



## Preventing Resource Guarding

No matter how much you love your dog, you may encounter a situation in which your dog thinks that he has to display aggressive behavior in order to prevent you from taking a valuable object such as food, toys, or other items. This behavior is called "Resource Guarding," and many people want to know why their dogs do it. "Resource Guarding" is a behavior displayed by dogs that involves them preventing their "stuff" (also known as a resource) from being taken away. A resource can be anything that your dog wants at that particular moment in time and does not want to give up for whatever reason – sometimes a resource is a favorite toy or a pizza crust that was dropped on the floor, and other times it can be a stolen item like a tissue or a sock! When a dog guards something, he might stiffen, growl, snap, or even bite when a person tries to take the item away.

Resource guarding is a common problem, but the good news is that behavior like this is both modifiable and preventable. Here are some easy tips to avoid problems and ensure you protect your relationship with your dog.

- Dog-proof your home to reduce the number of episodes in which your dog "steals" things that he shouldn't have. Do not chase him since you may very well be causing a guarding problem. With each rescued Barbie™ doll, and with every snatched shoe, your dog will learn that you feel that what he has is valuable. What starts as an innocent game of chase can turn into a competition for a non-valuable item. He may even learn to run with, hide, and even guard his found treasures. Set up baby gates to keep him out of untidy areas. Teach the family that leaving things out will possibly result in lost items.
- When you first bring your new dog home, it is important to teach him that you are a giver and not a taker. It's more important to build your dog's trust in you, than it is to show him that you can take things away from him. Give your dog a Kong™ toy with a small amount of food in it. Every time he finishes his Kong, pick it up, add more good "stuff" and give it back to him. This is a great way to teach your dog that he can trust you around important things. You will be your dog's hero.
- Teaching a dog to trust you around his food bowl does not include repeatedly taking the bowl away. It's more important to teach your dog that when he is eating, he can expect people to walk up, reach down, and toss a piece of food into his bowl. Make sure the food that you toss into the bowl is way more valuable than the food in his bowl. You only need to do 2-3 food tosses per meal, and the rest he can eat in peace. There is no need to do this during each mealtime.
- If your dog has the opportunity to take an item that he shouldn't have, quickly evaluate whether or not it is truly an emergency. A paper towel or a dish cloth may not be worth tackling the dog over. Remember that when you take things away all the time, you actually confirm for your dog the idea that you really do want his "stuff." While it's understandable that you need to take some things away, make sure that non-issue items are treated with less urgency.
- Retrieving a non-issue item may be as simple as being calm and unemotional. If you smile, crouch down, and say "What on earth do you have?" your dog may just bring you the item. It's easy enough to take away the paper towel and replace it with a more fun item. A squeaky stuffed toy that you play a little tug with may be better than that old paper towel anyway.



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- There will be times that you absolutely must take something away immediately. Most dogs will not have a problem having the occasional \$10 bill or ball point pen taken out of his mouth. But whenever you can, outsmart your dog. Grab a leash, go to the back door, or toss a ball. The trick is to do these things without ever allowing the dog to know that you noticed what he had. For example, you wouldn't want look directly at the dog, go for the item and ask him to trade for a treat if he doesn't comply. Instead, you might "accidentally" drop a piece of food on the floor. When his back is turned, you can pick up the item.

In summary, your dog will learn that it is okay to give things to you as long as you build trust and avoid being excessively grabby. Building trust is the cornerstone of leadership. For more information about dog behavior or to sign up for classes please visit our website at [www.sthuberts.org](http://www.sthuberts.org).