

RESOURCE GUARDING

Resource guarding is a natural behavior for dogs, but when living in a home with other humans and/or animals, it could become dangerous if not properly managed. When a dog resource guards, they are protective over items they perceive as valuable. These items could include food, toys, treats, bedding, spaces, or even a particular person. Resource guarding looks different for each dog, depending on what they feel is most valuable and what they are worried about losing. Sometimes dogs will guard these items only from humans, or only from other animals, and sometimes they will guard from anyone.

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR—WARNINGS

Most dogs will give a warning first, before escalating to a bite. Warning behaviors are GOOD. It is extremely important to respect these warnings and never to punish your dog for these warnings. By punishing for warnings, your dog may learn they do not work, and may stop giving warnings, instead immediately escalating to more severe behaviors, like biting, without giving notice first. This can result in immediate bites for future cases of resource guarding and will make management more difficult. The goal is not to eliminate this behavior entirely (you can't do that), but rather to manage it.

- 🐾 Freezing up
- 🐾 Stiffening of the body when approached, or when approaching the guarded item (this most frequently happens when chewing a bone or toy)
- 🐾 Growling, snarling, or baring teeth when someone gets too close to a valued item
- 🐾 Snapping or lunging if an attempt is made to take an item away
- 🐾 Hovering over or moving away with the item to protect it
- 🐾 Eating quickly or gulping food when someone approaches

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS 🐾

LEAVE YOUR DOG ALONE: The best thing to do is to leave your dog alone when they are eating or in possession of any item they think of as high value. If your dog is showing guarding behavior towards another pet in the home, the best thing to do is to separate all animals when they are eating or being offered toys/treats/bones or any other high value items.

AVOID TAKING THE ITEM: Do not attempt to forcibly take items from the dog, as this may increase anxiety and aggression. It may also result in a bite, which could cause serious injury.

PROVIDE SPACE FOR YOUR DOG TO BE ALONE: Allow your dog to eat and enjoy high-value items in a quiet, stress-free environment, away from other animals or humans.

TRADE-UP METHOD: Offer a higher-value item (think cut up hot dogs, pieces of chicken/meat, cheese) in exchange for the guarded item to build trust and prevent negative reactions. If your dog does not trade, do not force it.

GET HELP: If you are concerned about the level of resource guarding your pet is showing, if they are growling or barking when you just walk by them, or are having issues with your dog guarding a person from others, the safest option is to reach out to a qualified, positive reinforcement trainer or a **Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist**. There are safe ways to work with dogs who resource guard to help minimize the behavior and better manage it. You can find a behaviorist to reach out to at this link: <https://corecaab.com>

ADDITIONAL IN-HOME MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 🐾 If you've just adopted a dog and are worried about resource guarding, or your dog has a history of resource guarding, it is strongly advised that you keep your dog off the furniture and teach them to settle on a bed on the floor until you establish a relationship with your dog, and they settle into your home. In the future, if you choose to allow them to rest on the furniture, teach them manners. Always invite them to join you on the furniture first by saying "up" and patting the couch or furniture.
- 🐾 If you need to remove your dog from the furniture, or if they jump on the furniture without an invitation, use the "off" cue. Avoid physically removing them from the furniture, especially if they are resting or sleeping. If you must move them off the furniture and you've just adopted them, keep a light leash on in the house for the first few days. Grab the end of the leash and start walking away if they won't get off with the verbal cue. If they have a history of guarding furniture and will not get off, strongly consider keeping them off the furniture at all times.
- 🐾 Don't touch, pet, or disturb your dog when he/she is eating (either from a food bowl or snacks on the floor), chewing on a rawhide/bully stick/special chew, bone, or toy. For at least the first month after adoption, only feed dry food to avoid giving high value food during mealtimes. Be sure to place the food bowl in a location in your home where there is minimal foot traffic to avoid eliciting a response.
- 🐾 When your dog's food bowl is empty, pick it up and put it away. Feed meals instead of leaving the dog food out all day. Do not leave food around when you have guests.
- 🐾 Avoid giving your dog delicious chews such as rawhides, pig's ears, bully sticks etc, unless they have ample time to finish them undisturbed, in one sitting. Instead, give non-edible chew toys like Nylabones. Your dog will be less likely to be possessive over them.
- 🐾 Never take anything from your dog's mouth. Teach "drop it" or trade. Be careful when picking up dropped food while they are sharing space.
- 🐾 If your dog steals something, don't chase or reprimand. Instead, toss a delicious treat away from the dog and stolen items. When your dog drops the stolen item, praise him or her. If safe, it is best to then give the item back to your dog and trade 3 or 4 times. This helps prevent them from learning you are trying to trick them into giving it to you.

RECOMMENDED BEHAVIOR EXERCISES

- 🐾 Practice trades and teach **DROP IT** with toys to avoid having to take things from them.
- 🐾 When feeding, ask your dog to **SIT** and **WAIT** for their bowl to be put down and when picking up. Teaching a cue like **BACK UP** will be helpful as well, just in case he/she scoots close to you as you are putting the bowl down.
- 🐾 **PLACE:** Teach your dog to lay down on a blanket or their bed while you are eating to avoid begging. It will also allow you to maintain distance from them while you have food, just in case you drop something.

PLEASE DON'T! 🐾

Please do not use aversive training methods or punishments for resource guarding, including trainers who describe themselves as balanced or mixed. Avoid using prong collars, choker chains, & shock collars. Aversive methods do not change a dog's emotional response, and often the warning signals are punished, meaning escalation will next become quick, or sudden, and more severe. If you are struggling with resource guarding, reach out to a behaviorist with the link provided and ask for help! <https://corecaab.com>