

PREVENTING GUARDING IN PUPPIES

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Having a strong interest in food and toys can be a very useful trait in dog's 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, drugs or criminal they get a chance to play with their favorite toy or are rewarded with a food treat.

However, if this strong interest is not handled correctly it could deteriorate into guarding of these precious items.

Although guarding food and particular 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. They may have had to compete with their littermates or kennel mates for scarce food and toys. These dogs will eat very fast, run away with toys and rawhides or refuse to give them back to us. In some cases they may even use aggression to keep us away. They do this because they are afraid we will take away a resource that is precious to them.. It is important to handle this insecurity 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.

When you take your new puppy home, for the first couple of weeks feed him all of his meal from your hand, instead of the bowl. It is a little time consuming but this is a wonderful exercise for bonding with a new puppy. It also conveys to him that you are there to bring good things to him not to take them away. The next step is to add the food bowl. Place the bowl on the floor, then add to it a handful of the puppy's meal, let him eat it. Talk very sweetly to him as he eats, gently patting him. Continue in this way till all the food is finished. If you have taught your puppy to "sit" this is a good time to use it! Ask him to sit for each handful of food. When you have done this for a week you may then feed the puppy his meal in his bowl, but as he is eating walk up to him and add two to three extra special food treats such as hot dog or chicken. After a few meals, fed by this method, the puppy will welcome your presence around his food bowl!

To prevent your new puppy developing inappropriate guarding of toys and stolen items, first make sure he has lots of toys and chewies available to him at all

times. They should be in a range of designs and textures. Like us, puppies have preferences and individual tastes. Some puppies like all toys, some only like a particular sort. Try taking him to the pet store and choose together! Then, work on "object exchanges" with him. When the puppy is playing with his dog toy (or chewing on his rawhide) offer to trade an extra special food treat for the toy., then give the toy back to him. If you have a puppy who runs away continually and hides with the toy, then do these exercises on leash. After a few of these successful exchanges the puppy will be very eager to share his toy with you! When the puppy is trading all items easily you can then teach him the word "give" as you trade.

This same method of trading is used to teach puppies to retrieve. Throw the ball or toy, when the puppy brings it back, trade for a treat and throw it again. Within a couple of weeks you will not need the treat as the puppy will have learned that you will throw his ball for him if he brings it back and drops it for you. This is a great game to teach the concept of sharing

If the puppy has stolen a household item that he cannot have back, then trade with a food treat and give him a dog toy instead.

These food bowl exercises and object exchanges will ensure that you raise a puppy who does not need to use threats to keep you away from possessions, but instead welcomes your involvement around his food bowl and toys.

If your puppy or dog is already showing aggression by growling or snapping at you over resources, please consult with your vet for a referral to a licensed behaviorist or dog trainer.

For help with this or any other dog related problem please call the Helpline for Dogs at 929-9115