True Nature Dog Services



Resource Guarding

It doesn't have to be forever

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Contact Information

What is it?
a normal behaviour

The first thing to understand, about resource guarding, is that it is a perfectly normal behaviour performed by every mammal. As humans - we protect our stuff too. We lock our doors to keep people from wandering in and stealing our things. If you've ever had someone try to take a chip from your plate, and reflexively swatted their hand away, that's resource guarding too!



When it's not 'normal'

There's a fine line between protecting things, that belong to us, and being 'over-protective'. Resource guarding happens when the dog becomes over-protective (in our view) about things.

What causes it?

In nature resources are scarce so, over millennia, dogs learned to protect their food, family, and territory in order to prevent intruders, or interlopers, from coming in and taking them/taking over. Although we have domesticated dogs many of their instinctive traits still exist. Resource guarding is one such instinct. While it's an instinctive behaviour, resource guarding can also be learned.

When is it a problem?

The short answer to this question is as soon as you notice it.

Your dog is doing their best to tell you that they feel uncomfortable. In general, dogs will avoid fighting, or biting, at all costs as the risk of personal injury is high so there are usually many early warning signals beforehand.

If we are hurt, injured, or sick we go to the doctor, right? If your dog is resource guarding then they're struggling too, even mildly, so get professional help ASAP.



But, why? There's plenty to go around

Although in pet homes resources are plentiful, often, this fear has been accidentally reinforced, through:

- Other household dogs taking something away from the dog e.g. a toy
- The use of outdated training methods (teaching the dog 'who's boss')
- Trauma, from a previous situation, where resources were, indeed, scarce.

Things your dog might guard

Essentially, anything can become an object of the dogs' guarding behaviours. Most commonly we see this with:

- Toys
- Food e.g. food bowl, treats, or even food on a persons plate
- Favourite people in the home (or outdoors)
- Locations e.g. a particular bed, or a spot on the sofa etc

It can become literally anything, or anywhere, that the dog perceives to be of particular value to them at the time they show the behaviour.

The most important thing to remember is that resource guarding is not about what we perceive but it's how the dog feels about a particular 'resource' at a given time.

Types of Resource Guarding

There are two, main, types of resource guarding behaviours:

Human-Directed Guarding

This is when your dog shows resource guarding behaviour TOWARD their/other humans.

For example: your dog might growl, or freeze, when you walk past them eating, chewing something, or playing with a toy

Dog-Directed Guarding

This is when your dog shows resource guarding behaviour toward other dogs. This may be other, resident, dogs or dogs outside of the home.

For example: your dog might steal another dog's ball but become aggressive when that dog attempts to take it back. They are unlikely to behave the same if the human picks up the ball (though they may run away with it!)

When faced with these challenges, it's often hard to remember this, but **your dog is not being naughty**. For whatever reason, he's having a hard time sharing.

Getting professional help is the only way to resolve this, before things get worse.



What it looks like

For most people the early signs of resource guarding go completely un-noticed. If this is you, it's **NOT** your fault, the important thing is you're here now.

In the early days, it can look very passive and that's the problem. Knowing what to look for now can save a mountain of trouble later. Below are some examples things you might see. As you will see, things can start off, almost un-noticeably, and gradually get more serious.

May sit beside you, while preparing their food. Likely to face away, toward the door, watching for another dog/person to enter

May also block access by shifting position.

May place head over bowl, low down when someone walks by, or comes near.

May freeze, when another dog enters their space, only moving eyes to track the movement

May 'charge' at other dog/person

May hear a low growl when dog/person approaches.

May see a lip curl and/or air snap

No more warnings. Dog may lunge at other dog/person, snarl, and snap.

May also escalate to bite

What to do now

- Get in touch. We will work together to make a plan for resolving the resource guarding challenges your dog is facing

- I will check-in regularly for progress updates, to help you move forward, and adjust the plan if needed.

Please don't try to deal with this alone. Resource guarding is not something that dogs grow out of. It's a challenge that, almost always, gets worse if left un-treated and it can be dangerous for you to try and deal with on your own.

Should things get worse:

- I have a network of certified Behaviour professionals, that I trust, to refer you to, should this be necessary.

Contact

For any questions, or to get started, please reach out to:

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What to do next

While you're waiting for your appointments to begin, you can begin to think about the things that trigger your dog.

By completing the worksheet, attached, you will help your trainer, and yourself, become more aware of situations that make your dog feel uncomfortable, and that set off the resource guarding behaviours.

For the moment, avoid those, as much as possible.

Keep a journal of times when resource guarding happens. I've attached one for you, to keep things simple and help you record the key information.

Finally, understanding that resource guarding may be something you need to manage on an on-going basis is crucial. Nobody can promise a magical fix, however together, we can take steps to make your dog's life a happier, and more carefree one.

