

Resource Guarding and How to Manage It



Have you ever had something that was so important to you that you didn't want to give it up? You may have even kept others from trying to take it from you by making faces at them, raising your voice, or even physically pushing them away. Well, dogs are the same way. Dogs can react just like humans when they have something in their possession they feel is of high value to them. Resource guarding is normal dog behavior. Dogs have evolved as opportunistic feeders, and it's natural for them to protect what they consider to be "theirs" from potential takers. The displays of growling and related body language are the dog's way of saying, "Back off! This is mine, and I don't intend to give it up."

FACT: Dogs can guard just about anything or anyone that they find to be high-value to them.

Common Things Dogs May Guard

- ❖ Food bowls (full/empty)
- ❖ Rawhide, bones, treats
- ❖ Toys
- ❖ Furniture
- ❖ Owners
- ❖ Other dogs
- ❖ Favorite resting spot
- ❖ Found objects

Resource guarding in dogs can range from relatively mild behavior, like running away with a coveted item or growling at an approaching person, to full-blown aggression, such as biting or chasing a person away. Whatever level of resource guarding your dog is exhibiting, it should never be ignored.

Common Warning Signals a Dog May Display When Resource Guarding

- ❖ A stiff body, freezing
- ❖ Staring with hard eyes
- ❖ Holding their head, paws, body over item
- ❖ Snarling and showing teeth
- ❖ Growling
- ❖ Air nipping

In some cases, but not all, resource guarding can escalate to a dangerous situation if early warnings signals from your dog are ignored. A dog may take further steps to keep you away from the item they are protecting. Your dog may lunge at you or even worse, bite you. No matter how small your dog is, it can injure you. If you attempt to punish the dog for threatening to attack you, you may intensify the aggression in your dog. And, even if you "win" the dog may decide to fight sooner and harder next time.

Common Mistakes Owners Make When It Comes To Resource Guarding

- ❖ Assuming your dog won't bite you
- ❖ Avoiding the problem rather than dealing with it
- ❖ Leaving certain toys out because "he likes them so much"
- ❖ Thinking the behavior will get better on its own

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How to Manage Your Dog's Resource Guarding at Home

- ❖ Never go near your dog while it is eating.
- ❖ Don't leave food bowls out, even empty ones.
- ❖ Put toys away when not being used.
- ❖ Never punish your dog for giving warning signals – this is their way of communicating with you.
- ❖ Never take anything away from your dog.
- ❖ Teach your dog to “Trade-Up”. The thing you use to trade-up must be something of higher value than what the dog is in possession of at the time. Don't expect your dog to give you something he values in exchange for a boring biscuit.

Example: If your dog has a toy or other object in their mouth and you need them to drop it, grab a high-value treat like chicken, cheese, or anything your dog finds irresistible. Let the dog sniff the treat. When the dog drops the item, reward the dog while taking the object. In some cases, it is better to toss the valued treat across the room so that you can safely retrieve the item you are trying to get from the dog.

- ❖ Feed food, bones, treats, etc. to multiple dogs in their own spaces away from each other.
- ❖ Teach children to never go near a dog when they are eating, chewing on a bone or playing with a toy.
- ❖ Never try to take away anything your dog has unless it is dangerous for the dog or it is something they should not have. Doing this can create or worsen the resource guarding behavior.

FACT: Children are more likely to get bit because they may not recognize a dog's warning signals.

Aggression associated with resource guarding is complicated and, if it isn't dealt with quickly, can get worse. If, at any time, your dog threatens you, don't wait for a bite to happen. Get help immediately from a reputable trainer who specializes in resource guarding. If you are looking for a recommendation on a trainer, the Behavior Team at Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League is happy to provide you with a list of trainers located in the Palm Beach County area.

If you should need any additional support or have questions, please feel free to reach out to the Peggy Adams Animal Rescue League Behavior Department.

561.472.8815

Behavior@PeggyAdams.org