



Preventing Resource Guarding

Just like us, dogs can become worried if they feel that something, they value is at risk, especially when it 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. This behaviour is often referred to as resource guarding or protecting. We can prevent our dogs from feeling so frightened, by teaching them that we pose no threat to the things they love!

It is important to understand that the main reason for guarding is fear, because this means that either simply taking items away from your dog, or telling them off for guarding things, are likely to make their behaviour worse in the long term! They'll become even more worried and feel the need to protect those valuable things even more! Instead we need to build trust and confidence so that the dog is learning a different, happier way to feel and a safer way to behave around the things they love.

How do I know if my dog guards things?

Guarding behaviour can include:

- ✿ Standing over an item they value, with a very stiff and still posture
- ✿ Lowering their body posture if anyone approaches the item
- ✿ Running away with the item
- ✿ Hiding the item
- ✿ Eating their food or treat very quickly (if that's what they're guarding)
- ✿ Growling or showing aggressive behaviour to protect the item

Swapping means sharing safely!

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 else they love. For example, if you are taking a toy, swap for another favourite toy or very tasty treats. If you are taking away a chew swap this for extra special treats, such as chicken! Give your dog the better item before trying to take what they have away, or drop several pieces of special food onto the ground slightly away from your dog so that they have to leave whatever it is they have in order to go over to eat the treats – then you can calmly pick it 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 have learned that 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. No fear = no guarding!

NEVER



Touch your dog when they are eating.

Do not 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, as this is obviously dangerous! If you do ever have to do this then make it really worth their while - immediately afterwards be sure to give them lots of **AMAZING** treats, play and praise to counterbalance the worrying effect of you prising something away from them!

If your dog is 'stealing' household items, make sure you don't chase them as this can cause more problems. They might enjoy being chased, even if they don't want to give up the item and learn to steal things just so you'll run after them! Unless it is dangerous to do so, simply ignore your dog and create a distraction by either running out of the room calling them excitedly so that they follow you, or picking up an item you are happy for your dog to have, a favourite toy or a chew. 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. They are likely to become interested in what you are doing, because it looks like much more fun than what they are doing by themselves.

Your dog now has a choice – carry on all by themselves with absolutely no attention from you, or to come and join in with all the fun that you are having, which should be by far the better option! When they come 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.

When to seek help!

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 is important to avoid making things worse for them by approaching him or trying to remove anything from them. Simply leave them well alone when they are enjoying having food or playing with toys all by themselves and ask your vet to refer you to a qualified behaviourist for help.

Top Training Tip

Prevention is better than cure! It is a lot easier and quicker to **PREVENT** resource guarding than it is to cure it. Being consistent and always swapping things will help your dog learn to share without being worried!

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog, please email: reception@dogstrust.ie

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