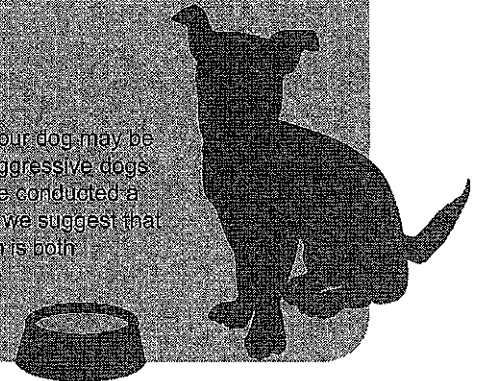


Congratulations!

You have adopted a new family member.

As your adoption counselor discussed with you, your dog displayed some food aggression issues while in the shelter. **What does this mean?** It means that your dog may be more likely to show aggression around his food than some other dogs. Food-aggressive dogs may bite when they perceive that someone is trying to take their food. While we conducted a successful behavior modification program with the dog during his time with us, we suggest that you continue this work with the dog when you take him home. Food aggression is both treatable and controllable. We suggest you follow the plan below, beginning the moment your dog comes into your home.



the plan:

- **Food time should never be made into an event.** Do not get the dog riled up for dinner.
- **Be sure your dog sits and waits for the food bowl.** For the first few days, you might want to keep the leash on the dog for this exercise. As the dog sits, you will bend toward the dog with the bowl. If the dog gets up, stand up and have the dog sit again.
- **Put small amounts of food in the bowl.** As the dog finishes the first bites, place more food in the bowl. Feed the normal amount of food, but do so in small amounts.
- **Feed one-half of the dog's food out of a food-dispensing toy such as the Buster Cube™.** This will not only help with food issues, but it will also help keep your dog busy in body and mind.
- **When your dog is interacting with the food-dispensing toy or eating food from the bowl, you can teach him that when he leaves the bowl or toy to look at you, he will get something even better.** This is a very important and fun exercise! Begin by placing dry kibble in the bowl or food-dispensing toy. Let the dog eat for a moment, then walk over with a tasty piece of cheese or other highly desirable food item. Say the dog's name. If he lifts his head, praise him and give him the food item.
- **Trade.** While this game is similar to what is written above, here you are not only asking the dog to lift his head, but to let you have one object for another more desirable one. Place a tasty treat that the dog loves in your pocket, and begin by giving the dog a boring toy — one that the dog finds only marginally interesting. (We want the dog to quickly understand the game as well as avoid any aggression, so we must begin by giving the dog something that is not highly desirable.) Once the dog has this item for a moment, take the tasty treat out of your pocket and calmly say "Trade." Draw the dog toward you with the treat, and let him nibble the treat while you pick up the boring toy. When he is done with the treat, have him sit and give back the toy. We want your dog to learn that you always have something better and that he can trust you.

If you are unable to do the preceding exercises, we suggest you choose another dog to adopt. While we cannot 100 percent predict the future, research does show that dogs who display food issues in the shelter are more likely to display the same behaviors in the home. We want you to be safe and for the dog to have the opportunity to be able to work through his issues. Please take the time to ask yourself if you are ready to take on a bit of a project.



Behavior Modification Handout

Resource Guarding

An unfortunate problem for many dogs and their owners, resource guarding can be a challenge to control once the behavior is firmly established. Prevention should be part of your regular training regimen. Practicing desensitizing and counter - conditioning exercises with your dog on a daily basis will be helpful in avoiding future issues and controlling current problems you may be having.

Starting Off on the Right Paw

It's never too early to begin training. Your puppy starts to learn the moment he enters the world and early socialization will help mold his adult dog personality. Exposing your puppy, in a controlled environment, to new sights, sounds, smells, people and other animals will create a less fearful and more confident pet that is better equipped to deal with our day -- to - day lives. Early socialization is critical to the mental and behavior well being of your pet. If your pet has joined your family later in life and you are unsure of his history you can and should still practice socialization skills. Using positive reinforcement (giving treats or play time) when your dog is experiencing a new situation that may be frightening (desensitizing) will help to change his mind (counter - condition) about the scary things. Your dog will develop a positive association with these things.

