



Issues Around Food Resources



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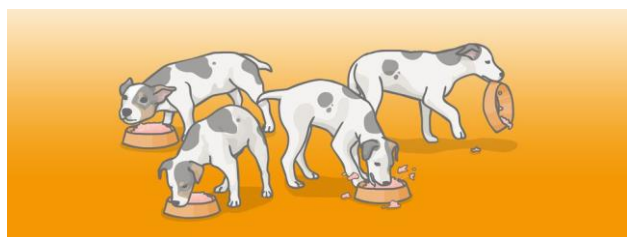
Why does my Greyhound guard Food, Toys and Sleeping Areas?

Like humans, dogs understand the concept of possession and ownership of resources. Perhaps also like some humans, dogs can take excessive measures to guard these resources. The types of resources can be numerous, but the most common and problematic ones are usually food, objects (toys/chews etc.) and particular locations such as their bed, your bed or sofa.



The majority of our dogs are ex-racers or have come from similar backgrounds. As such, they have not been exposed or used to spending time in a home environment, and this can affect their relationship with important resources such as food, toys and resting areas. Some dogs may not initially be comfortable sharing these resources with people or other dogs, especially when they first arrive home.

What is resource guarding?



The term “resource guarding” refers to the tendency of some dogs to feel uncomfortable about being approached by people or other dogs whilst in possession of a resource. This could be their food bowl, a long-lasting chew or treat, a favourite toy or a preferred resting area such as the sofa or your bed.

You may find that your dog growls, snaps or even bites if you attempt to remove these items from them, try to physically remove them from the sofa or bed, or in fewer cases, even if approached whilst he has or is on the perceived resource.

This behaviour is often misinterpreted as “dominance” or an attempt by the dog to control their new family. In reality, it is motivated by anxiety, fear and insecurity – your dog values the item in question very highly, is worried that it will be taken away, and feels the need to defend it. During his or her lifetime in kennels, it is quite likely that your dog did not have access to high value treats or chews, toys, or comfy resting areas such as the sofa or a human bed. Unsurprisingly, these items will be extremely exciting and novel and your dog will probably value them very highly!

In addition, dogs that have spent their lives in a kennel environment are generally not used to being approached or disturbed whilst eating or sleeping. Most pet dogs learn as puppies that these situations are safe, but your dog is likely to have missed out on this experience – it is understandable that he or she might feel vulnerable at these times.



How to avoid resource guarding



Since this behaviour is often misinterpreted as “dominance”, sometimes well-meaning adopters may unintentionally cause their dog to develop resource guarding behaviours if they follow **outdated advice focused on enforcing ‘dominance’ between humans and dogs**. Such interactions are not recommended as they are not based on current scientific understandings of dog behaviour and often can result in an escalation of the problem as dogs learn that their owners are unpredictable and even dangerous.

An example of this could be an adopter repeatedly taking high value items away (food or toys etc.) from the dog, and then punishing them when they show resource guarding behaviours. Doing either of **these things will simply confirm your dog’s fear** - being approached whilst he has a valued resource is definitely something to be avoided!

This is a dangerous tactic (as it can force the dog to bite), will make the behaviour worse in the long term, and will make it impossible for your dog to feel safe around you. Instead, you want your dog to learn that he or she doesn’t **need to defend their** resources from you, and that being approached whilst he has them is a good thing.

When it comes to resource guarding, **prevention is always the best cure**. Following the advice below from day one will help your new dog to feel safe and secure around resources at home, and to trust his new family:

Avoiding mismanagement

It is important to view your relationship with your greyhound as a close emotional bond between two different species, and at no point in time should obedience be enforced with aggressive displays of ‘dominance’. **As such the following things should be avoided:**

- Taking food away from the dog once given or teasing a dog with food. Except in situations where the dog has taken something potentially toxic/poisonous
- Disturbing the dog while they are eating
- Taking toys away from the dog without providing a valuable replacement e.g. a treat or throwing a different toy to play with
- Touching dogs when they lying down or lying on top of them (either if asleep or awake)
- Feeding household dogs together
- Physically moving the dogs off furniture or beds
- Grabbing dogs by the collar
- Hugging the dog, especially when he/she is still settling into their new home. We humans see hugs as a way of conveying our love, but this doesn’t mean the same in dog language (it is



often seen as a form of restraint!). A scratch under the chin or on the chest will convey your love to your furry companion in a much more polite way!

