



Resource Guarding

Resource guarding is a natural animal behavior, stemming from the instinct to protect items that have value to the animal. Left unmodified, this behavior can become very dangerous. Most commonly, dogs will guard their food and treats, toys, household items, space, kennels, or beds, and the people they love. The key to modifying this behavior changing your dog's mindset from "I feel threatened and need to protect this from others" to "I trust good things come when others are present."

TEACH "DROP-IT" FOR RESOURCE GUARDING PHYSICAL ITEMS.

1. Give your dog a toy or ball and allow them to play with it.
2. Show your dog you have an item to trade for their toy. Most dogs will trade for food or treats; for dogs that are not motivated by food, try a similar toy to what they have.
3. When they release the toy, quickly say "drop-it" and toss the treat away from the item to get space for picking it up.
4. Give the toy back to the dog when they return.
5. Repeat steps 2-4 about 5-6 times each training session. Practice 1-2 times a day.
6. Increase the value of their toy or try a long-lasting dog chew when they get better on dropping things on command.

Drop-it tips:

- Increase the value of your trade if they have something they refuse to give up.
- Never practice the "drop-it game" with something you don't want them to steal. The game only builds trust if you give back the item you ask them to drop.
- Don't forcefully take something out of their mouth, unless it can truly hurt them. They will guard things more aggressively if you do and lack trust in you.

PREVENT RESOURCE GUARDING OF THEIR FOOD

- Build confidence through hand feeding:
 - » Hand feed the first half of their meal and then offer the rest from their food dish.
 - » If your dog is too scared to take food from you, start slower by gentling tossing food in their direction or try higher value treats in smaller portions.
- Teach your dog "wait":
 - » When offering food, say "wait" and attempt to put the food bowl down.
 - » If they move forward, bring the bowl back up.
 - » Repeat until your dog stops trying to move towards the food.
 - » Add in a "release" word (ok, free, break, release, done) and allow them to go to their bowl when they have stopped moving forward right away.
- Only offer your dog HALF their regular meal at the start of mealtimes
- For guarding against people:
 - » Stand by their bowl and drop food into their bowl periodically
 - » Work your way closer to them over time if they are not reacting.
 - » Respect their warnings! If they growl, lunge, or otherwise show discomfort, stay calm, take one step back, and continue. If the reaction is too intense, just leave them be.

- For guarding against other dogs/animals (this is easier with two people):
 - » Put the dog that is guarding on a leash or in a kennel to start.
 - » Proceed as above with half their meal to start and drop food in their bowl as the other animal walks around. The other animal should start at a good distance away

PREVENTING RESOURCE GUARDING OF PEOPLE AND SPACE:

- Separation anxiety can be a primary reason for resource guarding people from other people and animals. To learn more, review our Separation Anxiety handout.
- If you have two or more animals, try not to reinforce pushy behavior. You can pet them individually or simultaneously, but all petting should stop if either is growling, pushing the other out of the way, snapping at one another, etc.
- Never allow your dog to break up affection between you and your spouse/other people. If your dog is barking, nipping, growling, blocking, or doing anything else to “protect” you, try a treat/food scatter on the floor during the triggering behavior to keep them distracted and associate a positive outcome to the event.
- All animals should have their own kennel, bed, or other personal space.
- Sharing the bed where people sleep can cause dogs to guard the bed from the person. To avoid this, refrain from sharing sleeping spaces with animals. A bed or kennel on the floor in the bedroom is safer and builds confidence.
- Teach “on” and “off” cues. If you enjoy your dog lying in your lap or next to you, teaching them to get on and off when you are ready sets respectful boundaries for your personal space.
- People (especially kids) should not chase a dog who is trying to remove themselves from a situation.
- People (especially kids) should not enter a dog kennel or lay in the dog’s bed.
- Strangers should not approach a dog that does not advance forward first, especially in the dog’s home or while on a leash. These tighter spaces can make a dog feel more threatened and lead to more guarding to protect them self and you.

This is a very basic and general approach to resource guarding and does not cover the nuances of guarding or how a pet may respond. It is always recommended to seek professional help if your dog’s guarding behavior worsens, or you are unsure about your dog’s particular guarding habits.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the HSSW Dog Training Team at dogtraining@southwesthumane.org or visit hssw.org/training.