



Sussex North & Brighton 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 where a dog considers a resource to be 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 dog's empty food bowl in front of them. When the dog investigates the bowl and then looks at you, praise them and drop a piece of food into the bowl. When they've finished that and look at you again, praise and drop a bit more food into the bowl. Repeat until the entire meal has been consumed.

Start by doing little bits of food at a time and overtime increase the amount you put in each time, so there are less repetitions. Do this until you can comfortably put the whole bowl down and the dog be comfortable eating it while you stand there. If the dog will tolerate you bending down to scoop the food into the bowl then great, if not drop food into the bowl from a standing position and avoid bending down towards the bowl or putting your

hand too 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 while 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 while 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 the steps above (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 the 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 the 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 behaviours such as lip licking, yawning, whale eye (showing the whites of their eyes) and any signs of tension in their 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 where your dog was comfortable 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 the dog, not even eye contact, when the dog is guarding.

STEP 1: When the dog is guarding, walk towards the dog but don't look at them. Walk straight past 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 walking towards them when they are guarding doesn't mean you are going to take it away, but instead something tasty appears. Repeat for a week or two (sometimes longer in some cases).

STEP 2: When you can tell that your dog's body language is more relaxed with you approaching, you can begin practising 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 is 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 often enough, then when you have to take something away and not 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 the area where the dog is fed around the house, so that a particular area does not become too high value.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Make sure your dog's 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 vet.
- 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.

Extra help

If you are struggling please get in touch with a qualified behaviourist. These can found by copying and pasting the following link into your web browser:

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/general/findabehaviourist>