

Resource Guarding

Dogs that growl, snarl, snap or bite over items such as beds, food bowls, chew bones, toys, or a favorite person are what we refer to as "resource guarders". Aggression over resources is a natural dog behavior but it is one that pet owners find unnecessary even if the dog feels that it is necessary. As the owner of a dog that has resource guarding issues, it is up to you to set your dog up for success so that he does not have the opportunity to practice the aggressive behavior and train him to offer different behaviors when his favorite items are available.

Management

When your dog has displayed aggressive behavior over certain items or situations, the first thing that you need to do is set up your home so that your dog does not have free access to the items, places, or people that he feels the need to guard.

If your dog guards his food bowl you can feed him in a crate away from people or other pets so that no one is able to come into contact with him or his bowl and risk injury.

If your dog guards chew bones, discard any and all chews. Since chew bones are not necessary for your dog to live a healthy and happy life they can live without them. If you risk allowing your dog to have chew bones, they can hide them or leave them somewhere that you are not aware of until you stumble upon them when your dog decides to guard one.

If your dog is aggressive when being moved off of furniture then he must not be let on the furniture and instead provided comfy dog beds in safe places where he won't be approached or moved. If you live with a dog that is willing to behave aggressively inside your home while guarding a person, place, or thing, then you must keep your dog safely confined to a separate room or crate when you have visitors, especially children. You must never 100% trust that your dog will not behave aggressively over something that he previously felt the need to protect.

Training

When you are training a dog with aggressive behavior it is recommended that you contact a qualified behavior specialist to assist you (see links on the previous page to find a qualified trainer or behavior specialist).

Teach your dog some cues such as "Leave it," "Drop It and Give" and "Off" that you can ask him to perform if he has possession of an item that he is likely to guard. Remember, you must teach your dog what these cues mean before asking him to perform them once he is already guarding an item.

What to do if your dog is behaving aggressively

There may be times when you find your dog is guarding something so you will need to be prepared in knowing what to do to keep everyone safe. The first thing that you must determine is if your dog, another animal, or a person is at immediate risk. If it is possible to leave your dog alone and let him have the item and you are able to move anyone that is at risk away from him then this should be your first step. It is not worth a physical altercation to try and remove an item from your dog's possession if no one is in imminent danger.

If your dog has something that you need to get away from him because it is dangerous to his health or potentially life threatening, you will need to arm yourself with the most delicious items to trade him. You could offer meats from the refrigerator, cheeses, toys, anything that he might find irresistible to trade him for the dangerous item. Be sure to remove anyone else from the area that your dog might guard from if trading with an item that he will also potentially guard.

Never try trading for something mundane such as a boring treat or cookie that he is used to or a low value item. Just think, if you had \$1,000 that you were trying to protect from someone and I offered you \$100 would you give me your \$1,000 for my \$100? No. I would probably need to offer you something better than \$1,000.

Never try to remove an item from a dog that is willing to guard it by growling or worse. A dog's growl may be the last warning he gives you before he bites. It is better to let the dog have the item if it can't be traded than to risk injury to yourself trying to get it back from him. You should also let these opportunities be a lesson to you of how better to manage your dog's environment to avoid any future opportunities for him to gain access to the things that he has guarded.