Setting your adopted greyhound up for success in their new home is done by ensuring they can feel secure in the environment that they now call home. This can be achieved by:

- Feeding the dog in a different room from other family members and not disturbing them whilst they are eating.
- For multidog households, feeding each dog with complete physical and visual separation from each other.
- Let your greyhound sleep in peace, occasionally tossing them a treat as you walk past if safe to do so.
- **If your greyhound is laying somewhere you don't want them to, call them to their own bed and** reward them with 2-3 high value treats either thrown onto the bed, or given to the dog.
- **If your greyhound has grabbed something they shouldn't** (e.g. the TV remote) call the dog to you and reward with a few high value treats, 'swapping/retrieving' the item when the dog is busy eating and his attention diverted
- Removing potential items of value such as always removing food from the counter and away in the fridge/cupboard, not having communal toys freely available in multidog households, etc. to *avoid* resource guarding becoming an issue.
- Again – toddler proof your home.

Food Guarding



This is the most common type of resource guarding. It is usually easy to spot and occurs when a dog is aggressive (or threatens to be) when approached whilst eating from their food bowl. Growling and/or gulping their food down are common behaviours displayed. It can also occur when an owner attempts to retrieve food items snatched or found by the dog.

Dogs are also known to guard their empty food bowls.

First, disciplining your dog for food guarding, is more likely to aggravate the problem than cure it. Using harsh discipline often results in the dog deciding that it needs to be even more aggressive to retain this resource.

Always feed/ your new dog separately from any resident dogs.

Always feed your new dog separately from any resident dogs. Again, it is normal for dogs not to want other dogs around them whilst they eat, particularly when they **don't** yet know them well. Some dogs may have had to compete with others for food in the past. In most kennels, dogs are always fed separately, (many prefer eating outdoors!) so this is their 'normal' eating environment.



Similarly, you should separate your new dog from any resident dogs when giving high value, long lasting food items (such as raw bones, food filled toys or dental chews).

Always keep any children away from dogs whilst they are eating. Don't allow them to approach or try to touch the dog or the bowl during feed times, or when the dog is having a treat.

All dogs should be left alone when eating (both at mealtimes or when given a chew/treat).

It is totally normal for them not to enjoy being disturbed at these times. Repeatedly walking past, or taking the bowl away or sticking your hand into it will simply irritate your dog, and may cause an issue **where there wasn't one before.** How would you react if someone kept taking your dinner away whilst you were eating? At some point, you'd probably get fed up and tell them to go away! Dogs are no different in this regard, but they can only communicate their frustration through physical behaviours such as growling.

How can I help stop Food Guarding

The reason a dog guards its food is the fear that the approaching person is going to take it away. So you need to remove that fear and create positive associations with people approaching its food.

- The best way to achieve this is to tempt your dog away from its bowl with an even tastier resource (i.e. its favourite treat). Do this in small steps and start by keeping a distance from the food bowl. Let your dog take the treat and return to its bowl.
- Over a number of sessions, gradually get closer to the bowl to the point where you can drop the treats into its bowl. Further develop this by offering the treats right next to the bowl whilst the dog is eating. Different people should carry out these exercises to avoid the positive



associations only being related to one person and the dog continues to guard when others approach.

- Another useful exercise, particularly to prevent food guarding, is to feed your dog in small instalments. This is where you feed your dog a small amount of its food, and then take the bowl away to add more food. Repeating this 3-4 times until its meal is finished. Again, this exercise helps build positive associations as your dog soon learns that when the bowl is taken away, it is going to be returned with more food.
- Never take food items away from your dog whilst he is still eating them. This will teach your dog to be suspicious of being approached at these times, making him feel the need to defend **his resources from you. Wait until he's either finished or has left the item/bowl** before removing it.

How can I stop TOY & OBJECT guarding?

Guarding of this nature usually relates to dog toy and dog chews, but can also relate to more obscure items such as laundry, tissues, food wrappers or objects found by the dog or have a particular smell.

As with food guarding, we need to look to building positive association around people approaching the guarded objects. We want the dog to understand that approaching people and the removal of objects means more fun, excitement or a special treat.



The same advice applies to toys as for food guarding. If your dog has settled down to chew a toy, leave him alone. If he wants to play with you, he will let you know!

