



Resource Guarding

Resource Guarding is a fairly common behavior in dogs. Dogs may exhibit this behavior around other dogs, humans, or other species. This is a general guideline.

What might a dog consider a resource?

- Food
- Shelter
- Toys
- Treats
- Space
- People
- Anything you can imagine.

Every dog is different and some exhibit normal guarding behaviors while others can act dangerously when guarding. When the reaction is not in proportion to the perceived threat, it is usually necessary to seek help from a professional.

Let's look at an example of everyday, healthy interactions between dogs: A dog is playing with a toy, another dog approaches. The dog who is playing with the toy, gives a look that says "leave me alone". The other dog moves away. No fights or drama involved. How else could this have played out without conflict? They may have decided to play together OR the dog could have relinquished their toy to the other dog if the other dog persisted.

When can it become risky?

- If the dog with the toy attacks without giving the other dog a chance to back off.
- If the dog without the toy continued to pester the dog with the toy until finally the dog with the toy retaliated.
- If both dogs challenge each other and a fight occurs.

Always eliminate the possibility that the guarding behavior is onset by any medical condition. Most often resource guarding is manageable and sometimes the behavior can be modified or at least lessened. Consulting with a professional who uses non aversive training methods is recommended.

What are the signs/ body postures that indicate that a dog is resource guarding? If a dog perceives that another is a threat to what they view as a resource the dog may snarl, growl, snap or bite. It may begin with:

- Stiff body posture

- Hard stares
- Low growls
- Baring of teeth
- “Whale Eye” When a dog turns their head away but eyes are turned to the side, showing the whites of the eye.



Management will make your life a lot easier! Make a list of what your dog guards, and remove it from the equation that triggers conflict. If the dog guards tennis balls, pick up the tennis balls and save them for one on one time when your other dog is not around. If the dogs fight when they are fed together, feed in separate rooms. No need to make things more complicated than they need to be!

Hints:

- NEVER punish your dog for this behavior. This will confuse your dog and more often than not intensify the aggression.
- Work on trades. Teach your dog to drop in item in return for something better. (A tennis ball for a piece of tuna is one example). Then put “drop” on cue. Remember to heavily reward when your dog drops something that is valuable to them.
- Teach your dog to “target”. This is a safe way to move them away from conflict. This exercise can help with dogs that guard space. Teach this exercise when your dog is not guarding first. This sets your dog up to succeed. How to: Place your hand, fingers down and palm forward, about 5 inches from the dog’s nose. The dog will likely put his nose to you to investigate and smell your hand. As soon as his nose touches you, mark with an enthusiastic “Yes!” and give a food reward. Repeat 5 times, moving your hand an inch to the left or right each time. Once the dog understands the behavior, you can begin moving your hand further away and attaching the command “Touch.”
- Teaching an “off” cue can make it easy and safe to remove a dog from a sofa or area they become possessive of. You can also leave a lightweight leash on a dog to move the dog if needed, preventing you from having to grab a collar. How to teach the “Off” cue: Invite dog on couch, then show them a high value reward such as a hot dog piece. Toss the treat on the ground. When dog jumps down to get the high value reward, give him some more treats. The dog learns that by willingly removing itself, it is very beneficial! Once the dog catches on to this game, you can pair it with the verbal cue, “Off”

- The tighter the space, the more likely for conflict. Narrow hallways, inside of a kennel, a dog bed are all just examples of places that conflict could arise. Especially if this is paired with another exciting event or object such as: a favorite treat, a door bell ringing, etc..
- While you are working with your dog, if the dog becomes tense, stop what you are doing, and begin at the point in which the dog was comfortable. When you begin, only work with one animal at a time.
- Please contact a qualified behaviorist for any behavior that creates an unsafe environment for anyone in your family
- Recommended reading: MINE! - A Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs by Jean Donaldson

Here are some exercises specifically regarding food aggression:

- Hand feed meals for at least two week. Ideally hand feeding at least part of your dog's food is beneficial
- This exercises should not be done in the presence of other animals, at least at first.
- Do not free feed from one bowl or even in the same room. Give each dog their own "space" for food. The idea that they will "work it out" is dangerous and unrealistic, not to mention stressful to the animals.
- Do not make eating a big deal. If you are hand feeding it can be considered another training session. When you do feed, do it in an area that is not high energy/excitement
- Use the bowl as a training session. Put a little dry dog food in the bowl. Say your dog's name or make a "kissy" noise as he is eating. If he looks up, drop a very high value reward on the ground near you. It can be cheese, hot dogs, something VERY delicious. This rewards the dog for leaving the bowl and checking in with you. If your dog is progress well, becoming more relaxed and you feel comfortable, you may offer the treat from your hand, closer to the bowl.