



Resource Guarding Behavior

Resource guarding is a natural canine behavior. Over evolutionary time, dogs might have starved if they did not guard their food from being stolen by other individuals: a dog's discomfort with others taking high value resources would have provided an advantage for survival. Resource guarding is a common behavior in many animals. Do you lock your car? Would you prefer not to share dessert? Surprise! Humans do it too!

Though most dogs today have an abundance of food and resources which makes guarding unnecessary, many dogs still posture over, show teeth, growl or show other distance-seeking behaviors when another individual approaches something they value.

What they deem valuable can vary between individuals and can generalize to other resources over time if not addressed. A dog may guard food, bowls, bones, toys, beds, even people or spaces. Some dogs guard from other dogs, some from human strangers, some from certain human family members, etc.

Subtle

- Standing squared over item/bowl
- Body blocking (turning between you and bowl)
- Whale eye (whites of eyes showing)
- Stopping eating/closing mouth
- Frozen/stiff posture ("going still")
- Hard stare

Overt

- Lip lift
- Show teeth
- Growl
- Air snap
- Lunge
- Bite

The process behind managing resource guarding is simple. Our goal is to avoid *causing the dog's behavior to escalate by arranging the environment for prevention*. Once your management plan is in place, a certified positive reinforcement-based trainer can guide you through the process of modifying resource guarding behaviors to help your dog feel comfortable with you approaching them while they have valued resources. Below are some management tips:

- **Clear your floors** of guardable items, such as toys, empty food bowls, chewy bones, shoes, or other household items.
- **Reduce conflict between animals** by separating them to feed, providing separate stations for water, and separating them when unsupervised.
- **Actively supervise your dog's interactions** with children in the home. If you cannot supervise interactions, separate.
- **Offer strategic barriers.** Crate train your dog and/or block off certain problem areas with baby gates or exercise pens.
- **Let them keep it.** If your dog has a known item that triggers resource guarding behavior, *let your dog keep it if it is safe to do so!* Removing things from the dog to “get them used to it” or to “show dominance” will only signal to your dog there is a legitimate reason to guard their resources (i.e. you keep being a thief!).
- **Trade outs.** There are certain situations where you must take something away from your dog. In these cases, utilize trade outs as a safe way to get a hazardous item away from your dog. Here's how trade outs work:
 - **Keep some extremely “high value” food on hand** such as Vienna sausage, hot dog, cat food, or anything else your dog loves and never normally gets. Even a slice of pizza from the fridge would suffice.
 - If your dog acquires something undesirable, **get the high-value food and begin tossing it near the dog.** Our goal is for the dog to leave the item in favor of the high value food.
 - As the dog begins to investigate the high value food, toss more of it in a line away from the item you are trying to remove from your dog. **While they are distracted, you can safely retrieve the item.**
- **Contact a certified trainer!** Serious resource guarding requires professional guidance. Make sure that the trainer you choose uses positive reinforcement methods; *resource guarding can escalate quickly and dangerously when paired with punishment or pushing a dog past their threshold.* Check out our *Referral List* in our free behavior library for a guide to choosing a trainer.
- **For more information about resource guarding,** check out the book ***Mine!*** by Jean Donaldson.