



# Food Aggression/Resource Guarding

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Food is a resource that all animals need to survive, so it's not surprising that these animals attempt to guard or protect food that they have gained access to and may become aggressive if you try to take food away from them. It's also very common for dogs to get into fights with other dogs in their home over food, so you want to make sure that those animals are given adequate space or fed in a separate room to ensure everyone is able to eat in peace.

- It's very common for dogs to want to guard or be protective of food. You can help this behavior diminish by **hand feeding** your dog kibble and teaching the dog to trade up. Hand feeding helps your dog associate you and your hands more directly with the food so they begin to understand that you are the source of the food, thereby helping your dog to form a positive association with you.
- The **trading up game** consists of offering a higher-value item in place of a lower-value item, which will all be relative to what your dog views as low and high value. Examples of this would be giving up a toy for a treat or a dog biscuit for a piece of hot dog or dog kibble for a piece of hot dog. You are basically teaching the dog that if they give up something they feel the need to guard, they will get something even better in return.
- If you have a dog that just LOVES their food and inhales it while they eat to the point that they nearly vomit it back up, force your dog to slow down by using a **slow feeder** or **puzzle feeder**. There are many great new slow feeder food bowls that have little ridges in them that force your dog to slow down and eat around them. Kyjen offers a variety of shapes and sizes. You can also get creative and use baking tins, such as a bundt pan or a muffin tin. Some people even spread their dog's food out on a cookie sheet and place heavy soup cans that the dog has to eat around. Puzzle feeders are toys that you lock their food in, and then your dog paws at the puzzle feeder to get to kibble to fall out of small holes. Puzzle feeders are great because it forces your dog not only to slow down but also to use their brains to figure out how to get their food. The Kong Wobbler is the most popular puzzle feeder, comes in different sizes, and is sold at our retail store at Wayside. Overall, getting your dog to slow down while eating will be healthier for the dog and will help discourage food guarding from developing. Your dog may also be inhaling the food because you're feeding it too closely to other dogs in your home, so take the time to reevaluate your feeding setup.
- Teaching your dog behaviors like "**drop it**" will help them to have more impulse control with food and realize that you are in control of their stuff but they'll be rewarded if they listen to you by getting their stuff back in return for good listening. By giving your dog its toy or rawhide bone right back as a reward for dropping it, they'll learn that there was no need to guard the toy in the first place because they get it right back and they are therefore rewarded for giving up the toy.
  - Start practicing "drop it" with a low-value item, such as a toy that you and your dog regularly play with together. When your dog has the toy in its mouth, hold the other end of

the toy sticking out of your dog's mouth gently with one hand; then, in your other hand, have a treat ready in your pocket. Then say "drop it," present the treat with your free hand to your dog's nose, and as your dog lets go of the toy to take the treat, tell your dog "good dog!" Then return the toy to your dog as an extra reward and practice again. If your dog doesn't drop the toy, you may need to find a higher-value treat or a higher-value toy to trade up for.

- Never try to yank the toy out of your dog's mouth. You don't want to teach your dog that you will use force to take the toy away because that will make them want to guard the toy more, which could escalate into aggression. You also don't want to pull the toy out of their mouth because some dogs love to play tug-of-war with their toys. Pulling on the toy will then just excite your dog more and make them want to clamp down on the toy more. If your dog tries to pull back on the toy in an attempt to get you to play tug-of-war, move with them while putting the least amount of tension on the toy, thereby not engaging in tug-of-war and making the toy less interesting. They will eventually get bored and drop the toy.
- The "**leave it**" behavior is another exercise you can use to help your dog learn some impulse control around food or other objects and teaches them to look to you for direction. For example, if you drop a piece of food on the floor in front of your dog and you teach them to leave it, you will teach your dog that they shouldn't dart after anything that drops to the floor. This same command can be applied to other scenarios like telling your dog to leave it when she wants to go after a cat, squirrel, the mailman, or piece of trash while out on a walk.
  - Start practicing "leave it" by placing a treat on the ground; then place your hand over the treat if your dog goes for the treat. Then say "leave it," and the second your dog stops pawing at your hand or sniffing your hand covering the treat, say "okay" or "good dog!" and lift your hand, allowing your dog to get the treat to reward them for leaving it alone. OR, you can give the dog a separate treat from your other hand when your dog leaves the treat that is on the ground covered by your hand. Once your dog learns that exercise, you can start to make it more difficult by slowly lifting your hand, but the second your dog tries to lunge for that treat, you have to be right there to cover the treat again with your hand quickly so your dog doesn't get it. You don't want to inadvertently reinforce your dog for grabbing the treat. Eventually you can get to the point where you are standing up and can drop the food on the ground while saying "leave it," and your dog will remain calm and wait until you say "okay," releasing your dog to get the treat, rewarding her for the excellent behavior.
- **Do not punish** or try to intimidate a dog that is guarding its food. Dominating dog training techniques will only teach your dog to fear you and may even make your dog more aggressive. It's important to form a good working relationship between you and your dog that is based on respect. Explicitly teaching your dog that it doesn't need to guard its food using the exercises outlined above is a more effective and humane method of teaching your animal right from wrong.

***If, after trying these suggestions, you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your dog, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org).***

**Below are some additional resources about how to work with a dog that resource guards food and other items such as toys along with information about how to teach “drop it” and “leave it”:**

Food-

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/food-guarding>

Mine! A Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs by Jean Donaldson (2002)

Leave it-

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/teaching-your-dog-leave-it>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQdg0qOVik0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHVrg98tBuk>

Drop it-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epiNkbdrsiQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JO2cxHglzX0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDxOOTaHCMU>