



Cedar Valley
Humane Society

Dog Care and Behavior: Resource Aggression

Your dog has a history of guarding food or other resources in the home. This means he (or she) may have frozen up, growled or even bitten!

There is no guarantee that your dog will never guard again, but there are ways you can reduce the chances of it occurring. Clicker training, for instance, is a good way to reduce any stress your new dog may be feeling.

Causes of Resource Guarding

Food and other resource guarding can be the result of stress and limited resources. It can also be a behavior the dog learned in his previous home.

What to Do

Resource guarding may not go away on its own, and if not managed well, may get worse. Some guarding, when worked with, can decrease in intensity but may not disappear entirely.

- Take responsibility for items that the dog may find high value and likely to guard by picking them up and keeping them out of reach.
- Always trade up when you need to retrieve something from your dog. If he has a toy or item he is not supposed to have, bring a few extra-tasty treats to toss to the side so he drops the item to eat the treats. This creates an association with your dog that you are not there to take things away from him, but to bring him extra good things.
- If you have seen your dog guarding in specific situations, you can then manage those situations, such as confining your dog when giving him a bone, or feeding him and then not disturbing him until the resource is gone.
- If your dog is showing resource aggression towards other dogs, this is a normal behavior and something that can't be trained out and is best managed. Separate the dogs at feeding time or when giving treats/bones/toys; otherwise, avoid giving out these items if that is not possible.

Realistic Expectations

- Some of the things that cause dogs to guard can be difficult to stop or control. For example, if your dog guards his food bowl, he still needs to be fed daily, so feeding him in another area is a great way to manage this.

When to Get Help

- Because guarding can be scary and potentially dangerous, and because behavior problems can increase if managed incorrectly, you may want to get professional, in-home help from an animal behavior specialist.

What Not to Do

- Do not punish your dog for guarding during or after the incident. Punishment will only make him more likely to guard that item again. Dogs do not understand punishment even after the fact and can make things worse, potentially leading to aggression.