Dogs can guard toys, food, people, objects, or even locations. This occurs when your dog shows signs of aggression when you (or another dog) approaches the guarded item, person, or location, such as snarling, growling, or snapping. Here are some prevention strategies and ways to help address resource guarding.

Prevention is Key

Resource guarding is not associated with dominance. The best prevention for resource guarding is hand-feeding puppies or dogs and training a "drop-it" cue.

Hand-feeding your puppy their meal, or using kibble as treat rewards during training teaches your puppy impulse control and prevents food guarding, as the food bowl is eliminated.

During puppyhood, you can also practice exchanging a toy for a treat. If your puppy has a toy (or another household item), approach your puppy with a treat reward. You must wait for your puppy to drop the toy, rather than retrieving the toy from their mouth. When your puppy drops the toy, pick up the toy, and reward your puppy with a treat. Give the toy back to your puppy. When your puppy reliably drops their toy for a treat, you can begin to add the "drop-it" verbal cue when you approach your puppy. This will motivate your puppy to exchange favourite toys for a food reward.

Management

It's important to manage your dog's environment to prevent resource guarding. If your dog guards food from other dogs in the household, feed your dogs in separate rooms. Ensure household members do not disturb your dog when they are eating their meal.

You can start to change your dog's mindset about someone approaching their food dish, by tossing treats to your dog as you walk by. Never attempt to remove your dog's food dish while they are eating! Maintain a safe distance as you walk by and toss high-value treats by your dog's food dish. Over time, your dog may learn that someone approaching their dish = something good happens!

If your dog guards items such as toys, remove all toys from a space where your dog will interact with others. If your dog resource guards multiple items, people, or locations, then you should seek assistance from a certified dog trainer.

What to AVOID

In summary, here are some things to <u>avoid</u> when addressing resource guarding:

- Taking your dog's food away when they are eating, or physically removing a toy from their mouth. This practice perpetuates resource guarding, as the dog learns that you approaching = a desired object or food is taken away. It also puts you at risk of being bitten. The best way to address resource guarding is through counter-conditioning, where the dog learns over time, that a person (or another dog) approaching a valued item or food results in something good happening (i.e. receiving a treat).
- Punishing your dog for showing warning signs. This is your dog's way of communicating their discomfort with someone (or another dog) approaching. Punishing warning signs may cause your dog to not show warning signs before biting, which significantly increases a bite risk.

Finding Help

If your dog's resource guarding becomes unmanageable and/or you have safety concerns, then you should seek assistance from a certified dog trainer and/or veterinarian.

A qualified professional can develop and supervise a behavioural modification plan for your dog, which often involves counter-conditioning through reward-based training. In some cases, there can be underlying medical issues that contribute to food-related aggression.

Additional Resources:
The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers private consultations for behavioural issues such as resource guarding. For more information, visit our website: https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/private-consultations/

Did You Know?
You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:
askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately $7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please <u>Donate</u>.