



Resource Guarding: Prevention and Helpful Tips

Resource Guarding is defined as a dog displaying behavior intended to convince another dog or human to stay away from something that is valuable to the dog. Items could include food, a toy, a piece of furniture, another animal in the house or a person.

The behavior can be as slight as stiffening, moving away with an item, or as worrisome as growling, snapping or biting. It is important to recognize, identify, modify or, at the very least, manage these behaviors. A dog that is repeatedly pushed or punished in these situations is likely to escalate.

Below are some ways to PREVENT resource guarding and also some tips to help if your dog has displayed some MINOR guarding behavior. (moving away with the item, freezing, ears back)

If your dog is displaying growling, snapping or biting behaviors around any resource it is time to contact a qualified trainer to work with you. Resource guarding can be a serious and extremely dangerous issue.

Resource guarding is a natural animal instinct.

A poorly structured environment with a lack of social and mental stimulation, or an environment with a lack of items, will often increase the need to defend the items and resources available. A lack of trust, new family environment, or fear can also leave a dog feeling the need to guard.

PREVENTION

If your dog has displayed little to no resource guarding it is important to build a strong level of trust so in the future they do not develop any concerns.

- **Instead of competing with your dog for an item, offer an exchange for another item or for treats.** This gives the dog the message that he can always get a more valuable item from you in exchange for the one he has. **You should never yank or struggle to get the item out of the dog's mouth.** This will teach the dog you will use force to obtain the item, and the guarding may intensify. It is important to advise visitors to use the same practice. **Tug is not an appropriate game for dogs that take their toys seriously and the source of many accidental bites.**
- **Help your dog learn that YOU are the source of their food.** Practice being near your dog's bowl by placing an EMPTY bowl on the floor, and as you walk past, drop a handful of their kibble in the bowl. Repeat this several times. Your dog will begin to associate you being near the bowl with good things happening. You can also hand feed a portion of their meals so they further associate you with being the source of their food and that there is no reason to protect things from you at meal time.

MANAGING MILD GUARDING

- **If you have already noticed some mild guarding behaviors, it is important to control the dog's environment.** Minimize or eliminate any conflicting situations during the times you are not actively working on the issue. An example would be putting toys away unless they are in their crate or you are actively working on trading or "drop it".
- **Your dog needs to trust you.** The better the relationship is, the more forgiving the dog is. **Do not break this trust by punishing a dog for guarding or them not giving up an item.** Instead, increase the value of the item you are trading for. Your dog **MUST** know that you will manage things in a non-confrontational manner. Also, engaging in fun, positive, reward-based obedience training can greatly increase your bond with your dog and increase their trust level.
- **Start any training with the lowest value item your dog still has interest in.** If you are working with toys, have multiple of the same toy available. Example: 5 tennis balls, or 5 rope toys. A dog is much less likely to guard an item there is an abundance of. Work on dropping one ball for another ball. As your dog starts to realize that you are not there to take his things away, increase the value of the toy. When you find a toy that is super high value to your dog, you may have to change your reward to a small treat for dropping it for you. If at any time your dog refuses to trade an item or displays any stiffening, you must go back to lower value items.
- **If you determine items that your dog has the strong potential to guard, it is advised to offer these items in a controlled environment such as a crate or a room secured with a baby gate.**

If at any time you have a dog that is growling or snapping it is time to call a professional. Children should NEVER be allowed to interact with a dog that is exhibiting guarding behaviors.

If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, **SUBMIT QUESTIONS** by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: www.waysidewaifs.org.

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