

# Rescue Me Canine Training

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## Food Aggression with other dogs

Safety – Before you begin food aggression training you must consider the safety of yourself, your dog and the other people and dogs around you. Changing this behavior involves low level exposure to a trigger in order to create a new conditioned response by the dog. The risk exists that the dog may become reactive to the trigger and could potentially attempt to bite or redirect onto the handler or other people or dogs. For this reason you need to use extreme caution and make every effort to ensure the dog always stays below his reactivity threshold. Use safe handling procedures such as tethering the dog on a leash and stay outside his range to eliminate the possibility of a bite. Consider the length of the leash you are using and add a healthy buffer zone of distance to that just to be safe. You must ensure that the dog is on a strong leash and collar and you are confident the dog is secured well. If you feel your dog is at any risk of biting I would recommend training the dog to wear a muzzle prior to commencing training. This technique works best when the trigger stimulus is very low, so getting too close to the trigger can actually hinder results as well as increase the risk. Always use extreme caution and err on the side of safety. Due to the risk of biting children should never be involved in addressing food aggression in dogs.

Here is a great video on muzzle training. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BjPpXer8IE#t=540>

Food aggression can be a common problem, particularly with dogs that have had to compete for food in the past. Dogs that come from particularly large litters or abandoned or street dogs are particularly susceptible to food aggression.

Part of the solution is to ensure that you don't meet aggression with aggression. Using force to address food aggression is a recipe for disaster and sets the stage for future conflict. If you choose to use alpha rolls, force or intimidation to address food aggression, even if you see initial success, your dog may decide they want a rematch when you least expect it.

A better approach is to teach your dog not to be concerned with another dogs presence near the food bowl. The way to do this is to teach your dog that the other dogs presence is linked to the presence of good treats, and brings good things rather than taking them away. If the other dog is always the bringer of wonderful treats, why wouldn't they welcome their approach?

Before you start, if you think you are at risk of being bitten, or if your dog has shown a history of lunging or biting anyone near their food bowl, start working on your dogs food aggression with people only. See the food aggression with humans worksheet. Always take extra precautions to ensure your safety. Leash your dog and tie the leash off to a secure point that will allow the dog access to the food bowl, but prevent them from reaching you if they lunge or attempt to bite. Be conscious of the dogs range and ensure you stay outside it.

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If your dog is food aggressive around another dogs and not people, you will need to keep the non food aggressive dog with you, on leash, while doing these exercises. Be sure not to allow the dogs to get so close that they could make contact with each other if they were to lunge. Always err on the side of safety and caution.

## Techniques for addressing food aggression;

### Step 1 – (for the first few times have an assistant present for this exercise)

#### Desensitizing the food aggressive dog to the other dogs presence

- Leash the food aggressive dog and tie the leash to a secure point to prevent the dog from being able to lunge.
- Leash the second dog and keep it by your side.
- Start with the dogs far apart. Place a small amount of kibble (about ¼ of a regular serving) in the dog bowl. Have the assistant place the bowl in front of the food aggressive dog and give the command for the dog to eat.
- Approach with the second dog, being careful to stay outside the primary dog's reactive zone.
- Throw tasty bite sized treats one at a time into the food bowl, being careful to not get too close. Use 10-30 treats
- Once the dog has finished the food in the bowl gradually step closer while continuing to throw treats into the bowl. Ensure you do not get close enough for the reactive dog to reach you or the second dog.
- Walk away taking the non reactive dog with you. Treat the non reactive dog now.
- Repeat multiple times a day. If you normally feed your dog 2 meals a day you should be able to do this exercise 8 times a day. (1/4 portion of a meal x 2 meals = 8 – ¼ sized portions)
- If at any time the primary dog reacts with signs of aggression, you have moved too close, too quickly. Back up and try again at a greater distance.

You may want to cut down on the portion size slightly to account for the extra caloric intake of the treats.

After multiple repetitions see if you can approach the primary dog with the food bowl yourself while keeping the secondary dog out of reach behind you. This will eliminate the need for an assistant.

### Step 2

#### Hand feeding both dogs

- If you see progress with step one after 1-2 weeks move on to step 2. With both dogs leashed and unable to make contact with each other, measure out ¼ of their meals and place them in bowls, one for each dog.
- One dog at a time, take a handful of food and wait for the dogs to sit. The first dog to sit will be the first one to receive a handful of food. Feed each dog from your hand, alternating from dog to dog. The dog must sit in order to receive the food.
- Ensure the food aggressive dog receives the last handful of food

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- Lead the non reactive dog away
- Repeat for 1-2 weeks

## Step 3

### Bowl feeding both dogs

- Essentially this is the same exercise as Step 2, but instead of hand feeding each dog directly you will place one handful of food into an empty bowl at the dogs feet
- Alternate between dogs
- Each dog must sit to receive each handful of food
- Ensure the dogs are leashed and cannot reach each other
- Repeat multiple times a day

### Bones and other high value treats

Be aware that bones and other treats like rawhide or pigs ears are very high value to your dog, compared to kibble which is a fairly low value reward. As a result dogs that do not fight over food may easily fight over high value items such as bones. While counter conditioning can be effective with higher value treats as well, we often find the very highest triggers are still valued enough to fight over. As a result one of the most effective ways to deal with high value resource guarding is to simply eliminate the resources.

While food is obviously essential to your dog, bones and treats are not. If the presence of bones brings with them the added risk of fights or injuries, the best option is to simply remove the trigger by never giving bones to your dogs.

### Food Guarding Dogs and Children

Food guarding dogs and children, particularly small children or toddlers, can be an extremely risky combination. Young children won't understand that the dog that plays with them and sleeps in their bed can become dangerous when food is present. They won't hesitate to approach a dog that is eating and may not even recognize warning signs from a dog such as growling or showing teeth.

In addition, children can be a constant source of food for a dog. Children carrying food through the house and dropping food can put the child and the dog in proximity and introduce the one thing that causes the dog to be reactive – food. For an average sized dog it can also put the dog and the food at the same level as the child's face, which can result in a disastrous bite and injury.

If you have a food reactive dog and children, and you think your children may be at risk of a bite or injury, you should keep the dog and separate from the children and consider rehoming your dog to a more suitable environment.