- If you want to encourage your dog not to resource guard his toys, when you first start playing fetch, use two similar toys. **Rather than try to physically take the first toy out of your dog's** mouth, throw the second toy for him. You can pick up the first toy when he drops it to chase the second. He will soon start dropping the first toy voluntarily in anticipation of the next throw! If you need to pick the toy up, offer an alternative as above.
- A good place to start is by approaching your dog whilst near an unguarded low value object. Pick up the object with one hand then produce a treat from behind your back with the other. Then give the object back and walk away. Repeat this, but change the angle of approach and intervals between approaches.
- Work on this over a number of sessions, then change the exercise so that as you offer the object back to the dog, as soon as they touch it, withdraw it then praise and treat, then give the object back.

- Over time, start to carry out the exercise with higher value objects. Then move onto carrying out the exercise when the dog is more engrossed with the object. But always remember to keep it positive and that the removal of resources results in even more positive experience.
- Another useful exercise to help against object guarding is to introduce the concept of sharing. This works particularly well with chew toys and the exercise involves you offering a chew toy to your dog, but keeping a hold of the other end yourself. Allow your dog to enjoy the chew, but after a period, take it away for a spell then offer it back. Your dog soon understands that the resource is not his, but he is allowed to share it. Practice this with different people and objects.

How can I stop LOCATION guarding?



A common behavioural concern of owners is aggressiveness by their dogs whilst in a particular location. The most common locations being their sleeping area(s), which could be their bed, your bed or the sofa.

An interesting feature of location guarding is that the level of severity is not only tied to the value of the resource, but also to who is approaching. For example, a dog may allow an adult but not a child to approach. Or perhaps a woman can approach, but not a man.

We always recommend that you prevent dogs sleeping on your bed or on sofas from the very beginning of your home trial/adoption and we ALWAYS suggest you keep all children away from your dog while it is asleep.

- Like other forms of guarding, the best solution is to make this a positive experience.
- Always give your new dog space when he is resting.
- Resource guarding aside, many dogs can feel vulnerable when lying down, particularly when in an unfamiliar environment with new people. If your dog has been living in a kennel, he won't be used to having anyone around him whilst he sleeps.
- After a sensible period of time has elapsed, you may want your dog to join you on the sofa. Always sit down first, then your dog can then decide whether or not they want to join you!
- If your dog is resting and you need to interact with him, call him to you rather than approaching him in his bed. If he doesn't respond, leave him to rest!

Some dogs show guarding behaviours whilst in their bed.

- This is usually when a person attempts to handle, caress or move them. The reasons for this may be varied, it could be they are just tired and want to be left alone or it could be that they are poorly. Obviously in the later case, you should seek advice from your vet. But in all other cases you need to accustom your dog to being handled whilst they are in these locations.



awake before approaching.

- Always make sure your new dog is fully awake before you approach or interact with him, as some dogs can respond by growling or snapping when startled awake. You can do this by calling him softly then watching and waiting until they are fully

NB Greyhounds often sleep with their eyes open, so make sure he is fully awake!

If your dog is on your sofa or bed and shows any guarding behaviour, throw a treat(s) onto the floor or its bed to encourage him off and to show him that there **is something nice to get off for. Remember, he's a dog....he won't understand that this is your sofa/bed and not his.**



Some Signs of Resource Guarding

Typical signs that your dog is uncomfortable about being approached whilst in possession of a resource include:

- Moving away from you with the item
- Eating/chewing more quickly/frantically when approached
- Freezing/tensing up when approached
- A hard stare (often with the head hovering over the item)
- Growling
- Showing teeth
- Snapping
- Biting

What to do if your dog is resource guarding

If you notice any signs of resource guarding in your new dog, follow the steps listed above and contact us for advice. Do not try to approach your dog or remove the resource, and do not punish or tell him off. Once he has left the resource, avoid giving him access to anything similar until you have spoken to the Kennels Manager at WGW.

Helpful Information

Kennel Manager contact info: 01932251894 or carol@hershamhounds.org.uk

Other handy guides that can be found on the Wimbledon Greyhound Welfare website include:

- [Responsible Dog Ownership](#)
- [Bringing Your New Dog Home](#)
- [The First Night at Home](#)
- [Greyhounds and Children](#)
- [Greyhounds and Muzzles](#)
- [Toilet Training](#)
- [Greyhounds as Pets](#)
- [Issues Around Food Resources](#)
- [Sighthounds and Stairs](#)
- [Spending Time Alone](#)

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