



Behavior and Training Department Behavior Resources

Possession Aggression

Possessive dogs will not readily give up toys or food. Some just hold onto their possessions... others will become aggressive. Here are some tips to help solve the problem. Start by establishing pack leadership. Make sure your dog is getting enough food, so that he does not believe he is competing for scarce resources.

Teach "Sit" when approached

For food - Fix the dog's food. Put two thirds of the dog's food in a bowl, make him sit, and give him the food. When he's finished, tell him to sit, give a little from your hand, put some in the bowl and then tell him he can have it. Do that two or three times, and then let him eat the rest.

Continue for a couple of weeks.

Phase 2: Fix the food, put half in the bowl, ask him to sit, then give him the food. Before he's finished, tell him to sit. If he does, give him some TREATS from your hand, and put a mix of treats and food in his bowl. Do that every meal for a couple of weeks.

Phase 3: Tell your dog to "sit" as you approach his bowl. When he sits, give him a treat, while reaching down to take the bowl. After a few seconds, give the food back.

For toys or other objects – Give your dog a toy or chewie that is attractive but not compelling. Approach while she is chewing, ask her to "sit" and give her a treat. Do that many times. When she automatically sits, start to trade – she gets the treat, but you get the toy. When she begins to drop the toy because she's anticipating the treat, go to something more attractive, until she begins to drop the toy upon your approach.

Method 3: Splitting meals

Divide his meals into fourths, feeding him a portion at a time, and cheerfully require that he sit nicely or lie down before each portion is put in front of him. Give him a command once, and if he complies, he gets his meal; if he doesn't, the bowl goes back on the counter and you leave the room for a minute or so before trying again.

Another approach is the Stupid Owner routine, where you make a big deal of mixing up his meal, but leave out the food, ask him to sit or down, put his bowl on the floor and walk away, watching for that stunned look when he realizes the bowl is empty. You come back, apologize, pick up the dish, and mix some more. Repeat the routine of putting the dish on the floor, but with one piece of kibble in it. Gradually, increase the amount in the dish, and he will get the idea that having you around is a good thing. Once he's better about the growling, periodically slip a really good treat into his dish, so he gets the idea that good things happen when your hands are around his dish.

Recall with a stolen object

When your dog gets something – anything – that he finds attractive, call him to you and praise him for being a clever dog. Then go to somewhere specific (like a refrigerator or a treat bowl) ask him to sit, and take out a treat. Trade the treat for the thing. The praise is very important – your dog should actually *want* to bring things to you – even Kleenex and other strange possessions.

When working with any kind of possession aggression, avoid physical corrections, or any other forceful methods you might have been considering. The dog may well become more aggressive – if not with you, then with others. That's probably not the kind of relationship you want with your dog anyway.



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