**Resource Guarding**

**What is it and why does it happen?**

**What is it?**

“Resource guarding refers to any behaviour that a dog displays to convince others to stay away from something he/she considers valuable. Among these behaviours are growling, baring their teeth, stiffening and frantic eating (if food is involved). To that list, add glaring, snapping, barking, leaning over the resource to shield it and biting. Dogs commonly guard food, toys, treats, bones, rawhide, beds and even another dog or a person.”

**Why does it happen?**

There are many reasons why a dog may start to resource guard. On most occasions it is hard to identify the reason why but lets take a look at a few possible causes:

* A large litter where a puppy may feel the need to ensure it gets its fair share of food. Not uncommon to see a puppy, who may develop food resource guarding issues straddling the bowl to prevent other pups from feeding.
* In the pup’s new home children may tease the puppy whilst she is trying to feed.
* Well intentioned puppy parents think it is ok to remove the bowl whilst puppy is feeding, thinking they are teaching him to be ok with his food being removed. This can often have the opposite effect, resulting in resource guarding.
* A puppy or adult dog may develop resource guarding when either chews or toys are continually snatched from their mouths.
* A rescue dog who may have had multiple homes and has an unknown history, may develop resource guarding issues due to fear of loosing his toys, his new comfy bed and even his new person. These dogs often have Generalised Anxiety issues.

**5 Resource Guarding Behaviours:**

**1. Eating faster when you approach**

If your puppy starts eating his or her food faster when you approach him or her, this can be an early warning sign of resource guarding. Resource guarders want to gobble up anything they believe might be taken away from them.

**2. Thieving**

A resource guarder is always on the prowl to find important things that “need” protecting. Stolen items are very enticing!

**3. Refusing to drop items**

It is super difficult for a resource guarder to spit out something that he or she has possession of! Luckily, this skill can be taught through counter conditioning.

**4. Growling when being moved**

Resource guarders often love their beds, blankets, and other resting places. They may be quick to snap or growl if touched, moved, or told to get off.

**5. Leash reactive or fearful**

Resource guarders often start off shy or socially awkward. As they get older, they can become reactive or fearful on leash. Resource guarders *really*don’t like sharing their space!

Are resource guarders “bad dogs?”

No, resource guarding does NOT mean the dog is bad or defective.

This behaviour only becomes a major problem if the owner is inexperienced, the guarding is unpredictable or unmanageable, or if there are young kids in the home.

Whilst we are counter conditioning puppy to accept our presence near food, remember she/he should be left alone to eat their meal in peace!!

Need help managing your puppy’s food resource guarding? Below are some steps to help your dog/puppy become comfortable with humans near their food bowl. Please be in touch should any resource guarding be severe.

**Resource Guarding steps for your Dog or Puppy**

* Hand feed all her meals, other than the food you scatter for a minimum of a week.
* Reintroduce the bowl. Give your dog/puppy some from your hand and put some in the bowl alternatively.
* Gradually decrease the amount that comes from your hand and increase the amount you throw in the bowl.
* Gradually decrease the distance you are standing from the bowl whilst going through this counter-conditioning exercise, so your dog/puppy becomes use to your presence near her food.
* Once she is feeding entirely from her bowl again, introduce some yummy treats such as roast chicken.
* As your dog/puppy feeds, toss a tasty morsel next to the bowl, make sure she sees it.
* As she accepts this step start putting the treat **into** her bowl.
* This way she is becoming use to and accepting hands near her bowl.

**Chews**

The counter conditioning for chews follows a similar principle. However, when you start, sit at a distance that keeps your dog/puppy calm and not over threshold, so she is rehearsing the resource guarding behaviour.

* Sitting at a distance throw a tasty treat near her chew for her to eat.
* **Very** slowly reduce the distance between you and your dog/puppy.
* Practice these 2 steps for several days. Take one small step closer per day.
* Once your dog/puppy is comfortable with you being close and you are preferably still in a seated position, reach your hand out toward the chew in her mouth and drop her treat, then withdraw your hand without taking the chew.
* When she is not displaying any resource guarding behaviours, touch the treat in her mouth, drop the treat and remove your hand.
* Lastly, take the chew into your hand, hold it but do not remove it, hold the tasty treat right next to her nose. Your dog/puppy should let go of the chew to take the treat. As soon as she does that it is important you give the chew straight back.
* Once your dog/puppy is comfortable with this final step introduce the cue ‘give’.
* When your dog/puppy understands the cue, you can increase the time you hold the chew before returning it. Lots of praise too!!

It is important that all steps are included. If, at any time, you see your dog’s/puppy’s body stiffening, and hard stare or a growl, you have gone to fast, go back a few steps to where she is comfortable.

CanineLife Skills ©2020

[www.puppylifeskills.com](http://www.puppylifeskills.com)