

Resource Guarding

IT IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM WHEN A DOG THREATENS TO BITE ITS OWNERS when they try to take something away. Dogs must be willing to give up things they'd rather keep - like that rawhide that has gotten too small or a turkey bone that has fallen on the floor. You, the pack leader, own all items in the house and your dog should give them up to you if asked. There are some dogs who make huge statements, taking a stolen kleenex under the coffee table and daring anyone to come close. Possessive aggression, commonly called resource guarding, can be a serious danger to your family. Children are particularly vulnerable, whether they are children who live in the home or who are visiting. The solution is to teach your dog that people who approach when he has something of value are going to give him something better, not steal his prized possession and leave him with nothing. You want your dog to believe that giving valued resources to its humans is the greatest thing ever.

Don't pester, don't dare.

Just because you should be able to take things from your dog, doesn't mean you should make it a point to repeatedly bother your dog while it is eating or march over and take things just because you can. One of the worst things you can do is practice challenging and stealing from your dog. You can annoy the nicest dog into becoming ready for the next challenge and make matters much worse, or even create a problem where there really wasn't one.

TEACH A WILLING EXCHANGE

[Please note: If you have ANY hesitation or concern that your dog might become aggressive during this exercise, or if your dog has ever bitten anyone with a bite that has broken the skin, please contact a professional to work WITH you and coach you on this exercise. In following the suggestions given, you hereby agree that Diamonds in the Ruff assumes no responsibility for your safety as you work with your dog.]

The goal is not to teach your dog to "give it up or else" but to create a relationship based on trust and respect where the dog will WANT to give you what he has.

TRADE UP!

Always trade what your dog has for something better. When your dog has an appropriate item, ask to see what he has and then praise and give it back so he doesn't think just because you are showing interest, that you are planning to steal.

1. Prepare two large items, one with peanut butter or cream cheese on it, and one without. For safety, start with something your dog probably wouldn't want to keep, like a wooden spoon or paint stir stick.
2. Hide the doctored one behind your back and hold out the plain one and let him investigate it while you hold it. (Keep the item in your possession at all times during the groundwork of this lesson.)
3. Next, produce the "better" one AS you say "can I have that?" and praise "thank you!" as he leaves item number one to lick the stuff off item number two. While he is busy with item number two, dip item number one in a bit of peanut butter and hold it behind your back.
4. When he's about finished with the peanut butter on item #2, say "can I have that?" RIGHT BEFORE you produce the newly-doctored item #1. After a few repetitions of this, the phrase "can I have that?" will come to predict "better item is coming" and he will remove his mouth from the item he has when you say "can I have that?" before you have to produce the doctored one.
5. Change your physical orientation. Sitting, kneeling, standing. Leaning over and looming is often a trigger for coveting. Remember at all times that your goal is to NOT trigger a guarding response. If your dog goes still at any time, go back two steps. Do not move to a more difficult

level until your dog is relaxed, unthreatened and willing at the previous step. When he hears the phrase "can I have that?" he should look up with eager anticipation.

6. Let go of the item briefly, say "can I have that?" and immediately produce the doctored one. He should have no problem with your picking up the first one or taking it as he lets go if you have worked long enough at the previous level. IF YOUR DOG HAS PROBLEMS GO BACK A STEP, or two.

Increase criteria gradually.

The above might happen over several days or several weeks. The goal is to avoid bribing: "look what I have - wanna trade?" but instead teach the dog to give you the item without seeing what you have to offer.

Future steps might include starting over at level one using two large rawhides and going through ALL of the above steps, one by one, carefully watching for any signs of reluctance. The biggest mistake most people make is to get into a power struggle with their dogs. They end up practicing guarding instead of practicing a willing exchange.

During the process you must use errorless management, NEVER letting your dog have a chance to practice stealing, hoarding or guarding.

Teach your dog to retrieve.

A dog who wants to have things in its mouth can easily learn to "bring it here!" deliver to hand and trade for a treat. A dog with a good retrieve can help clean the house or fetch that pen that rolled under your desk so you don't have to crawl around on your hands and knees to go get it. Let your dog help you!

Dogs love jobs. Most stealing behavior is simply a way to get your attention. Grabbing and running is an invitation to play. Teach your dog to play YOUR games!

If your dog has a serious guarding issue or you are not comfortable or unsure that you understand the above sequence completely, get professional help before you start.

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