



Resource Guarding and Exchange Games

Resource guarding is a common problem for dogs that have not been proactively taught from a young age to surrender valued items. Resource guarding is a frequent trigger for bite injuries to both adults and children and this issue deserves early and regular attention and preventative maintenance work throughout every dog's life.

Myths about Resource Guarding (Jean Donaldson, Mine! A Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs)

1. Resource guarding is abnormal behaviour.
2. Resource guarding is driven largely by genetics and can't be changed.
3. Resource guarding is a symptom of dominance or pushiness.
4. Resource guarding is the result of spoiling the dog.
5. Making a dog realize that resources are abundant can cure resource guarding.

Resource guarding can be prevented by training focused on teaching your dog that a human approaching him, his food, his toys, or his space is WONDERFUL! The dog's natural response to someone approaching him when he is in possession of a valued resource is to protect that resource – fear or anxiety that the resource may be taken away is a natural response (and sometimes a response resulting from a past history of having things taken from him by force). We want to change that response to a new 'conditioned emotional response' through the process of classical conditioning.

Basic training exercises – the following foundational skills should be taught and heavily reinforced.

1. Drop it
2. Leave it
3. Off (as in 'get off the couch')
4. Give it

Each of these should be initially trained with low value items and gradually transitioned to higher and higher value items.

Condition your dog to expect good things when you approach.

When your dog is resting or playing with a toy, or working on a chew toy, approach him and present him a very high value treat, then leave (no talking – just walk up, deliver the treat and leave). Start this with your dog engaged with low value items then gradually move up to higher value items.

Food Bowl Bonuses

While your dog is eating, drop an extra special morsel into his dish. If your dog shows body language that suggests he is stressed by your approaching his dish, (stiffening posture, hackles come up, ears laid back, eating faster / gulping his food, growling, snarling) start with relatively

low value food in the bowl and stop forward movement as soon as you see him tense. Toss the high value food into the dish (or at least as close as you can to the dish) from that point. Repeat, keeping a careful eye on his body language. As he starts to be more comfortable and anticipate something great as you approach, move a bit closer before presenting the food. Keep working this until you can reach down and place the food directly into his bowl.

Food Bowl Exchanges

When your dog is completely comfortable with you adding a tasty morsel to his food bowl from close proximity, you can move up to food bowl exchanges. Divide your dog's meal into two portions. Give him one bowl and before he finishes the food set down the other bowl and remove the first. You can repeat this several times during the course of a meal. It is helpful to put a special morsel of something extra tasty on the top of the food each time you make the exchange.

Toy Exchanges

While your dog has possession of a toy, ask him to drop it or give it. Immediately give him a second toy that is identical or similar to the first toy. You can also give him a toy that is more valued than the one he has – this is a great way to end the game.

High Value Exchanges

After working on the exercises above you can start working on exchanges with higher value items such as bully sticks, raw meaty bones etc. The first few exchanges you will likely need to show him the new item before you reach out for the bone he has in his possession. When you can see that he is looking with happy anticipation to your approach, you can reach out for the item he has before presenting the new item. Always make sure the item you give in exchange is at least as good as the one you take away.

Teaching Drop it

1. Drop a neutral item such as an empty plastic container or lid, a small wooden block (not one of the dog's toys or food). As soon as your dog goes over to check it out, CLICK and toss a treat. Pick up the item while your dog is getting his treat. Repeat.
2. Drop the item and wait for the dog to pick it up – CLICK and toss the treat.
3. Drop the item and wait for the dog to pick it up, reach out for the object (hold your hand under it) and CLICK without waiting for him to drop it.
4. Drop the item, wait for the dog to pick it up, reach for it and pause – if the dog drops the item, CLICK and JACKPOT!
5. Once you have the pattern, work with different objects. Gradually introduce more valuable objects.

Be sure to reinforce generously – especially as you start increasing the value of the objects to be surrendered. Remember – do not add a cue until the behaviour is complete. (Don't name it till you love it.)

For more information, here is a link to Emily Larlham's notes on resource guarding:

<https://dogmantics.com/resource-guarding-protocol/>