

Resource Guarding Volunteer Information Session

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Agenda

- What is it
- What does it look like
- What can be done
- Complicated guarding
- Common co-existing issues



Resource Guarding – What Do We Mean?

- Agonistic/aggressive behavior directed toward another in order to maintain control over a desired resource
- Resources might include:
 - Food
 - Water
 - Chew objects
 - Toys
 - Locations/resting places
 - Another social partner



Things To Keep In Mind

- Very normal dog behavior
- Also one of the leading causes of bites in the home
- Like most things, may be influenced both by genetics and learning history

What Does It Look Like?

- Usually a series of escalating behaviors
- Eating more rapidly, gulping food
- Lowering head and body over bowl/object
- Putting body between resource and approacher
- Moving away with object
- Freezing
- Hard stare
- Tooth display
- Growl
- Snap/bite





Lowered head

Tense
muscles



Eyes wide, round,
whites visible.
Hard stare.

Freezing!!!

Using body to
cover toy



Direct Stare, tense muscles, body turned away w/object,
tongue flick

More Subtle Warning Signs

- <https://youtu.be/wK2jOUssY-E>

What To Do – Before There Is A Problem

- My favorite answer to “Can you take an item away from your dog?”
- What NOT to do

How To Create a Resource Guarder (AKA, “I can take things right out of his mouth.”)

- Approach dog when with food bowl, rawhide, etc.
- Stick hand in bowl, take it away, take objects out of mouth, etc.
- Unfortunately, this is widespread “common knowledge” training advice.
- Extremely dangerous and MUCH more likely to create a severe problem where none existed previously
- Based on long disproven, outdated “dominance” theory based advice (same advice may also recommend spitting in or doing even less appealing things to dog’s resources)
- Completely illogical. Think about a similar situation – restaurant example

Being Proactive

- Food Bowl Bonuses
- Trade Games

What To Do – When There Is A Problem

- Management
- Training behaviors to assist in management
- Desensitization/Counter-Conditioning
- Emergency Situations

Management

- Prevent the dog from being in situations where they may guard
- Food bowls
 - Feed set meals – do not leave bowls of food out all day long
 - Feed in a secure area and leave dog alone (crate, separate room, behind baby gate, etc.)
 - Have dog exit area before picking up empty bowl

Management

- Object Guarding
 - Do not provide high value objects that elicit guarding (rawhides, etc.)
 - May provide lower-value items that won't elicit guarding
 - If enrichment items are provided, should be able to consume entirely in one sitting, provide in secure area and leave dog alone until done
 - Prevent access to valued items that the dog may attempt to "steal" (trash, clothing, etc. should be in locking trash cans, secure storage areas)

Management

- Location Guarding
 - Dog is not allowed on furniture
 - Provide secure comfortable resting areas where will not be approached by others

Training Management Behaviors

- Train repertoire of behaviors that will enable you to have dog cooperatively move out of potential guarding situations
- Recall
- “Off”
- Hand Target
- Stationing
- Default “Leave Its”
- Drop

Hand Target

○ <https://youtu.be/TgCQNBetH8Q>



Stationing

- Can use mat, platform, etc.
- Mat Part 1: <https://youtu.be/UpTeil6XsWY>
- Mat Part 2: <https://youtu.be/RoNKhdoYwlc>



Default “Leave It”

- Why a default behavior is important
- We get it by training the opposite – “take it”
- Step One: <https://youtu.be/hEfc52B8LIQ>
- Step Two: <https://youtu.be/vk7kyDzSW1Y>
- Step Three: <https://youtu.be/4lLkvQWAnhK>



Drop

- Use food first as a lure to get the behavior
- When dog starts to figure out the association (drop = expect treat), can wait for the behavior before marking/rewarding
- <https://youtu.be/l3sRu649w6o>

Desensitization/Counter-Conditioning

- Build a positive emotional response to person's approach
- Need to work at level BEFORE guarding is elicited
- Break down into small steps
- Elements to consider:
 - Value of resource
 - Nearness of resource to dog – whether in dog's possession or not
 - How long resource has been in dog's possession
 - Distance assessor approaches from
 - Nearness of assessor
 - Hand motion

Desensitization/Counter-Conditioning

- Start easy! Easier than you need to.
- Use safety precautions (tethering)
- If dog shows signs of guarding, back up to easier step.
- If dog is not guarding, but not showing signs of positive emotional response, stay at current step.
- If dog shows signs of a positive emotional response consistently (at least three times in a row), then move to next step.

