

Resource Guarding

Your new dog exhibited guarding behaviors during their initial behavior evaluation, or they have shown guarding behaviors in a home environment. Although behavior changes depending on the environment and the day, we would highly recommend that you NOT “test” for guarding for your safety and the dog’s.

Why Do Dogs Guard?

Dog guarding their resources from other animals or people is a very normal behavior. Wild animals who successfully guard or protect their valuable resources are more likely to survive in the wild than those who don’t.

It’s important to know that your dog is not trying to be “dominate” or become “alpha” over you when they guard their resources. They simply feel anxious and threatened when someone tries to take their resource away. It’s easier and safer to change the way your dog feels about people approaching them when they have a resource through desensitization and counter conditioning.

So What Is a Resource?

Resources are anything that a dog values. What is valuable can change from day-to-day. Resources could include:

- Food
- Resting places
- Toys
- Attention from people or other pets
- Stolen items like trash

What Does Resource Guarding Look Like?

- **Body Blocking**- the dog quickly circles around the resource, placing their body in between you and the resource.
- **Accelerated eating/Snatching toys**- For food, the dog takes bigger bites, gulping food, almost “punching at the bowl.” For toys, the dog quickly and roughly grabbing items from your hand.
- **Freeze**- dog momentarily ceases moving; their body becomes stiff.
- **Hard Stare**- dog looks at the person often with a hard, glassy stare in eye.
- **Growl**
- **Snarl**- dog lifts lip, exposing teeth
- **Snap**- dog deliberately misses
- **Bite**



This dog is **hard staring**, and looks **stiff**.



This dog has escalated to **snarling**, and **snapping** at the hand.

What to do if Your Dog Guards?

Management

- Feed your dog in a separate room or in a crate behind a barrier.
- Give a high value treat in exchange for stolen or scavenged items. Never attempt to just take away items from your dog.

What NOT To Do

- Do not punish, intimate, or take the dog's resources away. This will only cause the resource guarding to get worse and can damage the relationship you have with your dog. It can even lead to escalation in the aggression.

Training Games to Play

Food Bowl

For the first 1-2 weeks with your new dog in your home, practice this very important, and very fun, exercise! You will teach your dog that when you approach them while they are eating; they will receive something even better than what is currently in their bowl!

- Grab a few tasty pieces of cheese, some chicken or other highly desirable food item (a hard, crunchy dog biscuit won't cut it here!).
- Approach your dog and drop the yummy food item into the dish and repeat a few times during each meal.
- If you get too close and your dog reacts negatively, you pushed too hard. Back off and toss a treat from further away. Your safety is the most important thing, so watch the dog's body language carefully.
- After several repetitions, your dog should start to lift her head from the bowl and look expectantly at you as you approach. They are beginning to anticipate the yummy treat!

If you observe any signs of guarding during this exercise, cease approaching your dog while eating (do NOT take the bowl away from them while they are eating). Pushing the dog after showing signs of guarding may make the behavior worse.

Leave it

- With your dog on leash, place a treat on the floor out of their reach.
- Let them try to get the treat, but hold their leash so that they are unable to reach it. Give them some time and do not discourage them from attempting to get the treat.
- Eventually, they will become discouraged and look up at you. When the dog does this, praise them and give them a treat (separate from the one that's on the floor).
- Once the dog is quickly looking up at you instead of focusing on the treat on the floor, you can add the cue word ("Leave It") as you put the teaser treat on the floor.

Alternatively, you can hold a treat in your open palm, tell your dog to "leave it," and close your palm each time the dog attempts to take the treat. Once they look away from the treat or stop moving toward it, praise and give the dog a separate treat (ideally something better than what is in your hand).

Drop it

When doing exchange games give your dog something that they consider valuable. It can be a toy, rawhide, chewy as long as it is something that they will lay-down with and chew on. If the dog guards the resource so much that you cannot be near them, choose something lower value.

- Wait until the dog is lying down, settled and chewing on the object.
- Show the dog a treat (the treat must be considered, by the dog, to be more valuable than what they are chewing on) and say 'drop it.'
- Once the dog drops the object that they have, give them the treat, take the object away, and then return the object to him.

If your dog likes toys, you can exchange a different toy for the one they already have. Say 'drop it,' and when the dog lets go, throw the new toy.

For more personalized behavior help, CAHS a free Behavior Helpline. Call or email the Behavior Department.

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