



**Courteous
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COURTEOUS CANINE, Inc.
Dog School and Doggie Gym!

Possession Aggression: The Dog Who Loves Everything Too Much

In the wild, it is the selfish dogs that survive. If a wild dog finds a bone she is not going to share she is going to protect that bone with her life. She will growl, show teeth and go to battle if necessary to protect her bone. In a wild dog's world guarding your food, and toys is the only way to be.

When a dog lives with humans possession aggression, the guarding of food or objects, is highly undesirable. As dog owners, we have two choices:

1. prevent possession aggression
2. modify possession aggression

Preventing Possession Aggression

To keep your dog from developing the natural "me, me, me" dog mentality teach her from the moment she gets into your home that when she finds an object around the house she needs to bring it to you, because you will give her a wonderful treat for it.

Never chase your dog when she has stolen an object. If your dog has gotten a hold of something you would rather she not have calmly walk up to her and exchange the stolen object for one of her favorite toys.

Another great way of preventing possession aggression is to hand feed your dog. For one month all food comes out of your hand not in a bowl. After one month you can add the bowl back in by placing it underneath your hand. After this second month the food can be placed back in the bowl, but once a week for the rest of the dog's life you need to hand feed the dog for maintenance. Your car needs an oil change every two thousand miles, your dog needs to be hand fed once a week for the rest of her life.

If your dog is already exhibiting possession aggression, you will need to work with one of your trainers to assist you in developing a behavior modification plan. Use the chart

below to indicate what objects or types of food your dog guards and to what severity the guarding is occurring.

Never hit or physically punish a dog that is guarding. Remember guarding is a natural behavior that can be modified but most commonly will get worse not better if the dog is hit or physically roughed up.

In the chart below place a check mark in each box that applies to your dog.

Possession Aggression Assessment Chart

	Chew toys	Balls	Food bowl	Food	Treats	Doorways or beds	Other
Dog growls when approached							
Dog growls and snaps the air when approached							
Dog growls and attempts to make contact with owners hand							
Dog has bitten when approached							
Other							

If you have placed any check marks in an other box, please explain them below:

While possession aggression is a natural dog behavior it is easy to modify. Please make an appointment with one of our trainers today so that we can help you get your dog off on the right paw!

Recommended Reading

"Mine!" by Jean Donaldson

Dogs are from Neptune by Jean Donaldson

Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson

All of these great books are available at www.dogwise.com to place an order visit their website or call 1-800-776-2665.

Hand Feeding and Object Exchange

Hand feeding your dog is an excellent way to:

- ☺ Bond with your dog
- ☺ Teach your dog that hands are good
- ☺ Prevent food dish guarding and aggression

To hand feed your dog take your dog's empty food dish and set it on the ground. Now place your dog's food in your hand and hold it above the dish. The dog eats directly out of your hand above his dish.

The next meal, let some food fall in the dish, but have most of the meal in your hand. Gradually build up to having more food in the dog's dish, and less in your hand. Once you have all the food in the dog's dish make sure you can take food out, and drop food back in while the dog is eating.

Now you are ready to start messing with the food dish while the dog eats. Pick up the dish while the dog is eating. Move it to a different location. All of these exercises are always done in a fun and positive way. If you have prepared the dog well for this, these exercises should be no big deal.

If you at any point during this training have problems please immediately, notify your trainer.

Some problems are:

- ☒ Dog growls
- ☒ Dog snaps
- ☒ Dog lowers head
- ☒ Dog gets stiff
- ☒ Dog seems tense
- ☒ Dog refuses to eat

If any of these problems occur please let your instructor know immediately. For safety purposes STOP hand feeding if you encounter any of the problems listed above.

For the life of your dog periodically, like once a month, hand feed your dog. This will help ensure that the dog maintains a good attitude about people around his food dish.

Object Exchange

This is a fun game to play with your dog. To start playing this game, whenever your dog picks up an object with his mouth make sure to praise him. In general, it is a very good idea to teach your dog that picking things up is a good idea. When your dog picks up objects, you are setting the foundation for playing fetch and even teaching your dog useful tricks like picking up objects you have dropped.

If your dog grabs an object you do not want him to have, **DO NOT CHASE HIM**. This is very important. If you chase your dog, you are teaching him that picking up objects, you do not want him to have, is a great way to start the game of chase. Being chased is a huge reward to dogs.

Only chase your dog when he is playing with one of his own toys that way you are rewarding him for playing with the toy you want him to play with.

When your dog has a toy in his mouth gently take a hold of the toy and when he lets go give him a second toy that you were holding. This is object exchange. The dog lets go of the first object and you hand him the second. From the dog's perspective, giving up the first toy is not a big deal, because you are giving him another toy that is of equal or even greater value.

You want to be able to take all kinds of objects out of your dog's mouth and have your dog not mind this process, so object exchange is an important part of training.

If your dog does not let go of the object, here is how you teach your dog to "give" (let go of what is in his mouth).

1. Dog has object in his mouth. Owner gently gets a hold of the dog's collar with one hand and places the second hand on the object that is in the dog's mouth. There should be no pressure on the object in the dog's mouth. If you put any pressure on the object in the dog's mouth, you are playing with the dog and not teaching him to "give".
2. Eventually the dog will get tired of just standing there and holding the toy. When he does, CLICK and treat your dog! Your dog will learn to anticipate the click and release the toy faster and faster.
3. When he releases the object immediately when you put your hand on it, you are ready to add the cue "give".

When practicing "give" always make sure that the reward you have is something the dog really wants. Do not have your dog "give" is favorite toy and then give him a boring, dry, piece of kibble. Ideally reward your dog with something that is better than the object he was holding.

Another variation is to use the exact toy that he just gave up to reinforce him. This would look like this:

Fido has his favorite tug toy in his mouth.

You ask him to "give".

Fido lets go, you click and immediately let him tug on the toy!

Courteous Canine, Inc. No Force, Just Fun!
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