Some exercises you can start with that will make your dog safer and more comfortable around food and his bowl:

- Hand feeding his meal. He associates the resource (food) coming from you and you + his food becomes a good thing. The behavior of guarding a bowl or feeding location has less opportunity to develop.
- Holding his food bowl while he eats (ONLY if this can be done safely) and dropping in special treats every few seconds.
- Move the food bowl around. Change locations frequently to different areas of the room or house.
- Portion feeding time. Feed small amounts of food at a time. One meal can be divided into 6-8 separate portions. Once your dog has finished the first portion he may have the next and so on until his complete meal has been eaten. This also works great for dogs that like to gobble down their food too quickly.
- Approach the food bowl (ONLY if this can be done safely) while your dog is eating and drop in a special treat like a small piece of chicken or cheese. When you are around, better stuff appears in the food bowl!
- Nothing in life is free. Have your dog work for his resources.

Managing Your Environment

Eliminating opportunities for your dog to practice his guarding behavior is essential in controlling the behavior. The more chances he has to practice the bad behavior the bigger the habit will become. If you know he will guard it he should not get it, of course with the exception of his regular meal time. Most dogs will guard a big greasy, meaty steak bone and with good reason. This is a very valuable resource that your dog highly desires but if you cannot safely take it away from your dog then you should never give it to him. If you are fortunate, your dog may only guard this type of item (a highly valued target but not an everyday occurrence) and managing your environment will be much easier. Some dogs may guard their food, a special toy, his bed, his owner. The more a dog guards or the less predictable his guarding targets are, the harder it will be to control the behavior. Other factors that should be considered when addressing guarding behaviors and the safety of a training program are:

- Your ability as the owner (or family) to follow a training plan.
- What type of dog do you have and is this a family with small children? The larger and more powerful dog you have increases the potential for serious injury.
- Has your dog actually bitten and if so the seriousness of the bite? Did it require medical attention?
- Is your dog predictable? Do you know what he is going to guard and how he is going to guard it?
- Does your dog have a good warning system (lots of growling and posturing but never or rarely any snapping or biting)?

The answers to these and other questions will help you to outline the potential success of a training plan. Determining safe parameters for your family and your pet is critical before proceeding with any training plan.

DESENSITIZING AND COUNTER - CONDITIONING

The anti – resource guarding training will be a gradual process of desensitizing and counter - conditioning. The same process can be used for different types of resource guarding i.e.: Food guarding, object guarding (toys, rawhides), location guarding (the bed). You may need the assistance of a professional trainer or animal behaviorist to help you assess your situation and begin a training program. This type of training can be complicated and dangerous and getting the help you need will set the stage for a successful outcome and avoid possibly making matters worse.

Begin by identifying and dividing targets. Targets are the items your dog guards. The three categories are food, object and location. Only work with one target at a time. You do not want to start training with your dog lying on his favorite bed with his most cherished toy right before dinner time! Have realistic expectations, set your dog up for success. Some additional variables may be distance, who in the family is the guarding directed at, intensity levels, and time of possession. You will need to allow for variables and adjust your training approach as necessary. One of the basic ground rules for D&C training is to start from a level of tolerance that will not elicit a guarding response from your dog. For an example of a training plan we will briefly outline a food guarding exercise.

- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft), bend down, pick up bowl (with your other hand, not treat hand) and move to food preparation area, replace bowl then drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen time of faux food preparation as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft), pet dog's back for 1 second. Drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen time of petting as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft), pet dog's back for 1 second. Pick up bowl drop treats in bowl and replace. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen time of petting and holding bowl as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.

You get the idea. The above training outline is a long and drawn out process. Take baby steps, with each gradual increase closer to the desired behavior. The process is exact and deliberate; if you skip ahead too fast you can create too much training pressure and cause a guarding behavior relapse undoing any progress you may have accomplished.

This is only the first sequences (empty bowl) of the training. From here repeat each of the above steps for three additional categories.

1. Empty bowl
2. Bowl with dry food
3. Bowl with dry and wet food mixture
4. Bowl with wet food

Each sequence must be completed using the entire training outline.

