

RESOURCE GUARDING (RG) PREVENTION – “WHAT HAVE YOU GOT?”

Goal: This exercise is designed to teach your dog that your approach predicts something good (a high-value treat), NOT that you're going to take something away. *Important note: This exercise is **not** meant to be a complete treatment protocol for dogs that actively resource guard.*

Consider videotaping Steps 3 & 4. This will provide important information for the Behavior Support team.

Step 1 - *Condition the phrase “What have you got?” to predict a treat.*

1. Stand or sit near your dog and say “What have you got?” in a happy voice, then immediately give the dog a tasty treat.
2. Do this quickly in succession about 10 times. (The same way in obedience training you've conditioned the word “yes” to predict they're about to get ‘paid’).
3. Perform Step 1 at least 5 times over 1-2 days.

Step 2 - *Test the phrase “What have you got?” after performing Step 1 at least 5 times in a 1-2 day period.*

1. When the dog has simply looked away from you (but not when overly distracted), say “What have you got?”. Does the dog quickly look at you expecting a treat? Great! He gets it.
2. If not, go back and repeat Step 1 (10 reps) one time.
3. Give the dog a few minutes and try Step 2 again. If you can say the phrase “What have you got?” and the dog quickly looks at you expecting the treat, move on to Step 3. If not, work on Step 1 for another day or two.

Step 3 - *Condition the phrase when dog is eating.*

1. When dog is eating a meal, say “What have you got?” and walk toward dog.
2. Drop a high-value treat in the dog's bowl and walk away.
3. Observe dog's behavior (see Resource Guarding scale). If dog is low on the scale (keeps eating, no severe guarding behaviors), repeat Step 3 a few times in succession.
4. Over a few days, repeat Step 3 when dog is chewing on a bone or some other high-value long-lasting edible: say “What have you got?” as you walk by and drop a treat.

Step 4 - *Interrupt when dog is eating a meal.*

1. While dog is eating, approach him, stop at the bowl, and say “What have you got?”.
2. When he looks to you for the treat, **give it to him as you take the bowl (as if you're trading).**
3. **Give back the bowl and walk away.**
4. Repeat 1 time. Does the dog respond differently? With more “guarding” behaviors? **If so, stay at Step 3 and contact Behavior Support.**
5. **If dog appears comfortable with the brief “trade,”** wait awhile and try Step 4 when dog is chewing on a bone.

NOTE: Bones are often more high-value than regular food. If you observe ANY level of resource guarding, immediately stop the exercises and contact Behavior Support.

Level 1

- Dog appears relaxed and is eager for person to approach for attention.
- Will generally eagerly disengage from food or other resource to engage with person in a relaxed, friendly, “happy” manner.

Level 2

- Dog remains relaxed as person approaches but does not disengage from food or resource item.
- With a resource item, when given, they will most commonly just lay down where they are given the item (verses trying to hide it or take it someplace else).

Level 3

- Dog becomes “aware” and a bit tense as person approaches and begins to eat somewhat faster.
- There are no other aggressive or distance increasing signals given.
- With a resource item at this level, the dog may take the item and move away from the person.

Level 4

- Dog becomes aware and quite tense at approach.
- Dog will not only eat fast, but take large mouthfuls of food as if trying to finish the resource before it can be removed.
- With a resource item, the dog may move away with the item or attempt to put the item under his body, commonly between the front legs just under chest.

Level 5

- Dog stiffens on approach and exhibits one or more of the following: freeze, whale-eye, low growl, piloerection, exaggerated guarding posture (rear-end up high and front end low, covering resource in a very stiff and still manner).

Level 6

- Dog shows one or more of the criteria for level 5.
- Also shows: Aggressive tooth display, which may be directed at the intruder or while engaged with the resource.
- Additionally the dog disengages from the food bowl or resource for a snap or bite at the intruder, then goes immediately back to the resource.
- There are no punctures but may be slight contact.
- Note: with a resource item, often dogs at this level won't release the object, but will appear to try to bite the intruder with the resource in their mouth.

Level 7

- Dog shows one or more of the criteria for Level 6, and disengages from the resource to bite.
- Contact is made, punctures are likely. Usually many signals are seen (freezing, whale eye, tooth display). With a resource item, usually a dog at this level will drop the item in order to bite and then return to the item.
- It is at this level and above that you begin to see dogs that will spread food all over, spill the bowl, etc.

Level 8

- Dog disengages from the resource quickly (fast trigger) and sometimes does not even show any of the precursor signals but goes immediately for the bite OR Dog disengages from the resource and bites multiple times, hard enough to puncture and or tear.
- The bites are often of a longer duration (for example, 1 second vs. instant bite and release)

Level 9

- Some or all of the previous criteria are met with the addition of the following:
- Dog disengages from the resource and bites, holds and shakes their head.
- Dog bites multiple times in a row.
- Dog moves away from bowl and guards the area surrounding the resource while in full agonistic display.
- Dog may guard an empty bowl.

Level 10

- At this level the dog would do serious, life-threatening damage if not restrained.
- They will guard the area, the empty bowl, or crumbs of a finished resource.
- Often instead of directing their aggression toward the intruding object (plastic hand) they will make direct and threatening eye contact with the person.