

Resource Guarding Prevention

Why do dogs protect their prized possessions?

Their ancestors did this to protect their food and other resources in order to survive. It's how they got the other members of the pack to back away. But you are the leader and you can demonstrate that peacefully.

It is normal for dogs to guard their food, toys or bed from people – but it is not safe. Without preventive training, resource guarding from people will develop in approximately 50% of dogs by the time they are two years old. If your puppy or dog already displays guarding behavior (stiffening, growling, snarling) you will need close training guidance from a qualified dog trainer or animal behaviorist.

Preventing a guarding problem is much easier, and much safer, than fixing one.

You can only prevent resource guarding in early puppyhood (until about 18 weeks of age) – so get started now!

- When your puppy is eating dinner, take his bowl away without any warning, add a special bonus treat to the bowl and then give the bowl back. This will teach the puppy that people who take something away return it with a great bonus. Imagine if someone stole your wallet, then returned it with more money in it than you had to begin with – you would want the pickpocket to strike again!
- When your puppy is eating his kibble or working on a chewie, play with the food and touch him all over, occasionally adding a special treat to whatever he is eating. This will teach him to like it when people approach and touch him while he is eating.
- When your puppy is playing with a favorite bone or toy, take it away without warning, give him a special bonus treat and then return the item to him. This will teach the puppy to like it when people take away his favorite things.
- When your puppy is lying awake on his favorite resting place (dog bed, crate, sofa) gently pick him up and move him to another location, then go and get him a favorite toy or treat. This will teach him to like being approached and handled when he is on his favorite resting spots.

Once you and other adults have done these exercises, supervise children doing the same. This can only be done safely while your puppy still has his baby teeth! Do these exercises once a day until he is one year old, then once a week throughout his lifetime.

Note: These guarding exercises are aimed at preventing guarding from people, and have nothing to do with guarding from other dogs or pets. Guarding from people and guarding from other animals are unrelated. Guarding from other dogs or pets only requires intervention if it causes constant fighting, severe fear, or physical damage. In order to curb guarding from other animals you would need to consult a qualified dog trainer or animal behaviorist for guidance.