TIPS AND HINTS

- Using punishment will not correct the undesired behavior and may cause other behavior problems to emerge. Physical punishment will not address the cause of the behavior and could even make things worse.
- Your dog or puppy may learn to be afraid of you.
- He may become defensive and develop aggressive behaviors.
- He could shy away from physical interactions with you, such as not wanting to be petted.
- Fearful behaviors will influence future training and make learning difficult for your pet.
- Take your time. This type of training is not a quick fix.
- Safety first. Do not put yourself in a vulnerable position that may result in injury.
- It is important to set your dog up for success. Each step of the training should start from a level that enables your dog to get it right. Don't push too hard too fast.

Food guarding exercise:

Food guarding is the least complicated guarding issue to address. It is important to remember to take your time; you cannot rush this type of training. It will take time and patience. For safety sake, your dog may require a muzzle or to be leashed during training. Your dog must be adequately acclimated to each (muzzle or leash) prior to beginning training.

- Start with an empty food bowl and gently toss treats from about 10 ft away towards the bowl. Use a high value food item, chicken, cheese or whatever your dog finds really yummy.
- Move closer to the bowl as your dog becomes accustomed to the game and is comfortable from that distance. Some dogs may only guard once you are closer to the bowl or if it actually has food in it and the first steps of this exercise can go very quickly. If your dog guards an empty bowl from 10 ft start with a new bowl in a different location.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft) and drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach as your dog becomes comfortable.
- Remember to go slow and do not push your dog too hard. You want an eager and happy response from your pet not a growly or stressed response. If your dog is showing signs of stress then you are going too fast. Stop and go back to the part of the exercise he was comfortable with.
- When you can approach bowl successfully start back at 10 ft again and approach bowl but add bending down a little, like you would if you were going to pick up the bowl. DO NOT touch the bowl yet. Drop in a treat. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach as your dog becomes comfortable.
- Approach from 10 ft, bend down, pause a second or two with your hand extended out slightly then drop in treat. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen pauses as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft), bend down, touch bowl (with your other hand, not treat hand) for a second then drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen bowl touches as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft), bend down, hold on to bowl (with your other hand, not treat hand) and move it around for a second then drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen time of bowl holding and moving as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.
- Approach bowl from the same distance (10 ft) bend down, pick up bowl (with your other hand, not treat hand) and stand up for a second, replace bowl then drop treats in bowl. Walk away. Repeat (8-10 repetitions).
- Decrease distance from which you approach and lengthen time of bowl holding as your dog becomes comfortable with this part of the exercise.

Supporting your veterinarian!

VeterinaryPartner.com



Resource Guarding

By Kathy Diamond Davis

None

Resource guarding is normal dog behavior. Like many other dog behaviors, it's dangerous when it goes too far. Also like some other behaviors, it is an instinct best kept dormant and never triggered in the first place.

Resource guarding that a dog displays toward other animals can extend to humans—especially to small children. People often try to prevent or cure this problem by forcefully or repeatedly taking things away from the dog. This actually makes resource guarding worse and can be the trigger for it in the first place.

A young dog who grabs something people aren't willing to have eaten or chewed by the dog and then has that item snatched away by a human is being given a reason to guard things more determinedly in the future. It's much safer to create the pattern in your dog's experience that people are givers rather than takers. If you have to remove something from your dog, simply "pay" for it—and make the payment something the dog considers a great exchange!

When you look at a resource from the dog's point of view, you'll soon see that it doesn't take a filet mignon to replace an expensive shoe the dog has found to chew. Keep an assortment of good dog toys in easy reach. The toy you pick up and start animating for exciting play with the dog will immediately become more interesting than the stolen shoe just laying there doing nothing!

Pay attention to the texture of the inappropriate items your dog picks to chew, and find a toy of similar texture for the trade. Dogs often choose specific textures to chew because that is what their teeth need at that time. If the dog has stolen food (and hasn't eaten it yet!), swap for food.

Guarding Food

Interestingly, dogs enjoy food they pursue more than they enjoy food offered "free." You will often see this at work with a picky eater who ignores food in the dish or just handed out, but eagerly accepts chances to catch or earn food. This can get dogs to eat who otherwise will not eat in a particular situation. That's why an "eye contact" exercise that includes moving and having the dog move with you is more effective than just handing the dog bits of food. [See Eye Contact.]

The way you manage your dog's day-to-day life will largely determine how much of a problem you'll have with resource guarding. Avoid letting other animals or young children approach your dog when the dog is eating, and don't let anyone tease the dog over food. Instead, walk up and add extras to the dog's food.

