

## **WORKING THROUGH RESOURCE GUARDING**

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Resource guarding can be a 'scary' issue, as dogs do have the capability of hurting us. If at any time you fear for your personal safety or are afraid of your dog, seek the advice of a professional trainer willing to work humanely with your dog. My suggestion is to progress slowly; better to move slowly than to rush things and wind up with a bitten hand or face.

There are several ways to approach resource guarding, and combining these approaches often creates a very synergistic, humane approach. The first suggestion is a "Nothing In Life Is Free" program, where the dog has to earn everything valuable—treats, attention, food, walks, going outside, etc. It gives you a chance to work on obedience humanely and to show your dog that you are the one controlling the resources. It is as simple as having your dog "request" to go outside, to receive his dinner, to receive a toy. If he drops a ball on your lap to play, ask him to sit or lay down before throwing it. Get up and walk away if he does not comply the first time (do not try and force him; just leave.), Then try it again later. One easier way to get this message across to your dog is to grab one of his favorite toys, "rev" him up to play, and then ask him to sit before throwing the toy. If he does not sit, turn your back on him and wait. If he sits, immediately turn around and give him the toy. If he does not sit, wait a little while and then try again. Possibly even walk away a little so the dog has to follow you. You can do this with food, too. If he wants his dinner, he must sit for it or lay down. Eventually try to get two behaviors for one reward. If you go to put his leash on, have him sit. If he does not, then put the leash down and walk away. If he wants to run through the doorway to go outside, ask him to lay down. If he does not comply, simply walk away and leave the door shut. Then try again in

another minute. Integrate this "NILIF" philosophy into your life with your dog, and you will soon find that you have a dog that politely "asks" instead of demands.

Another suggestion to help with resource guarding is to work on "Tradeoffs" with your dog. Start easy: trade him for a lower value item, like a toy, by giving him a tasty liver treat and then quietly picking up the toy when he opens his mouth to eat the treat (you can even hold it in your hand so he has to lick at your hand for a while to get the treat). Teach him the "Give" or "Release" command if he does not know it already. Say "Give" just as the dog lets go of the toy, and then give him the treat. Then ask him to "Take It" and shake the toy so he grabs it. Then ask for another "Give" using the treat lure. Gradually and slowly fade out the lure, treating every other time. Repeat this often for short periods of time until all you have to do is command him to "Give" what he has in his mouth and he will—without a treat. Practice taking his toys from him, inspecting them, and then promptly returning them with a warm "Good dog!" He will be learning that you control the resources and that you are fair—you give it back to him. Work up to something as valuable as a raw meaty bone. Grab some high-value treats, like extra beef heart or meat. Approach the dog while he is eating, saying his name warmly and happily so that he looks up at you. Show him the food you have and give it to him. Repeat this at each meal so that he equates your approach with a yummy treat, until he is looking up eagerly and wagging his tail when you approach.

At this point in time progress to asking him to release his bone to you. Start with him on lead, so that he cannot slink off with his bone or run away from you (just do not press him into a corner!). Give him his bone. Immediately ask him to "give" it to you. Show him a nice high-value treat if he is reluctant to release it. Once he gives it to you, give him the treat, inspect the bone, and then immediately hand it back to him and let him eat his meal in peace. Do this at every meal until he readily gives his bone up to you and you can do it without him on a leash. Treat intermittently at this point. Now you can try taking the bone at varying times after he has started chewing it. Either call your dog over to you or approach with a nice piece of meat. Ask him to "give" his bone and take it from him as he gives it to you, feed him the meaty treat, inspect the bone, and then give him back his bone. Leave him to eat his meal in peace. Always exercise caution, and if you feel frightened of your dog at any point, contact a professional trainer who uses humane methods and who will be willing to work through this with you without just telling you to "get rid of the bones". Also keep in

mind that you are wanting your dog to voluntarily relinquish this prized possession; you are firmly requesting him to "give" it to you, but not forcing him.

You can also teach your dog to "Leave it", a command that is taught in a manner similar to the "Give". There are several ways to do this; one common way is to hold a treat in your hand and let your dog lick and worry at your hand. The moment he stops, you say "Leave it", and then open your hand to give him the treat. Repeat this often at regular intervals. You should be able to say "Leave it" earlier and earlier in the behavior so that a simple "Leave it" command will get him to stop licking. Then progress to toys and eventually to his RMBs. Pat Miller's book (listed below) contains some excellent training exercises for teaching "Off" or "Leave it" in a variety of settings. It is definitely a good command to train.

There are several great books out there that discuss resource guarding as part of their overall training program. Ones that I have found helpful are:

#### **Ian Dunbar's Before and After Getting Your Puppy**

While geared toward raising puppies, this book does an excellent job of teaching you how to teach your dog or puppy bite inhibition and how to prevent resource guarding in puppies. Like most other training books, it assumes you feed a commercial kibbled diet, but the techniques can easily be applied to raw food. Simply cut up some of the meat into little treat-sized chunks to use in training, and feed the RMB later on in the day.

#### **Brian Kilcommon's Good Owners, Great Dogs**

A good all-around book that has an excellent and thorough section on the "Nothing In Life Is Free" philosophy and on working through resource guarding humanely. Again, it assumes you feed a commercial diet, so you will need to adapt the techniques to raw food. For example, you could feed a few meaty meals that would allow you to cut up the meat into small treat-sized pieces that you can feed by hand or feed in a dish. Then you can toss him the RMB as the "last treat" of the meal.

#### **Pat Miller's The Power of Positive Dog Training**

This also is an excellent training book that utilizes positive operant conditioning (clicker training). Many of the exercises discussed above ("Give", "Leave it") are discussed in detail in her book, and prevent a wonderfully humane, non-confrontational way to train your dog.

**Suzanne Clothier's Bones Would Rain From the Sky**

While not necessarily a training book, this is a wonderful glimpse into life with dogs. It discusses our relationships with dogs and how these relationships can be influenced for better or worse through the training methods we choose. It is one of my favorite books and really showed me a whole new world of deeper communication with dogs, particularly in reference to "aggressive" behavior in canines.

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