The Happy Dog Training Academy

Understanding Resource Guarding

**Understanding why dog Resource Guard. Preventing it.**

Is your pup acting a little aggressive and possessive of their food or toys? It could be a sign of guarding. Yes, it’s more common than you think, something the breeder should have begun to stop, but a lot of breeders don’t. One of the biggest single reasons, but not the only one is feeding all the puppies out of one dish, once the breeder starts the weaning process. But don’t panic, it’s possible to correct this behaviour with gentle training techniques. In this guide, we’ll discuss what causes resource guarding, how to spot it and how to stop it before it becomes a chronic issue.

**So, what is resource guarding anyway?**

I describe it as “possession aggression”. As the term suggests, it’s when your dog is aggressive behaviour around something they have or need, even a place. This could be food, toys, or personal spaces such as playpens, crates, and kennels. It’s a signal to those around them that “this is mine”. A type of territorial behaviour that is localised to specific items. Defiantly different to territorial aggression, which is about protecting the home or family members. Possession aggression can happen between dogs and their family members, children, or other pets in the household.

**What Triggers Resource Guarding In Dogs?**

Possession aggression and resource guarding is quite a normal canine behaviour? Well in a sense, it is, It comes from the natural instinct to protect what your own resources which are learned from pack behaviour in wolves. Although it is “normal, not all dogs resource guard. Some grow out of it naturally in puppyhood and some take more intense training to correct. The first place to start is with the triggers. Here is a list of triggers that can cause resource guarding in each situation.

**Resource guarding between dogs and other animals.**

**Limited resources.** If your pooch feels like there not enough toys, food, or sacred spaces to go around, they may snap at the other family dog or animals to claim their possessions. It’s so important to have plenty to go around.

**Feeding dogs too close to one another.** Your dogs must have separate feeding stations so that your dogs don’t feel threatened by each other while eating. You should also, be clear about which bowl is which. Don’t allow your dogs you steal from each other’s bowls. Put the bowls down in order of dominance, the most dominant first.

**New arrivals.** Your dog may be more territorial if a new dog or puppy is introduced to the home. Make sure you’re sensitive to your dog during this time and introduce the new pet properly. They should still have their own toys, sleep spaces and bowls, always putting the first dog bowl down first.

**Ritualised aggression.** This is part of normal dog to dog conflict whenever you have a more than one dog household. Your dog will send out the odd growl or warning shot to let the other dogs know that a chew or food bowl is theirs. This usually isn’t anything to worry about. It’s like communicating with your housemate that they can’t use your favourite cup. Yes “conflict” but ultimately constructive to the smooth running of the household. It’s only when things get heated that you need to worry.

**Resource guarding with humans.** Let’s move onto humans. Resource guarding towards humans can be particularly concerning when it involves children. So here are the triggers you’ll need to avoid.

**Feeling under-stimulated.** An unstimulated, bored dog can cause many problem behaviours. Stealing and then guarding the stolen items are some of them. Keep your pup happy by providing plenty of enrichment at home. **Dropped food**, children who drop food and reach down to retrieve it, when the dog has made it there’s.

**Feeling threatened or unsafe with a person.** If a person causes your dog anxiety, they may shield their high-value treats, toys and food from them. This happens often with children who take away a dog’s toy. Your dog will then associate the child with a loss of their possessions.  
  
**Note.** This doesn’t happen all the time.It depends on your dog’s personality. Some dogs are more open to sharing than others. But as a rule, you should teach your children not to take toys or chews away from your family dog. Instead, teach them to respect the dogs space and encourage group play activities when you can supervise and your dog is happy to play too.

**Medical issues.** Sometimes if your dog is injured or unwell, they can resource guard as a way of protecting themselves. This is even more prevalent with food aggression. If you think this could be the cause, head to the vet to get your dog checked out.

**Stress.** Dogs can become guarded if you have a major house move or if you have a new baby in the family. Your dog can become stressed at other events like thunderstorms, fireworks, loud or high-pitched noises.

**Unmet needs.** Tiredness, hunger, or any other unmet need can cause resource guarding. Try to tend to your dog’s basic needs to see if problem behaviours go away naturally. If not, try the training techniques we’ll outline in a later section.

**Let’s have a look at the Signs of Resource Guarding in Dogs.**

So, we now know what resource guarding is and what triggers it. Now let’s see if your dog is resource guarding or if it’s something else. Below we are going to go through the various behaviour’s dogs display when resource guarding. But remember, to keep things in prospect as with everything. Just because your dog is growling, when your dog is being accosted by a neighbour's dog is not about resource guarding. Apply these to the situation where your pup is either eating or seemingly “protecting” their toys or personal spaces, like crates. If in doubt, consult your vet or a professional dog behaviourist.

