

Information Sheet – Resource Guarding

What is Resource Guarding?

Resource guarding is a normal and natural behaviour. It is simply guarding an item or 'resource' that means something to an animal. It is often food (most commonly high value items such as bones) and food and water bowls (full or empty) or a toy, but it can also be a resting spot/bed, a person, another animal or an object. Dogs that have a guarding tendency will likely guard other items.

Resource guarding is about fear of loss, rather than a dog trying to be 'dominant' or 'alpha'. The aim is to make the resource guarder feel safe. We encourage you to be proactive in preventing, managing and reducing the behaviour, rather than punishing the behaviour.

Resource guarding is a normal and natural behaviour

What does Resource Guarding look like?

It can be very subtle, but also very obvious! Unfortunately, many people miss the subtle signs and their dog needs to escalate their behaviour until someone listens. Then, unfortunately, most people's normal reaction is to punish the dog for displaying unwanted behaviours, which in turn, causes the dog's behaviour to get worse and worse over time.

What are the Subtle Signs?

- Moving in between you and the resource
- Turning away from a person or another pet when they have the resource
- Eating faster when you or another pet approaches
- Eye sliding
- Lip licking
- Freezing – the body (usually over the resource itself)



What are the more Obvious Signs?

- Growling
- Snarling
- Snapping
- Biting



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Resource guarding is a normal and natural behaviour in dogs and it can be changed for the better.

Preventing Resource Guarding in Puppies

Resource guarding in puppies is very common! Even if you don't notice your puppy guarding items, there are some important exercises and games to incorporate into your puppy's training right from the start which will help to prevent problems further down the line.

Training exercises

A lot of these exercises teach impulse control and manners, with the added benefit of making it easier to prevent resource guarding.

- Give or Out
Teaching a puppy/dog to give an item up is super important. Many puppies like to pick up dangerous items around the house and yard. Always offer something of higher value in exchange for an item. Avoid taking items away without an exchange. See 'Exchange Game' below.
- Gentle – taking something gently from your hand. Hold a treat in your hand with a closed fist. Let your puppy sniff your hand, and only when they stop grabbing or biting your hand, say 'gentle' and release the treat.
- Leave it – prevent your puppy/dog from picking something up in the first place – refer to our Info sheet – Leave it.
- Stay/Wait – for impulse control and management. Ask for our client homework sheet.

The Exchange Game (creating a trusting and give and take relationship)

You don't need to make a point to your dog that you need to take things off them; however there are situations where you will need to (think of cane toads, rat bait etc.).

Making a list of your dog's top 10 favourite items (food or toy) is a good start.

The principle of this game is to teach your dog to exchange any item in their mouth for a higher value one (remember the value of the item is in your dog's eyes, not yours!).

Start with a low value food item (e.g. dry dog biscuit) and then offer something higher value (e.g. chicken). Repeat, repeat and add cue such as "give" after the dog is dropping the first item consistently. If you can't do this safely, please contact us immediately.

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The Food Bowl Game

Teach your puppy/dog that good things happen when you are near their food bowl. When your puppy is eating from their bowl, simply walk calmly past them and toss a few tasty treats into their bowl, then keep walking. Repeat a few times each time your puppy is eating. Soon your puppy will be really happy to see you approaching their bowl! Never take food away from your puppy as this will teach them to guard what they have even more.

Changing Resource Guarding in Puppies and Adult Dogs

For dogs that already guard items, we recommend you contact an accredited positive reinforcement trainer to help you. This behaviour is very serious and a behaviour change plan needs to be put in place. Puppies will not 'grow out of it' and more often can get worse.

Further Reading

Donaldson, J (2002) *MINE! A Practical Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs*, Dogwise Publishing, USA

McConnell, P, (2013), *Resource Guarding: Treatment and Prevention*, The Other End of the Leash blog, McConnell Publishing Ltd

<http://www.patriciamcconnell.com/theotherendoftheleash/resource-guarding-treatment-and-prevention>