

Resource Guarding

This protocol will assist in redirecting your dog from protecting toys, bones, food bowls and other prize possessions. The industry term for this behavior is **Resource Guarding**. Resource guarding is a *normal* dog behavior. However, it's not something we humans want in our relationships with our dogs. Whether it is due to perhaps to genetics or is has become a learned behavior, we can use classical conditioning and training to help minimize and possibly eradicate this undesirable behavior.

The main focus of this protocol is to teach your puppy or dog that the approach of a human to his food, toys, space, etc. is a Good Thing. We will do this by using classical conditioning as well as operant conditioning with the use of a marker and reward system.

The following process should be instituted in the puppy or dog's life. Every member of the family should take part in the exercises listed below. Children should be assisted by parents - keeping safe is the first order of business with this or any type of behavior modification or training program.

Teach your puppy to respond to training cues such as sit and reward him with food rewards or attention or other items he values.

- **Teach your dog to trade up for items - cue word GIVE.** Start with objects that he does not value as much and treats that are highly valued. Then gradually work your way up to objects that he cares very much about. Ask for him to give the object, then either wait for him to do so (if he knows the cue) or cause him to do so by presenting food near his mouth or as we did a similar or another of the SAME item. Reward and praise him for dropping the object, then give it back to him as soon as he's done chewing his treat. Practicing this cue, giving the resource back each time, helps the dog understand that giving away his resources to a human is a good thing, so there's no reason to guard them. Children should only work on this step under adult supervision. Start with the family member that the dog trusts most (growls at least).
- **Teach your dog the OFF cue.** If he is guarding the furniture, teach him to jump off of it on cue. Get him up on the couch by patting on it or luring him

with a treat. Don't give the treat yet (we want to reward for "off", not jumping on the couch). Then say "off" and lure him back onto the floor. If you use a clicker, click as soon as he heads off the couch. Give him the treat. Don't start to teach off when your dog is all settled down on the couch. Work up to that level.

- **Condition your dog to expect good things when you approach him**, especially if he has some sort of highly prized resource, like a bone. As with "give", start with something your dog does not guard. Walk over, present the treat while he's enjoying his low value toy or food, and leave. Do this with several low value toys throughout the day. Repeat this for several days until he begins to look up at you, with a "Hey, she's here to give me a treat" expression on his face. With the low value objects, move up to touching the dog in some way, touching of taking the object (often saying "give" first), then popping a high value treat in his mouth and returning the object. Over a period of weeks or more, gradually move up to repeating the above with higher and higher value toys or food. With high value toys/food/bones, start by just walking by the puppy, out of the range that makes him growl, and dropping a treat. Move closer as the days go by, if the dog is ready; never progress faster than your dog is happily willing to go. If the dog is not relaxed and happy at any stage, you have moved too fast. Retreat to the previous level. Repeat this entire process with several high value objects. After that, progress to doing this process with more people around, more stress in the environment. Children should only work on the conditioning step under adult supervision.
- **Keep your dog from exhibiting resource guarding behavior** by not moving past his acceptance level. If he growls when you get within three feet of his toy, then don't make him growl — stay more than three feet away from his toy next time. Better yet, remove the toys that he guards from the living area, so that he can't accidentally be triggered. If your dog guards his dinner, make sure no one approaches or give him his dinner in a separate room, for now. If your puppy guards the couch, try to keep him off of it by not inviting him up and/or by making it uncomfortable to lay on (an upside-down carpet protector works well for that). Any approaches that you make to your dog at this time while he has a resource should be on purpose and accompanied by

a treat. Do NOT punish him for growling by scruff shaking or any other show of violence. All you will be doing is proving to your dog that he was right — humans are crazy and you've got to protect yourself from them!

Maintenance. After your dog or puppy is happily accepting any human approach to his food or toys (a state that humans call 'normal' and dogs call 'strange'), you are at the maintenance stage. Twice a week, at first, then once or twice per month, approach him while he's eating, pick up the bowl, and plop in a handful of treats before setting it back down. Do the same with toys or bones as well. Occasionally practice the "give" cue, replacing the surrendered object with something else if you really must take it away. Finally, continue this for the rest of the dog's life, incorporating new tricks as your dog learns them.

Oh no, he's doing it again! If your dog ever starts up again with resource guarding, it's not because he is trying to take over the world. It's probably because you haven't kept up on his training and he has started to notice that it's not such a good thing to give up his resources, after all. Remind him that humans are the source of all good things by going through the above process again.

No guarantee is stated or implied. Implement this protocol at your own risk.