

Rescue Me Canine Training

250.884.3923 info@rescuemecanine.com

Resource Guarding

Safety – Before you begin resource guarding 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 resource guarding in dogs.

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

Resource guarding is the practice of defending anything that is seen as having value. It can apply to bones, treats, food, affection, locations or people. Anything that the dog thinks is a valuable asset can be defended.

The best way to address resource guarding is to teach the dog that he can swap the valued item for something of even greater value. By doing this you create a scenario where the dog actually looks forward to giving up the valued item, rather than fighting to keep it. If you follow up by giving the valued item immediately back you teach the dog that it cost him nothing to give the item up and he received valuable rewards for doing so.

Start by giving the dog a low value item, preferably one that he is not interested in defending. Once he has the item, present a high value treat, and give the leave it command. When the dog drops the item to take the treat, reach down and pick up the item while simultaneously giving the dog the treat with your other hand. If the dogs head is quite close to the item you can use the treat to lure him away to increase the distance from the dropped item, in order to decrease the risk of being bit. Once you have the item in your possession, give it back to the dog and end the exercise. Repeat frequently.

Once you have practised this with low value items, gradually increase the value of the guarded item. Continue to provide the highest level rewards possible and swap your dog for the item they possess.

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Use extreme caution around dogs with a bite history and watch for any signs of reactivity such as stillness, wide eyes, head over the item, or keeping it between the paws, growling or showing teeth. Discontinue exercise if you see these behaviors. If you are unsure lure the dog away from the item before trying to pick it up or use a stick or broom handle to remove the item from the dog's presence. Any items that the dog is unwilling to swap for must be permanently removed from the dog's life.