

Prevention and Management of Resource Guarding

Resource guarding, also known as possession aggression, is defined as “[a] normal behaviour which can become maladaptive. It may be directed at familiar and unfamiliar humans or animals that approach the dog when it is near or in possession of something it values. Guarded items can include food bowls, chew toys, people, pets or places.”¹



SAFETY AND PREVENTION TIPS FOR RESOURCE GUARDING

- **SAFETY IS KEY:** Higher value items such as rawhides are more likely to cause dogs to display guarding behaviours. Please place dogs with these items in their kennel or behind a closed door to prevent them from feeling stressed. Children should be instructed to never approach a dog in their kennel or remove food items, toys or stolen items from their dog and should find an adult to help.
- **TRAINING:** Training sessions should be done in a quiet environment without the distraction of other people or household pets.
- **FOOD BOWL EXERCISE:** Place a few kibbles or treats in your dog's food bowl. Then place it on the ground and allow them to finish all the food in the bowl. Pick the bowl up once the food is finished, refill it, and place it down for your dog once again.²
- **POSITIVE PROXIMITY:** Passively during the day while your dog is enjoying their daily meal or a higher valued item. Walk by, toss a treat in your dog's direction or place one gently beside where your dog is eating, and continue walking. This will help to teach your dog that good things happen when you approach them. This exercise can also be done with toys.²
- **SIT AND BE CALM:** Teach your dog to sit for all items, such as food and toys. Daily, with their food bowl, ask for a “sit”, once they sit, place the food or item on the ground, then release them from the sit position using a release cue so they can have their food or toy.³
- **TRADE GAME:** When your dog has an item not suited for them such as a Kleenex, a shoe, or piece of garbage play the trade game. Approach your dog with a high-value food treat and offer it to your dog. Most dogs will spit out what is in their mouth and take the treat. In this instance, the stolen item can be put away. Occasionally it will take more than one treat, in these instances place a pathway of treats away from your dog and while your dog makes their way down the path of treats, they will drop it along the way, and you can remove the item.¹
- **"DROP IT":** Teach a reliable “drop it” cue using positive reinforcement. Initially, this can be done with a food lure. When your dog has a toy, get a treat and place it near their mouth. They will drop the item to take the treat. As the item falls out of their mouth say, “drop it” and give them the treat. Overtime you will start cueing “drop it” prior to your dog dropping the item and begin using different item to help your dog generalize this behaviour. If your dog will not drop the item, consider increasing the value of your treat. You can also teach “drop it” by using two toys, making the one in your hand always more exciting than the one they have. Adding the cue “drop it” as they spit the toy they have out and giving them the one in your hand.¹

SIGNS OF FEAR AND ANXIETY

- Averting gaze
- Lip licking
- Yawning
- Tail Tucked
- Ears back
- Body stiffens (freeze)
- Stops eating OR eats more quickly as trigger approaches
- Trying to leave with item
- Blocking item with their body
- Lip Lift
- Growl
- Snap
- Bite

REFERENCES:

1. Landsberg, G., Hunthausen, W., & Ackerman, L.. Behavior Problems of the Dog and Cat-E-Book. Elsevier Health Sciences, 2013
2. Shaw, J., & Martin, D. (Eds.).. Canine and feline behavior for veterinary technicians and nurses. John Wiley & Sons, 2015
3. Overall, Karen L. Manual of Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Dogs and Cats. Elsevier Saunders, 2013