

Information Sheet – Feeding in a Multi-Dog Household

Feeding in a multi dog household can be a challenge at the best of times, especially if 1 or more dogs are highly food motivated. Even if the dogs are not food ‘aggressive’ (that is they will aggress towards another dog if they or the other dog have food), it can still be chaotic and cause stress to everyone involved (you and the dogs).



The following are some management strategies that can help you to maintain a calm and peaceful feeding time.

Reducing stress and teaching impulse control exercises will also assist with general behaviours and calm around the house at non feeding times.

Remember that some dogs still guard a bowl, toy or even an area they have eaten in for some time after the food has gone.

Refer to our Info Sheet – Resource Guarding.

Before Feeding

Take note of when/if some behaviours occur before eating commences – during meal prep or even prior to this. Subtle behaviours such as ‘dirty looks’ towards other dogs (refer to our ‘Dog Body Language’ Info sheet for more information) and pushing in front of other dogs are important to note and prevent at this stage. Dogs are great at picking up patterns so if they know when feeding time is, they may already start to get anxious or worried that they may miss out.

Management needs to start NOW, not when the dogs get their food. Separate the dogs during prep time if this can eliminate stress.

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Eating Rates






All dogs eat at different rates. Some will scoff food very fast (especially if they are concerned a person or another dog will take food away from them). Others are naturally fast eaters (insert common breed name here!). Some dogs are picky eaters and like to take their time, others will eat at a moderate rate.

The age of the dog is also a factor, along with any medical condition and also the type of food being fed. For example, a bone will take longer than a bowl of mince.

It is NOT OK if one dog loiters around another dog while they finish their food. This can be managed with the below strategies and/or training and supervision.

Basic Impulse Control and Training Exercises

These are super important exercises for multi dog households.




-  Sit - The standard! All dogs should know this and is the start of general impulse control and good manners. Refer to our client homework sheet “Sit”.
-  Go to Mat - Refer to our “Mat Training” client home work sheet.
-  Wait - This exercise has multiple uses and can be used before feeding, through doorways, feeding treats to multiple dogs etc. Refer to our client homework sheet “Wait”.
-  Leave it - Teaching a dog to leave an item of food, or a toy is very important. It can also be useful when feeding in a multi dog house. For example, if you drop food on the floor, asking the dogs to ‘leave it’, then go to a mat, or sit, can prevent scuffles or guarding. Refer to our homework sheet “Leave it”.
-  Target - To move a dog away from another dog, or food item. Refer to our client home work sheet “Targeting”.



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Management Strategies

Ask us how to implement strategies safely in your home, such as:

-  Crates, baby gates and tethers.
-  Inside/outside
-  Different rooms



Picture courtesy of: www.justatibetanpup.blogspot.com.au

Active Supervision

Feeding dogs in the same area can be done, but we recommend careful supervision. Just your presence can deter one dog from 'moving in' on another dog's food bowl. It is best to supervise the entire mealtime. Even a well-trained dog will sometimes try and use intimidation techniques to try to get a dog who is used to appeasing the others to hand over his dinner! It is your role as benevolent leader to discourage this, as the intimidating dog should not get another dog's dinner as a reward.

After Feeding

As we have mentioned, some dogs will guard the empty bowl or area they have eaten in for a while afterwards. For these dogs, continue to separate until such time as the dogs are able to be calm. For other dogs, sometimes they like to investigate the areas where other dogs have eaten. This is OK as long as no stress occurs for any of the dogs. Some dogs will walk away from an eating area which may indicate they are happy for another dog to come in and sniff.

Supervise all dogs until you are sure each dog has finished, and they aren't guarding any tiny morsel of food. Often picking up the food bowl or toy can indicate to the dogs that there is no more left.

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Food Enrichment Toys

How can your dog's still get the benefit of enrichment toys without one dog stealing all the toys? One solution is to provide more toys than one dog can guard, but initial supervision is recommended. So if you have 2 dogs, providing 6 enrichment toys should give one dog at least a chance to claim a toy and eat the food out of it before that other dog can get it – as they have 5 others to use 😊

Hanging toys or toys that are secured so that one dog can't take it and hide it can be useful.

Food enrichment toys to help with the rate of feeding

You can find toys that will help to slow dogs down. For example, slow feeding bowls and Kong toys. Feeding a dog who is a fast eater out of one of these toys can help to even out the rate at which the dogs finish, reducing the possibility of one dog racing over to the others food.

Final Thoughts

Remember, your aim is to make each dog feel safe and comfortable and not pressured into guarding or eating faster.

Practice makes perfect with any training, so perseverance will see results 😊

Contact us for help!

References and Links

McMullen, D (2014) *How Many Dogs* <http://www.howmanydogs.com/>

London, K, McConnell, P (2008) *Feeling Outnumbered? How to Manage and Enjoy Your Multi dog Household*, McConnell Publishing Ltd

