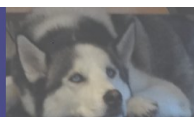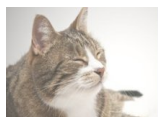# RESOURCE GUARDING

Resource guarding is a natural behaviour for dogs but one that can be very frightening for owners. Most behaviour is ritualised but, if not trained can lead to real harm. Early-onset resource guarding can have a genetic basis with some breeds of dog being more likely to exhibit it.

It is vital that you do not get into a competition with the dog that is resource guarding as this will only make the behaviour escalate. Most problems occur around toys, food, resting places and valued people.

Emergency Action

If your dog has something dangerous, find something that the dog perceives as even more valuable and toss it away from him so that he will drop and leave what he has. This could be food or a favourite toy or even the promise of a walk.

If this is a frequent problem, try to proof the environment and remove objects that could cause harm. Make sure that there is always something handy to distract your dog when you cannot control the environment.

Providing Secure Resources

Getting into competition with a dog over resources is not only likely to result in harm at the time, but it damages your relationship with your dog in the long term.

Resource guarding dogs need to learn to feel secure and confident that they do not need to guard resources because they are:
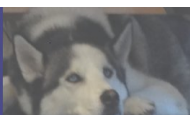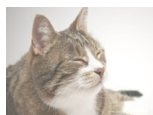
- Freely or frequently available

- Safe and secure

- Not going to be taken away without something else being given in exchange.

Puppies and older dogs explore with their mouths and have no concept of what, in our human world, is unacceptable or dangerous for them. If we keep taking things away without giving something in return, dogs can easily learn to become possessive.

Be consistent with house rules. Dogs cannot understand that they are allowed on the sofa "except when auntie Maud is visiting". Not being clear and consistent with rules about being on beds or other furniture can make dogs feel insecure and lead to aggression when the dog is asked to move.

Make sure that the dog has his own bed and toys and that he is able to rest and play without being disturbed. Do not leave toys lying around; give them out at playtime or when the dog needs to keep himself occupied with something safe such as a stuffed Kong.

Never take a dogs food bowl away but add food to it. Add food at random times - one piece of kibble is sufficient - so that tension does not mount at mealtimes.

Many resource guarding dogs are uncomfortable with being handled so make sure that you practice gentle handling for a minute or two on a daily basis. There may be an underlying pain issue that makes your dog more sensitive in situations that appear to be completely disconnected. If you suspect that this is the case, book an appointment with your vet for a pain check. You can also follow this up with a referral to a specialist in pain identification.

Make sure that your dog is not disturbed when eating and drinking and when resting or asleep. Feeling able to rest, eat and drink in peace will help your dog to being to learn that his resources are not under constant threat.

Dogs in multi-dog households should have multiple or separate access to resources where possible and should be supervised when there is a chance that disputes may occur and escalate.

Where there is a genetic basis to the resource guarding, it may not be possible to eliminate it completely. Your dog will require careful and permanent management to minimise the opportunities to guard.

Make safety a priority and always work to reduce the chances that your dog has to practice guarding.

Contact Companion Animal Behavioural Services at info@dogsnet.org for more help