

PREVENTION of GUARDING IN DOGS AND PUPPIES

Jane Marshall CPDT-KA www.cheerydogs.com

Most dogs and puppies are enthusiastic about food, toys and rawhides. Having a strong interest in food and toys can be a very useful trait in a dog as it makes them very easy to train. Search and rescue, police dogs and drug detection dogs are all chosen for these jobs because they are easily motivated by food and toys. When they find the missing person or apprehend a criminal they get a chance to play tug or are rewarded with a food treat. When you train your own dog, if he likes toys you can ask for a sit and throw the toy or if he likes food you can reward with a delicious treat.

However, if this strong interest is not handled correctly by you, it could deteriorate into guarding of these precious items. Although guarding food and special items is a normal behavior in dogs, it is not appropriate in a family setting and can make a dog difficult and even unsafe to live with.

Dogs usually learn to guard by being deprived of things early in life, or they may have had to compete with their littermates or kennel mates for food and toys. These dogs will eat very fast, run away with toys and rawhides or refuse to give them back to us because they are afraid we will take them away. It is important to handle this competitiveness over resources correctly. We have to teach the dog we are not a threat to him but rather, if he shares things with us, he will be greatly rewarded. Through training we will teach him that if he gives up items we request it is in his interest and we will reward him.

If you work on the following food bowl and object exchange programs your dog will welcome you around his food bowl and toys.

FOOD BOWL PROGRAM

The following exercises will help your new dog/puppy welcome you around his food bowl.

Week 1

Feed your new puppy/dog generously 2-3 times a day by hand. Sit with the food bowl on your knee and let him eat the food out of your hand. Talk nicely while he is eating. Please read the "Hand Feeding" handout. You may remain hand feeding for as long as you like, this will greatly reduce your dog's interest in competitiveness over food. It is a great bonding exercise too.

Week 2 (or when you choose to move to the next step)

Take a selection of 5 yummy treats (e.g. hotdog, liver, beef, ham or chicken). Put dog's food bowl down. Say "leave it" and with a wooden spoon put the treat into your dog's food bowl. Repeat 3-5 times at each meal. Don't worry if he does not leave it, still put the food treat in. After a few days he will realize "leave it" means something special is coming and he will start to look up at you.

(If your dog will not eat the kibble any longer because he only wants the treats, place each treat in the food bowl with your hand and let him eat it. When all the treats are gone you may leave the dog to finish his food.)

Week 3

Put dog's food down. Walk away. Walk back and say "leave it," and as he looks up put a yummy treat in food bowl. praise dog your dog a lot. Repeat 2 times at each meal.

Week 4 onward

If this is a puppy, continue to pat and praise him as he eats and add at least 1 treat per meal till dog is 1 year old. If this is an adult dog, walk up to bowl and add a treat and pat dog twice a week for first year of his life with you.

Note: If your dog ever stops eating with his head held in the bowl, stiffens his body, growls, or snaps at you as you do this feeding program, stop and call us for help.

This program is **NOT** for dogs that are already showing aggressive behaviors around their food bowls. If your dog already has a guarding problem please call Cheery Dogs for help with this program.

PREVENTING GUARDING WITH OBJECT EXCHANGES

Dogs and puppies guard items that are (or have been) in scarce supply. When you bring your new pet home, make sure he has a plentiful supply of toys and chew toys available at all times. Guarding is often created unwittingly by new adopters who continually take items away from the dog. Teaching your new dog to exchange items for food treats (or other toys) will keep him from believing you are a threat to him. Eventually, (after many months of training) you will not need the treats every time: he will happily give things up when you say "drop". Don't forget, however, to always praise and give the occasional treat for compliance. Practice the following exercise with your dog.

Approach your dog, who has a toy or rawhide in her mouth and hold yummy treat close to dog's nose. As dog opens her mouth to eat treat, the toy will drop on the floor. Say "drop", give the treat, and pick up the toy/rawhide and give back to your dog. Praise dog warmly. Repeat 2 times, if the dog remains interested. Do a couple of sessions a day.

Tips

1. If your dog already runs away with toy/rawhide do not try and hold the treat on the dog's nose, just throw lots of good treats on the floor near your dog as you are walking near her. You should start to notice, after a while that she will stop chewing as you approach, looking for the treats you will throw. This is your dog starting to welcome you near her precious items. The next step is to throw the treats to one side and then pick up the chew toy and give it back to her.
2. If your dog loses interest in the toy or chew toys and is more interested in the treats, look for opportunities during the day when he has voluntarily picked an item up. Get a treat, walk over to your dog and exchange the item she has for a treat, give the item immediately back to him as you praise him.
3. If the item he has, is something you do not want him to have (i.e. a household item) exchange for a treat and then give a dog toy instead. Praise warmly.

4. If dog will not exchange rawhide or any food type chew for treats he is no longer allowed to have it. Many dogs cannot control themselves around this sort of chew. Only allow them to have chewies they are willing to exchange for treats. Try stuffed Kongs,(www.kongcompany.com/) stuffed sterilized bones or Gumabones instead.

Keep these object exchange exercises up for one month. If your dog is showing signs of giving up items easily and sharing with you, you may go to 2-3 single exchanges per day. Keep this up for the first year of your dog's life with you. If the dog deteriorates into growling over food, toys or rawhides or consistently runs away and hides, please contact Cheery Dogs for help. (www.cheerydogs.com)

Some ball obsessed dogs can do these exercises not with food treats but by swapping items for a ball or even trading a ball for another ball!

PLEASE NOTE: if your dog is already growling and guarding items please contact Cheery Dogs for help. Resource guarding can be a dangerous behavior. These exercises are for dogs with very mild to no resource guarding at the moment, and are designed to prevent resource guarding developing or deteriorating.