

Safe Separation for Dogs who Guard Resources

Resource Guarding is a common and normal behavior that we often see in dogs. When a dog is in possession of a resource (food, treats, toys, etc.) and reacts defensively toward people or animals who approach or attempt to take that item, it's called resource guarding. Their reaction can range from a quiet head-turn to a loud growl, forward charge, or an actual bite. Dogs are especially prone to guarding high-value items such as their food, bully sticks, or pig ears. They may also guard non-edible items, such as toys, household objects, or even spaces, like the couch or their bed.

Dogs who exhibit resource-guarding behaviors require a higher level of management so that they can be safe and successful. It is important to give them edible items in a space where they will not be disturbed by people or other animals. As with all dogs, it's important to teach children that they should never crawl on a dog, play with them while they're eating, or attempt to take a treat from them. Below are just a few options for safely separating dogs who resource guard when they are given food or other edible items.



In a crate:

Crates are incredibly helpful tools for dogs who resource guard. You can give your dog their regular meals in their crate along with any edible items that you may offer them, such as bones, bully sticks, or pigs' ears. The bonus? Feeding your dog in their crate helps to increase their overall level of comfort with the crate.

Behind a baby gate:

You can also feed your dog behind a baby gate, just keep in mind that you should not enter that room until they have finished their meal. Be aware of the other animals in the house as well; this would not be an appropriate option for families with cats or other dogs who may jump over the baby gate while the dog is eating.

Inside of a puppy pen:

Feeding your dog inside a puppy pen is a great option for resource guarders. Keep in mind that as these pens do not typically have a top, making them an inappropriate choice for families with cats or dogs who could potentially jump inside while your dog is eating.

A special note:

If there are other animals or children in your home, you may need a double barrier system. If an animal or small child attempts to interact with your dog while they are eating -- even with a barrier



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between them – your dog may still have a negative reaction. It is important to avoid this as it will only increase your dog's level of discomfort. Instead, for example, you may choose to feed them in a crate that is in a bedroom and close the door behind you when you leave, eliminating the possibility of an unsafe scenario.

Additional resources:

If you are seeking additional support with your dog contact our Behavior Line at 414-431-6173 or email asktheexperts@wihumane.org.

For a video on safe separation for dogs who guard resources, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hn0qm7UrteM&feature=youtu.be>.