

Food aggression in dogs

One of the most difficult dog conduct problems for us humans to accept and understand is Dog food aggression its one of those problems that we just cant accept. It makes no sense that your beloved pet considers you a threat to her food; when you have just given her the food in the first place.

A dog's mentality...

If your dog growls at you, snarl, show his teeth and stations herself between you and her food she is actually telling you "this is mine, go away". She is also telling you that she considers herself as the pack leader. Dog food aggression is a supremacy issue; it is very serious and must to be addressed straightaway. It will not go away if ignored.

Some owners tend to find it funny or amusing when they first start noticing the behavior. Some of us even encourage our gutsy little pets when they first display the "cute" signs of dog food aggression. Don't fall into this trap! This should never be accepted or allowed, as you never really know when it can escalate into a more dangerous situation for you or your family.



How food aggression develops in dogs?

Food aggression or also known as canine possession aggression can be caused by a number of influences, however in most cases it can be linked to one of the following causes:



1. Mostly dog food aggression situations can be part of a confusion or gap in regards to who the leader is in the household or in your relationship with your dog. Seldom food aggression is an isolated incident - it's something you must rectify. To realize how to position yourself as your dog's respected leader.
2. Your dog is too hungry and anxious for her food, in her mind she is not sure when will her next meal be. Therefore she protects her food just like she would do in the wild and when living and feeding in a pack.
3. Your dog may be considering you as someone that removes and takes away all good things such as good left over food or toys. She starts to see you more of a threat rather than someone that provides.
4. Sometimes the owner fails to communicate to the dog that this behavior is unacceptable, therefore the dog doesn't understand that this behavior will not be tolerable. In such cases there is an evident lack of or breakdown in communication between the human and dog.

The Solution – First phase



Remember that you are rewarding your dog every time you back down after she snarls, barks or growls at you. Consequently the behavior is reinforced each time you back down. Your dog believes that her behavior has worked and is likely going to work the next time she tries it. This doesn't mean that you absolutely never back off in this situation – more on this later.

1. To effectively resolve this dog food aggression problem you have to involve the whole household in to the training process. You must all convey a unified and consistent message to your dog to successfully eliminate the behavior.
2. If the food aggression behavior is displayed against other dogs then its best to separate the dogs during feeding to avoid any serious injuries, possibly in different rooms or crates.
3. Take full control of the feeding time and place.
4. Make your dog work and earn the meal before it is served food. A simple task would do it such as sit, down or stay before you put the food bowl down.
5. Food aggression can be almost undoubtedly prevented if you condition puppies to having their meals when there are people around.
6. Always feed your dog after the whole family has eaten. This is a direct signal to the dog pack mentality in your dog telling her that the higher in rank will always eat first.
7. Don't let your dog win and get the food as a result of her growling or barking, this would be considered as rewarding the behavior you are working to reverse. Nonetheless don't terrorize or intimidate your dog, it's much better to make her like having you around when she is having her meal (there are points below that will help you achieve this).
8. In the case of food aggression you should never counter it with aggression of your own. In essence what this does is to lock you and your dog into an endless battle. Most likely your dog will increase her level of aggression in order to counter your action.

The Solution – Second phase

If you think that your dog can pose a real threat to you or your family, I would advise getting professional hands on help. You can contact us at the "Tails – Training division" to get in touch with a professional dog trainer or animal behaviorist, visit www.tails.co for our contact details.

A list of techniques and action points mentioned below are designed to address and tackle food aggression in dogs. This should help you and your dog overcome this stressful behavioral condition and having you both enjoy the company of each other

1. Keep yourself at a distance that your dog is comfortable with, and then progressively decrease this distance. You can toss some treats in or next to the feeding bowl as you slowly decrease the distance.
2. While your dog is eating try to pet and stroke her and at the same time talk to her in a calming and relaxing manner. All you are doing at this point is showing your dog that its good that you are around, even while she is eating.
3. Occasionally hand feed your dog. This technique will ultimately allow you to put your hand into the feeding bowl while your dog is eating without her displaying any signs of aggression.
4. Put your bowl down without any food in it, your dog will look back at you and in no time will start begging you to fill the feeding bowl.
5. Reduce the quantity of food in the feeding bowl, so when your dog is finished feeding she will look back at you for more because its not the usual daily portion. Then you can give her the remainder of the food. This will remind her where the food is coming from.
6. Throw in to her bowl a few of her favorite treats every time you pass by her feeding bowl. This will associate that good feeling of reward with you being around the feeding bowl and food.
7. During feeding, call your dog to you and then reward her with a treat. Make it worth her while, and then you can send her back to her food.
8. During the food preparation process have your dog in a sit-stay position. Once the food is ready to be served then you can release her from the stay command. By doing this you are controlling the food and further establishing your role as the leader in this relationship.
9. Get another family member to help you on this technique. Put your dog in her collar and leash and make her sit with your assistant during the food preparation process. When you are ready then you can release your dog and allow her access to the food. Here you are controlling the food.
10. During feeding have your dog in a pinch or choke collar with a leash attached. Whenever she displays any signs of dog food aggression you instantly administer a correction action to your dog by pulling on the leash. This result in your dog building a association between the corrective action and the dog food aggression sign she is displaying. I don't personally encourage this method since its based on a negative reinforcement technique rather than a positive one, however many veteran dog trainers swear by this method.