at the doorstep. Typically this situation brings them into a state of excitement, alertness, and sometimes agitation that leads to the excessive or crazy barking. Yet because this is a conditioned response – a learned behaviour, the pattern being that when the doorbell rings someone is there waiting, it can be reversed with some work and effort.

To break this response, and desensitize your dog you will need to teach him that when the doorbell rings he *never knows* when someone is there and that the correct response is not to go into crazy barking but to come to you, perform an easy ‘job’ and receive a reward.

You are probably thinking what do I mean by *job*? So far, to them, their *job* has been to bark and ‘alert’ you that someone is there; friend or foe, they don’t care, to them it’s still an intrusion, so they go berserk until this intrusion leaves or comes in and stays for awhile. Because of this we now need to re-teach him what the proper behaviour should be. To make this easier, let’s just start with having them learn to regain their composure and come to you when the bell rings.

This training is extremely successful when you have multiple people involved but not to worry, even if you live on your own you can re-train your pooch. You will just need to go out to your hardware store and buy an additional doorbell that you can ring while you are in the house.

## What You Will Need

- A doorbell or someone to knock on the door
- Clicker
- Your dog on a leash
- Really, really good treats like boiled chicken breast cut up into pea sized pieces
- Lots of patience! Don’t forget it may take some time to break this habit as he’s been doing it for awhile now!

## Getting Started

First you are going to need to teach your dog about focus and eye contact. If this is new to you, please find a reputable trainer in your area to help you with this easy but powerful step as getting your dog’s focus will help both of you be more successful in a lot less time.

Position yourself so that you or your dog are not in direct eyesight of the door. If you are close to the door or to a window, it could make getting your dog’s focus more difficult in the beginning. This is also why you should keep your dog on a leash in the beginning to limit his ability to race to the door while barking.

Next, have your partner ring the doorbell. As soon as the doorbell rings ask for eye contact and focus. If your dog is barking hysterically try to break his attention on barking by making a loud noise such as “AHHH!” followed by “Watch Me”, as soon as your dog is quiet for a millisecond click and reward or if you are not clicker training, then mark the behaviour with a “Yes”, then praise and treat as quickly as you can.

Make sure your helper waits until the barking has subsided for a few moments before they ring the doorbell again. Continue this pattern, waiting until your dog is quiet to click and/or praise and treat! If you are able to find success quickly you may be able to ask for other behaviours such as “sit” or “down” with the eye contact, but if you are finding this difficult then just be patient and reward the your dog the moment he is quiet.

Work on short training sessions and always end on a positive note where your dog has done well!

Once his demeanour to the doorbell has changed, you can start asking for other more positive behaviours. But don't rush and don't forget to keep up this new fun “game”, as this is a great opportunity for bonding and for you to teach your dog some much needed manners and self control when people do arrive!

For more detailed information on how to desensitize your dog with the doorbell, or other behaviour adjustments and training procedures, please email [info@k9trainingandsupplies.com](mailto:info@k9trainingandsupplies.com) or call Sandy @ 403-607-6248.

Happy Training  
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