

Resource Guarding

Just like us, dogs can become worried if they feel that something they value greatly might be taken from them. The fear of losing a precious resource can lead to some dogs using aggression as a way of keeping the item within their possession. We can prevent our dogs from feeling so frightened by teaching them that we pose no threat to the things they love!

Why do some dogs guard resources?

Guarding behaviour, which might include standing over something they value, running away and hiding with it, lowering their body while holding their ears back, and even growling as anyone approaches, is aimed at keeping that item safe. It's important to understand that the main reason for guarding is fear. This means that taking items away from your dog or telling them off for guarding is likely to make their behaviour worse in the long term. They may become even more worried and feel the need to protect those valuable things even more!

Preventing problems

It's a lot easier and quicker to prevent resource guarding than it is to cure it. Teaching our dogs from the start that there is no need to worry about losing anything they find valuable is an incredibly important lesson. It means they can always relax and enjoy the things they love without having to panic. Being consistent and always swapping items will help dogs learn to share without being worried.

Dogs Trust's Dog Schools across the UK provide the perfect opportunity for puppies to learn vital social skills in their puppy classes. This includes teaching your puppy to give up something nice in return for something even nicer! See www.dogstrustdogschoo.org.uk for your nearest class.

What to do

Every time you need to take something from your dog, swap it for something else. This should be something that your dog considers to be equally or even more valuable. This way your dog can feel comfortable about you taking something they like away, as you're exchanging it for something they love!

For example, if you are taking a toy, swap it for another favourite toy or tasty treat. If you are taking away a chew, swap this for extra special treats such as chicken. Offer your dog the better item before trying to take what they have away. Or drop several pieces of food onto the ground slightly away from your dog, so they have to leave whatever it is they have in order to go over to eat the treats. Then you can calmly pick the item up and remove it while they are busy enjoying themselves. As much as possible, return your dog's item to them shortly after swapping it.

Your dog will start to feel happy about you approaching them when they have something they treasure, because they've learned this means they are about to get something extra special. They might even get up to greet you, dropping what they have in the process. This is perfect! This means they have linked your approach with good things happening, so they have absolutely no reason to become fearful.



Dropping food near your dog's bowl and then walking away again whilst they're eating will help them to link your approach with good things. Remember, the food you drop must be tastier than the food they are eating, so they always see you approaching as a bonus and nothing to worry about! Progress this by placing down an empty bowl, then walking towards it and dropping a little food right into it. Retreat and watch your dog eat their food. As soon as they've finished, and the bowl is empty again, approach it and drop in another handful. Your dog will be learning to look forward to you approaching their bowl.



If your dog is 'stealing' household or human items, make sure you don't chase them as this can cause more problems. Even if they don't want to give up the item, they might enjoy being chased and learn to steal things just so you'll run after them!



Unless it's dangerous to do so, simply ignore your dog and create a distraction by quickly leaving the room so they follow you, or picking up an item you are happy for your dog to have. Start to interact with this yourself, turning it over in your hands, throwing it up and down, and playing with it while ignoring your dog. Your dog now has a choice – carry on all by themselves with no attention from you or join in with all the fun that you are having! When your dog comes over to you, reward them and encourage them to interact with their own things. Then you can calmly collect your own items when they are happily occupied. Our handout on **Stealing** provides lots of other useful tips.

Never grab your dog and prise something out of their mouth unless this is absolutely necessary, for example if they have picked up a packet of medicine. If you do ever have to do this then be sure to give them lots of treats, play and praise immediately afterwards to counterbalance the worrying effect of you prising something away from them.

If your dog is already showing signs that they are worried about having anything taken away, or anyone even being near their treasured things, it's important to avoid making things worse by approaching them or trying to remove anything from them. Simply leave them well alone when they are enjoying food or playing with toys by themselves, and ask your vet to refer you to a qualified behaviourist for help.

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your

Dogs Trust dog please email: postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk



Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.