

Managing a Dog who Guards Resources

What's a resource?

- Anything of high value to your dog
- This could be a toy, treat, a location, or even a person.

Signs that your dog is a resource guarder

- Your dog will carry the resource away to a private spot.
- Your dog is more interested in the resource than you, his human.
- Your dog does not disengage from the resource when you approach.
- Your dog may give a low grumble or growl if someone approaches while with the resource.
- Your dog's body language may become tense and stiff, with hair raised and ears back, when someone approaches while he is with the resource.

A newly adopted dog that guards resources will sometimes cease the behavior as he becomes comfortable in a home setting. Some dogs, however, will become comfortable and increase guarding behavior. The following are suggestions to decrease guarding behavior:

Be a strong leader!

- Limit opportunities for the dog to practice resource guarding.
- Teach your dog to trade resources by offering him something else, like a treat, in exchange for the resource.
- Never take the resource by force.
- Being a strong leader does not mean using punishment. Punishment can create new adverse behaviors such as anxiety and aggression.

Manage the resource.

- Give him the resource (toy, treat, etc) in an area away from all children, strangers, visitors and yourself.
- Tether him with a leash while he is with the resource, so in the event that he lunges at you, you can escape.
- If he guards food in a bowl, give him his food on the ground and let him eat off the floor.

Start by multiplying the resource.

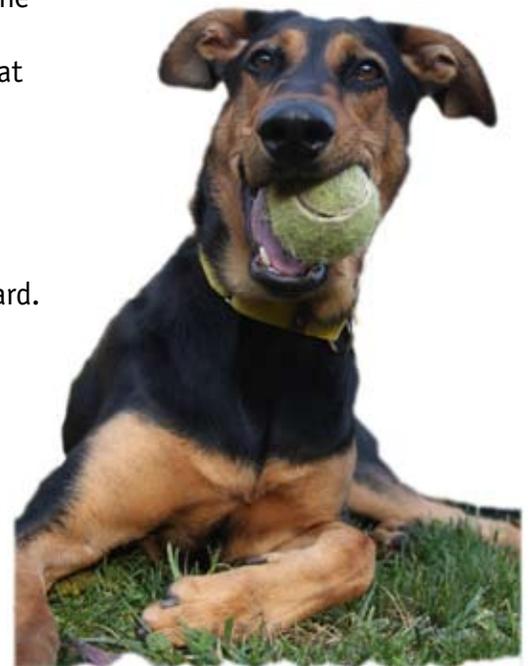
- If you give your dog large quantities of the resource, he won't be able to guard them all. For example, instead of giving one rawhide, give seven.
- The resource will be less scarce and he won't feel such a strong need to guard.
- If there is no apparent threat of losing the resource, your dog will cease guarding.
- Gradually decrease the amount of the resource in the environment.

Be mindful at all times.

- Be aware if your dog decides to guard a random resource.
- Always be on the lookout for guarding behavior.
- Educate children and strangers about your dog's guarding behavior.

If you are unsure whether your new dog guards...

- Keep him on a leash in the home as he gets comfortable.
- If he becomes aggressive or starts to guard a resource, you can step on the leash to restrain him.



Exercises to practice with a dog that guards:

- * Positive Association exercise
 - Tether the dog securely.
 - Use a resource that the dog will only receive during this exercise.
 - Approach the dog and throw him the resource.
 - Only give him the resource if he does not show guarding behavior.
 - Decrease the distance while he has the resource, and throw him another one.
 - This exercise will begin to create positive associations between you and the resource.
 - Your dog will learn that your approach = the resource = good things.
 - Anytime your dog shows guarding behavior, back away until it ceases.
 - Practice this exercise each day.
- * Control how your dog receives his food
 - Feed your dog in an open area where he cannot corner away with the resource.
 - Have your dog sit and stay while you place the food on the ground.
 - Use a release word for him to begin eating.
 - If he moves out of the sit and stay before you place the food on the ground, begin again.
- * Practice taking food away
 - Give your dog a small amount of food in his bowl.
 - When he finishes it, take the bowl away, refill it, and give it back.
 - Gradually, refill your dog's bowl while he is eating.
 - He should become comfortable knowing that you being near his bowl is not a threat.
 - Practice trading the resource for other resources of equal or greater value; do this often.
- * Do not reinforce the behavior by submitting to your dog.
 - If you back away after your dog growls or shows guarding behavior towards you, you've reinforced the behavior.
 - When your dog reacts, stay put and only move away when the guarding ceases or decreases.
 - Make sure your dog is secure and unable to reach you if he lunges.

Always use positive reinforcement techniques!

- Punishment can increase aggression and create new problem behaviors.
- If you continually take away a resource from a dog, without any trading or desensitization, he'll probably start to get a little annoyed and might take it out on you with guarding behaviors. Be mindful of how you, the human, might be reinforcing certain behaviors

For more detailed reading, we suggest Jean Donaldson's book *Mine*.

Visit www.ThinkingOutsideTheCage.org for more information.