



Food Guarding Behavior

Congratulations!
You have adopted a new family member.

As your adoption counselor discussed with you, your dog displayed some food guarding issues while in the shelter. **What does this mean?** It means that your dog may be more likely to show food guarding around his food than some other dogs. Food guarders may freeze, growl, or even bite when they perceive that someone is trying to take their food. While we are conducting a behavior modification with the dog during his time with us, we suggest that you continue this work with the dog when you take him home. Food guarding is both treatable and controllable. We suggest you follow the plan below, beginning the moment you bring the dog home.

Things to know before you begin:

- **Food time should never be made into an event.** Do not get the dog riled up and excited for dinner.
- **Do not feed the dog around other animals.** The dog may guard from animals as well and may injure them. We always recommend feeding animals separately.
- **Make sure others are aware of the food guarding issues and do not touch the dog while he is eating.** If possible, do not feed the dog around guests or children.

The Plan:

1. Give the dog some mildly valuable food such as dry kibble that is a bit tastier than what he has as free feed. Prepare some tasty, very high value treats such as canned food or cooked chicken. Approach the food bowl and drop in a treat as long as the dog shows no signs of guarding (freezing, growling, etc.) If he displays guarding behavior, wait until he stops eating, refill the bowl and start over. During the first session you may need to fill the bowl several times before the dog begins to relax.
2. After 5-7 successful repetitions, you can now expect him to begin lifting his head when you approach the bowl in expectation of the high value treat. Begin to treat only when he lifts his head.
3. When he is reliably lifting his head for food, begin to bend down over the bowl and then drop the treat. Bend only slightly at the beginning and after several successful repetitions begin to bend more until you reach 90 degrees. Watch carefully for any stiffness.
4. At this point you should be able to move on to touching the bowl, then sliding it away, and finally picking it up and giving the dog a really tasty treat before returning the bowl to the floor.
5. Have each person living in the house do this modification, always starting at step one with each new person.

Other Games and Training to Help You:

- **Feed the dog out of a food dispensing toy such as a Kong Wobbler.** This should not only help with the guarding, but also provides mental stimulation for your dog.
- **When your dog is playing with the food dispensing toy, you can reinforce to head lift behavior.** Place your dog's free feed kibble in the toy. Let the dog eat for a few moments then walk over to the toy with a yummy, high value treat. When the dog lifts his head to look at you, drop the treat and walk away. Repeat this often.
- **Play "Trade."** This game is very similar to what is written above, but you are asking the dog to allow you to take the toy instead of his bowl. Give the dog an okay toy, one he likes but doesn't love. Once the dog has the toy for a bit, approach the toy with a tasty, high value treat in your pocket. When you reach the dog, calmly remove the treat from your pocket while saying "trade." Distract him with the treat while you pick up the toy. When he finishes the treat, ask him to sit and give the toy back. Only start this after you have been able to successfully pick up your dog's food bowl. We want your dog to learn that you always have something better and tastier, and that he can trust you.

Lastly...

If you are unable to do the preceding exercises, we suggest you choose another dog to adopt. While we cannot 100 percent predict the future, research does show that dogs who display food issues in the shelter are more likely to display these behaviors in the home. We want you to be safe and for the dog to have the opportunity to work through his issues. Please take the time to ask yourself if you are truly ready to take on a bit of a project. If you are, then good luck and have fun with your new best friend!