

RESOURCE GUARDING

A.D.O.P.T. PET SHELTER

WHAT IS RESOURCE GUARDING?

Resource guarding is defined as a dog's desire to retain a coveted item that they don't want to lose. Most commonly seen associated to the dog's food bowl, resource guarding can also be seen with special treats and chew items, toys, garbage, sleeping or resting locations, even people. Dogs can guard items from people, other dogs, and other animals. This is a common and natural response, but in the home resource guarding behaviors can look quite scary, and if handling improperly can lead to potentially dangerous situations.

WHAT DOES RESOURCE GUARDING LOOK LIKE?

Resource guarding behaviors can range from very mild (taking an object and moving it away) or very severe (snapping or biting at anything or anyone that approaches the object of value).

- Moving the possession away from a person or animal
- Covering the possession with their body
- Eating faster as someone approaches
- Freezing or tensing their body over food or possession
- Snarling or lifting their lips when someone approaches or tries to remove the object
- Growling over the food bowl or possession
- Air snapping (intentional missed bite warnings)
- Chasing a person or animal away from the possession
- Biting a person or animal who comes near or tries to remove food/possession

TIPS FOR MANAGING RESOURCE GUARDING AT HOME:

Resource guarding can be managed in the home in a way that is safe for both humans and animals.

- All animals in the home should be given separate feeding areas and be on a feeding schedule. Any uneaten food should not be left out.
- Dogs should be able to enjoy special treats/chews in separate areas
- Keep all bones/chewies/special toys put away until designated chew times
- Keep all children away from the dog while he/she is eating, enjoying chew time, or sleeping.

WHAT NOT TO DO:

- Never try to put your hands in the food bowl, or remove the food bowl while the dog is eating. Contrary to what people may have advised in the past, this only makes you appear more unpredictable to the dog, and can actually make resource guarding worse!
- Do not pet the dog while he/she is eating, or allow children to approach.
- Do not correct the dog for growling or other warning behaviors. Like taking batteries out of a smoke alarm, you are removing the dog's ability to communicate and they are more likely to escalate in the future.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

- Respect the dog's space and communication and back away
- Let the dog have the item unless they are in immediate danger
- Make sure the food bowl is empty before you remove it. If it is not, make sure your dog is secured before removing the bowl (either in another room or behind a gate). Create a trail of extra yummy treats to help move your dog away from the bowl.
- If you need to get the item away from the dog, use the TRADE UP method. Toss a handful of yummy treat far away from the object, and only pick it up while your dog is preoccupied. You can also try to trade the object with a fun toy
- Teach your dog that your approach means good things. Take extra yummy treats, like cheese or hot dog pieces, and toss a piece or two from a distance near your dog's dish, then walk away. Make sure to watch your dog's body language and only work from a distance where your dog is relaxed. (This is only applicable with mild forms of resource guarding. For moderate-severe resource guarding, please consult with a qualified trainer or behaviorist as soon as possible.)

If at any point your dog's resource guarding responses begin to escalate or get worse, please contact a qualified trainer or speak to your veterinarian immediately. We highly recommend trainers that are associated with the A Sound Beginning Program (asoundbeginningprogram.com).

Additional information and resources:

Recommended Websites:

- www.clickertraining.com
- <http://drsophiayin.com/>
- <http://asoundbeginningprogram.com/>

Recommended Reading:

Mine! A Practical Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs by Jean Donaldson

Questions? Call the shelter at 630-355-2299 or email trainer@adoptpetshelter.org