Eventually you can include children in this exercise with your supervision and with a dog who is showing no resource-guarding behavior. But unless you are helping the child and watching very closely, children under school age are best kept away from an eating dog.

If you have a dog prone to resource guarding or if you have a young child in the house, feed the dog scheduled meals and take the dish up off the floor between meals. Keep the dog's meal times to just a few minutes so you can supervise. Dogs need water available at all times, and usually don't guard the water dish.

Let the dog know by consistent handling that you will distribute the food and that the dog has no need to worry about defending food. Then if a child does wander up to the dish sometime before an adult notices and moves the child away, there is hope your dog will not be on guard and ready to strike.

Guarding People

Dogs may guard humans as resources. If you have more dogs than time, a dog who feels a deep need to be with you might try to push other dogs away to get the closest position for petting. This will become more of a problem if you push that dog away. If possible, keep that dog near you while you pet others. Then the dog feels more security and less need to try to push others away.

Of course if the dogs don't get along, having them both in petting range at the same time could put

you in the middle of a dog fight, so we don't want that. For dogs who don't fight, try putting one on each side of you. If they do quarrel—or you fear that they would—make a big show of separate but equal time for them.

So that the dogs can recognize they are each getting fair turns, rotate the turns often. A human could understand that today is the other kid's turn and yesterday was mine, but that's too much of a stretch for a dog's mind. Start with very short rotations—maybe just a couple of minutes with one dog and then move to the other—and then increase the length of each dog's turn.

Another way to provide equal attention is to give each dog what that dog prefers. If one dog likes to cuddle with you and the other would rather chase a ball, you can do both of those things at once. Dogs will often adjust their activities to find a niche in the family.

When a dog leaves the family or a new dog joins the family, you will often see a change in other dogs' behavior. This causes us to realize that much of a dog's behavior is due to relationships in a social unit, not to that dog "being dominant" or having some other intrinsic trait. Like humans, dogs are adaptable to situations and to changes.

Sometimes a dog appears to be guarding a human when something else is actually happening. The person may feel safe and protected by a dog's aggressive behavior toward others, when actually the dog is guarding things such as the warm spot for sleeping, the chance to catch crumbs when the person snacks, and petting from the person. Or, as is quite often the case, the dog is behaving defensively out of fear and is using the person as a human shield!

It's a mistake to encourage a dog to behave aggressively toward people who approach you when the dog is with you. This is not a dog showing confidence. The aggression commonly escalates until someone gets hurt, and then the dog can't be with you anymore.

If what you want is protection, encouraging surly behavior in a dog is not the way. Get the right help to teach your dog to accompany you courteously. Whether or not you decide it's appropriate to teach your dog protection work, a good protection dog is not paranoid. In the case of a dog behaving aggressively toward humans, be sure to get the help of a veterinary behavior specialist. This expert will evaluate the dog's temperament, take a complete history, and advise you of the risks and your options.

Guarding Toys

A dog's concept of ownership has to be quite different from a human's. After all, dogs don't use money. Dogs use things to eat, to chew, to play (for exercise and practice of skills), to interact with others socially and perhaps for some other purposes as well. It's easy for a human to misinterpret what an object means to a dog at any particular moment.

When a dog is highly excited and something suddenly shifts in the situation, the dog is likely to react without thinking. This can lead to fighting between dogs and bites to humans. You can greatly reduce the risks of these problems by how you handle your dogs in the moment, how you manage them daily, how you structure their environment, and the training habits you help them develop. All of these things are part of a safe lifestyle with dogs.

Dogs do not absolutely have to have some of the things that commonly trigger resource guarding aggression, such as rawhide. It is important that dogs have chewing outlets, for self-calming as well as dental health, but you can use non-edible toys that are less likely to provoke fights. If you are going to use edible items (rawhide, pig's ears, chew-hooves, etc.) for this purpose, treat them like food.

This means dogs need to be separated from other animals and young children when they have these items. It's best not to wait and see if there will be a problem. Separate the dogs for things they consider to be highly desirable in order to prevent a problem. Having the dog enjoy these things in a crate can be the best practice if it takes longer to consume them than the length of time you can attentively supervise.

