



Sussex Brighton and East Grinstead Branch

Registered Charity No. 206630

RESOURCE GUARDING

HOW TO TREAT PRE EXISTING RESOURCE GUARDING

Resource guarding is a behaviour that involves a dog actively guarding an object, place or person. It is most common in resources that a dog considers of high value, such as their food bowl, chews, toys, their bed, or even particular members of their family. However dogs can guard what appears to us humans as completely random objects such as socks or hair bands etc. Remember, just because we do not see the value in the item, it doesn't mean there is no value to the dog. It can often start with guarding against other animals in the home and if left untreated, can progress onto the humans in the home. Resource guarding occurs for a few reasons, however the main cause is when a dog repeatedly has things taken away from them without the item being swapped for something else. It can also occur if a dog has been left in a position where they have had to fight for their resources, or where very little resources have been provided. Other reasons they may resource guard, could be general anxiety and lack of choices, leading to them reacting in a way that they feel will give them more control of their environment and make them feel safer. There is training you can do to prevent guarding occurring, but once it is already being exhibited by the dog it will require careful behaviour modification.

EMPTY BOWL TECHNIQUE :

STEP 1: Put down the dogs empty food bowl in front of them and when dog investigates the bowl and then looks at you, praise them and drop a bit of food in the bowl. When they've finished that and look at you again, praise and drop a bit more food in the bowl. Repeat until the entire meal has been consumed. Start by doing little bits of food at a time and over time increase the amount you put in each time, so there are less repetitions, until you can comfortably put the whole bowl down and the dog be comfortable eating it with you stood there. If the dog will tolerate you bending down to scoop the food in then great, if not then drop food into bowl from standing position and avoid bending down towards

bowl or putting your hand to close to the bowl, to avoid the dog reacting to your hand in a negative way. This works better with dry food.

STEP 2: After doing step 1 for a week or two and when the dog is comfortable with you being stood there when they eat (this may take longer than a couple of weeks depending on the individual dog and the varying level of their resource guarding) a couple of times a day, walk towards the empty food bowl if it is left down and throw a tasty treat into it and walk away. This will start to build the association with you approaching their food bowl being a good thing.

STEP 3: After a couple of weeks of step 2, The next step is to walk up to the dog when they are eating and throw a tasty treat into the bowl then walk away. Do this once every meal time. Any more than this can cause frustration at the interruption, even if the interruption brings a treat.

STEP 4: When the dog is comfortable with above steps (again, it can take weeks and in some cases months) Walk up to their empty bowl and pick it up. Put a treat in it and put it back down. Once dog has finished the treat and has looked at you, pick it up again and repeat. Repeat a couple of times, making sure you are quick with putting in the treat and putting bowl back down to avoid frustration. Watch the dog's body language to see if they will allow you to pick up the bowl. If they won't, then repeat steps 1-3 a few days and/or weeks longer. Look out for signs of stress and appeasement such as lip licking, yawning, whale eye (showing the whites of their eyes) and any signs of tension in the face or body. If you notice these signs, stop training for the day. If you notice signs of aggression such as a lip curl, growl or snapping, then go back to and repeat the previous step your dog was comfortable at for a while longer.

WHEN GUARDING TOYS/ITEMS:

When possible and safe to do so, it is vital that you don't take anything away from your dog. As long as it won't cause harm to the dog and it isn't a valuable item, let them have it. This includes items that belong to the dog, but also items that belong to owners such as

socks, crisp packets, anything. As long as the dog is not in danger and isn't going to swallow the item etc, completely ignore dog, not even eye contact, when the dog is guarding.

STEP 1: When the dog is guarding walk towards dog but don't look at them. Walk straight passed them then drop a treat a distance away, then walk away. Do this a couple of times a day if and when they are guarding something. This will build the association that you walking towards them when they are guarding doesn't mean you are going to take it away, but instead something else tasty appears. Repeat for a week or two (sometimes longer in some cases).

STEP 2: When you can tell your dogs body language is more relaxed with you approaching, you can begin practicing swapping. Hold a high value treat or toy, such as chicken or smelly food like sprats, under their nose and lure them away from what is being guarded. Drop the treat on the floor at a distance away from what is being guarded and when your dog is safely away, pick up what was being guarded. If it is safe to do so (which depends on what is being guarded) when your dog comes back looking for the thing they were guarding, give it back to them. This will stop them recognising the pattern that being lured away means what they've got is going to be taken. If you do this enough, the time you have to take away something and not be able to give it back, it won't be such a big deal as they have a lot of good experiences built up around things being taken away.

TOP TIPS

- Vary feeding times a little, to prevent tension/anticipation of that time of the day approaching.
- Have a few different bowls that you can alternate at random. This will reduce the value of a particular bowl and the dog won't get as possessive of one particular bowl.
- Vary where the area that the dog is fed around the house, so that area in particular does not become too high value.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Make sure your dogs basic needs are being met, as this not being the case, can cause or heighten the anxiety fuelling the guarding behaviour. Make sure your dog is getting sufficient exercise, food, sleep, play and enrichment every day. If you are unsure of how much of these things your particular dog needs, do some research around the breed and age of your dog and speak to your veterinarian.
- With any new behaviour issue, book a vet appointment to rule out health issues or pain as a cause. Pain is a major cause of behaviour issues, so it is always wise to rule out health issues as a cause, before you embark on a training and behaviour modification plan.
- Remember not to tell your dog off for guarding anything, as you'll only add to their anxiety. Your dog is not being "naughty", this is a fear and anxiety response.

If you are struggling, please get in touch with the RSPCA branch and the Behaviour and welfare advisor can help more.

Qualified behaviourists can also be found by going on the website for the Association of pet behaviour councillors or **APBC**
www.apbc.org.uk