**Mild resource guarding.** At first, resource-guarding behaviour can be quite subtle. Take a look at the list below. If your pup is doing three or more of the signs below, I would take this as an alert. If they display all of the signs below, get to work immediately to stop this behaviour,

* Stopping still/freezing over food bowl.
* Eating faster as someone approaches to prevent anyone else from getting to their food.
* Taking an item especially food and running away for privacy.
* Braced body language over the item or looking down at the item as if to “protect” it.
* Blocking the item with a shift in body weight.
* Eye tracking or staring, tracking of the approaching person or animal.
* Raising lips and baring teeth (often accompanied by growling)
* Ears pinned flat against the head
* Hard stare (often accompanied by still body language)

**Severe resource guarding**

If the milder signals above are ignored or your pooch feels particularly threatened, they could resort to severe resource guarding behaviours. These are harder to correct but not impossible. If you notice any of these signs combined with the aforementioned milder signals, start training your dog today to nip this behaviour in the bud. In some cases you may need to retain the help from a behaviour trainer.

* Growling
* Lunging
* No-contact biting (also known as air snapping)
* Chasing (you or other animals)
* Biting

**How Do You Stop. A Dog from Resource-Guarding?**

So, I am guessing if you have got this information, it is quite possible you may feel your pet is guarding, or you would like to prevent it from happening. So, now the moment you’ve been waiting for. How do you stop your dog from resource-guarding? Well to a degree, this depends on where you’re at in the process. Let’s start with prevention tips.

**How to prevent resource guarding in puppies**. Want to have a happy, healthy, well-behaved dog? Start young. Here are some tips specifically geared around preventing guarding.

**How to use desensitisation to stop food possession.** A common practice for dog trainers when dealing with a resource guarding dog is desensitisation training.Desensitisation simply means slowly getting your dog used to an action, item or person that historically caused them stress.There are lots of ways to use this technique but I’m going to give you a simple, step-by-step walkthrough of one of the techniques. Here we go.

1. Put a harness on your dog and tether them to something strong with a lead. You want the lead to be strong and of a normal length.
2. Walk around your dog at about a 2-metre distance and throw food towards them.
3. Don’t stop walking and watch for signs of tension or stress as you feed your dog.
4. Edge closer and closer to your pup. When your dog starts showing signs of tension, don’t go any closer. Only progress to the next few inches if your dog is relaxed with you feeding them at that distance.
5. It may take a few sessions of this exercise but eventually, you should be able to get quite close to your dog and feed them without them feeling anxious and aggressive towards you.

The goal of this exercise is to eventually be able to approach your dog’s food bowl while they are eating without your dog feeling stressed. You’re teaching them that you don’t want to steal their food. You approach their bowl can only be a good thing!

**How to encourage calm playtimes.** If your dog is guarding during playtime, you need to slowly assure them that you’re not trying to take away their fun or punish them. Have some treats to exchange the toy, if they are reluctant to give up the toy. If your dog is particularly possessive around a specific chew toy, don’t stress them further by picking it up. Instead, play with them with a new toy that you can share.As you build a stronger bond and share this toy during playtime, eventually your dog may even give you the toy to signal they want to play with you.It’s all about building mutual trust, respect, and boundaries. It takes time but you’ll soon be able to play without any possession aggression if you can keep the environment and mood calm. The main things to remember its about exchange, exchanging a more valued resource, like treats.

**Do you need professional help?**

In my experience, you can get quite far with at home training, if you’re consistent and patient. However, not all of us have the same capacity to train our dogs.This is especially true if you have young children at home.So, do you need professional help? Honestly most of you have the ability. But I also think professional help is always welcomed with most training aspects, as you’ll get off on the right foot right from the beginning.Giving you the confidence to go ahead, knowing you have someone to call on if you need help. Professional dog training is always helpful. Even if just for one session.If that’s not available to you, there are a few dog training site on the web that might help. Definitely do your research and fine a site or trainer that can deal with your specific problem.

[How to STOP “Food Aggression”/ Resource Guarding in Dogs- WITHOUT FORCE - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=266M5Tup9xc)[Resource Guarding Protocol | Dogmantics Dog Training](https://dogmantics.com/resource-guarding-protocol/)The Happy Dog Training Academy I highly recommended these on the web, that is all about resource guarding. It will teach you all about Guarding to help you work with your dog and not against them.

**Final Thoughts, Preventing Resource Guarding Behaviour.**

Resource guarding in dogs can be very concerning. It has to be one of the biggest reasons owners give up the pet to rescue centres. In mild cases it’s entirely possible to reform, in extreme cases you may need professional help. Set yourself up for success by avoiding the behaviours and creating a calming environment around mealtimes and playtimes. Guarding is an expression of insecurity and worry, so creating a safe secure environment, alongside consistent training, will help you and your pet. It will help them to let go of their possession aggression. In most cases exchange it the best option exchanging from a valued item to a more valuable resource, like treats good quality treats.We hope this article was helpful for you in understanding resource guarding and how you can stop it. Happy training!