

Food Guarding

Possession is 9/10ths of the law in dog society. Food guarding is not related to a dog being 'dominant'. A dog which appears generally meek can still ferociously and successfully guard a food item from a far larger, more confident dog.

The tendency to food guard varies from dog to dog, some have no inclination whatsoever whereas others can have a very high inclination. Some guard only particularly coveted items e.g. fresh bones, pig's ears, rawhide chews, etc. Certain breeds have a higher inclination to food guard than others and it can run in families, so check out the parents of pups if possible.

Spotting the signs

Not all dogs with food guarding tendencies are obvious, you need to look out for certain signs:

- The dog going very still as you approach.
- The mouth tightening, causing the whiskers to rise.
- Often you see the white of the eye as the dog stares sideways without moving the head.
- A slight curl of the lip.
- A quiet growl.
- It may progress to snarling, snapping and biting.

Overcoming Food Guarding Tendencies

New Puppy

It is a good idea to get the pup used to human involvement whilst feeding from early days. Hand feed the pup a portion of their ration by putting small handfuls of food into a bowl a little at a time, the pup will look at you expectantly for the next bit, and see you as a provider rather than a remover of food.

When the pup is eating, add a small amount of something really delicious e.g. diced chicken to build the association that people approaching the food bowl is good news (watch for the tail wag!). All the family can do this, but young children must be under strict supervision to avoid teasing the pup. **Avoid removing the bowl when the pup is eating at all costs! If your pup is harbouring any food guarding tendencies this will increase them.**

Adult Dog

There is much that can be done with adult dogs with food guarding issues, but due to the risk factor involved it's important that you ask your Veterinary Surgeon to refer you to a behaviour specialist/trainer.

Never, ever punish your dog for food guarding. For many dogs the behaviour is related to a FEAR of the food being taken away: in their minds it is the last meal they are ever going to get. Threatening behaviour from the owner will only increase the fear, and this will result in the level of aggression escalating rapidly.

Contact your vet or **Alpha** for specialist help if you are concerned.