Operationalizing “Positive Emotional Response”



- Know what body language signs you are looking for
- In food bowl protocols, we use a head lift from the bowl as indicator of changing emotional response.

Food Bowl Guarding Protocol



- HSHV follows Lindsay Wood-Brown's protocol
- Step 1: Approach empty bowl, drop kibble.
- Step 2: Approach empty bowl, drop kibble, back away, approach again while dog still eating, drop more kibble. Repeat until get head lift three times in a row as approach.
- Step 3: Approach bowl with kibble and canned food combo, following steps above.

Food Guarding Protocol Examples

- Tiny Session 1: <https://youtu.be/LxxAClsZF14>
- Tiny Session 2: <https://youtu.be/WT1YmsC0-v4>
- Tiny Session 4 (in crate): <https://youtu.be/EWLaXy3TL4U>

Object Guarding



- Similar protocol, but:
 - Start w/low value items
 - Start w/items nearby but not in possession
 - Proceed to item briefly in possession, then extend amount of time dog has had item
 - Build up to higher value items, backing up to first steps again

Location Guarding



- Start at less-valued locations
- How long dog has been on location, how settled they are
- Reinforce also getting off location, stationing to alternate location, allow to get back on after getting off voluntarily

Long-term

- Generalization
- Need to practice with all family members, through all stages
- Management at some level will likely always be necessary – goal of training and DS/CC is to minimize likelihood of problems
- These dogs are not the best candidates for life with young kids. If children present, adults need to take responsibility for strict supervision and management. Don't put more responsibility on the dog and child than on the adult.

Other Animals

- Management
- Don't allow problems to start or re-occur
- Feed separately in crates, separate rooms, etc.
- Pick up valued objects
- Provide valued objects only when separate from other animals
- Train management behaviors – stationing, recalls, off, back up
- Be predictable
- Desensitization not as feasible – guarding from con-specifics very natural, and hard to do controlled set-ups when involve another animal
- Not appropriate for dog parks, day cares

What If The Owner Is the Resource?

- Prevent situations where conflict likely
- Use trained behaviors to diffuse situations
- If able, DS/CC to other animal/person's approach

What To Do If Things Go Wrong

- If guarding starts, you have no good options, which is why management is critical.
- Do not punish or start conflict, as this will make the guarding worse – proves the dog's theory that you are a threat.
- Best option is to diffuse/redirect with higher value rewards. Toss treats and lure away from object before trying to retrieve it.
 - If you have to resort to this too often though, can reinforce “stealing” behavior and lead to problematic behavior chains.
- If you can let it go (object not valuable or safety risk), let it go.

Complicated Guardians

- Guarding objects/spaces that animal does not currently have possession of.
- Guarding areas where resources once were.
- Guarding “stolen” items that are less predictable.
- Leaving item to go after approacher.
- Management becomes much harder.

Assessing Safety/Prognosis

- How predictable/controllable
- What is the threshold for aggression?
- What does the dog do when triggered?

Common Co-Existing Behaviors



- Hoarding/caching
 - Depositing objects somewhere (taking to crate, “burying” outside or in couch cushions, etc.)
 - Can be dangerous if caching location changes and owner is unaware there are resources present
 - Otherwise, can avoid area and empty at times when dog is not present

Common Co-Existing Behaviors



- Body handling sensitivity
- Most guarders – especially location guarders – may have issues with touch and handling
- DS/CC Protocols for handling also need to be implemented

Resources

- Book “Mine!” by Jean Donaldson