A toy in play is much more exciting to a dog than a toy just lying on the floor. You may be able to have certain toys around the house for your dogs to pick up and chew at will, unless a human starts tossing the toy. Until dogs are highly trained, you may need to play retrieving games and other exciting games such as tug-of-war with only one dog present at a time.

Some dogs can learn to take turns retrieving. One way to structure this is to have the same number (or more) toys with you as you have dogs. Say a dog's name and throw the toy for that dog, then immediately do the next dog's turn and the next in rapid sequence. Throw each toy in a different direction.

Two dogs can play this way fairly easily, three if they are amiable together. It gets harder with four. Don't continue if the dogs start to spat. That tells you the excitement for this session has gotten out of hand. If you try again when they have had plenty of time to calm down, you may find—after a sufficient number of tries—that the dogs learn to take turns.

Dogs use toys socially in some strange ways. A dog may get a toy and lie down with it in a manner that "dares" another dog to try and get it. A dog may repeatedly take a toy away from another dog. To humans this behavior can seem selfish or mean, but the dogs are communicating important messages.

In a pack, there has to be order for the group to survive. Even in your home, the dogs need social structure among themselves to avoid living under excessive stress. They need to know which dog handles watching over territorial boundaries, which dog sleeps and eats in which spots, and other aspects of the daily routine. Dominance is not straightforward in many cases, because one dog handles one function while another takes the lead in a different situation.

The dog who takes the lead in protection may at times particularly feel the necessity of reminding the other dogs to obey him immediately without argument, by taking toys away from them. A female dog who has had pups or is unsplayed may do this to other dogs, too. Perhaps she does this as a necessary pack discipline to maintain in order to provide for and protect pups. And some dogs are extremely possessive for reasons we just don't know.

When you see this behavior, the best action from you really depends on how the dog who loses the toy reacts. If the "loser" accepts the other dog taking the toy, your best course is to ignore the incident. You may need to give this dog private time in a crate to enjoy chew toys. Don't take the toy back from the dog who "won" it. A point was being made. If the dog who lost the toy accepted it, you're better off accepting it, too.

On the other hand, if one dog swiping a toy from the other triggers an argument between them, they need to be separated to enjoy that toy. The rest of the time it should not be left out with them. Being able to have all the toys and chews lying around the house is something an "only dog" has to give up when you add another dog. It's one reason some dogs really don't want housemate dogs.

Risk Reduction

Many dogs become markedly less likely to fight over toys when toys are abundant in their environment. When a resource is plentiful, there's less reason to fight for it. This can work with treats, too, when you distribute them by tossing small pieces all over the kitchen floor or walking a track in the back yard and dropping a few dozen small pieces of food for the dogs to find.

Some dogs will react to abundant resources by practically having nervous breakdowns trying to guard them all, though! So watch your dog's behavior, and eliminate situations that create obvious conflict. Sometimes you can work things out by training and conditioning—over time, not in a hurry and definitely not with punishment. Punishment only makes resource guarding worse.

For the same reason it's tricky throwing toys for multiple dogs at the same time—and never a good idea to throw just ONE toy for multiple dogs at the same time—toys in dog parks can present serious problems. Don't put dogs in the position of feeling they need to protect these things.

If you train your dog with treats, it's possible you have a resource guarding problem you've never identified. When a dog shows aggression to other dogs during outings with you, try leaving the treats at home several times and see if it makes a difference. Some dogs should not be trained with food in certain situations, and this is one such case. Find other ways to reward the dog when training around other dogs. This need not be a setback to training. It can make a better trainer out of you!

Resource Usefulness

All the things your dog needs and wants provide ways you can communicate with each other. The dog can ask for things, and can do things you like in order to persuade you.

You can provide resources in ways that shape your dog's behavior to your wishes. How you distribute resources to your dogs can make them feel more secure.

Dogs can feel stress and anxiety over resources they fear will not be provided. Being a reliable provider raises you in the dog's esteem. Including another family member in the dog's care helps the dog learn to relate to that person.

The best reward for a dog at any given moment is the thing the dog happens to want right then. And yet, if a dog wants something TOO much, self-control may go out the window! Handling resources intelligently with our dogs is one of the most creative parts of having canine family members.

Permanent Link: <http://www.VeterinaryPartner.com/Content.plx?P=A&A=2438>