

Food Guarding

What is it?

Food guarding is when dogs exhibit behaviors designed to prevent other dogs, humans, or cats from obtaining food that is in their possession.

What does it look like?

Some guarding can be obvious such as growling, snarling, snapping, biting, or lunging/chasing. Some is more subtle such as tense muscles/freezing, hard eye (staring), or eating food or treats faster than normal.

Why do dogs do it?

It's important to understand that resource guarding can be a very normal behavior for dogs. The warnings that dogs give of growls, snarls, stares, freezing are the dog trying to communicate politely that they would like you to back off.

What should we do about it?

We can be proactive with prevention food bowl exercises below, add management, and positive training. Contact our behaviour line for a private consult if guarding is severe.

What should we NOT do?

Punishing the warnings dogs give us, taking items away repeatedly with no reward, smacking or "alpha-rolling" dogs for guarding all make food guarding more serious. Dogs that are punished for guarding may stop giving the warning signs, but they still don't want you to take their stuff and are more likely to bite.

Food Bowl Exercises

Step One

1. Put down empty dish
2. Withdraw
3. Approach and add handful
4. Withdraw
5. Wait for dog to finish eating
6. Approach and add next handful

Place an empty dish down and feed the dog in handfuls, withdrawing after each one and then re-approaching. Only bring the next handful when they have finished consuming the previous one, so that at this stage you are always approaching the dog with an empty dish.

Step Two

1. Put down empty dish
2. Withdraw
3. Approach just before dog finishes and add handful
4. Withdraw
5. Approach just before dog finishes and add handful

Feed meal exactly as in Stage 1 except now approach and add next installment just before the dog finished previous one. Do this stage warmed up after a few reps of stage one.

Step Three

1. Place full meal down
2. Withdraw
3. Approach and add bonus, something much better than what's in bowl.
4. Withdraw
5. Repeat adding bonuses for rest of meal

Bowl Touch

1. Place meal down
2. Withdraw
3. Approach
4. Touch Bowl
5. Add bonus (high value treats)
6. Withdraw and repeat

Bowl Removal

1. Place meal down
2. Withdraw
3. Approach
4. Remove bowl
5. Add bonus to bowl (also give some directly to dog)
6. Place bowl back down
7. Withdraw and repeat