**Resource Guarding**

Resource guarding or possession aggression refers to a dog using aggression to keep hold of something they have. The ‘thing’ can be anything including toys, food, space, attention, objects etc. It’s easy to forget in our modern society with pet dogs, that resource guarding is a completely natural behaviour. Wild dogs resource guard as a survival mechanism, to ensure they get enough food etc.

In our pet dogs however, there is no need for them to resource guard, so it is a behaviour we want to prevent them from displaying, by teaching them not to guard things, but to give them up for something better.

However, this can be a behaviour we teach our dogs to display without us even realising. By using the ‘old school’ method of removing your puppies food bowl or chews, just to prove we can, will over time teach your puppy to fear you approaching when they have food or an object and as such become possessive and aggressive.

*Think like your puppy thinks: Milo picks up a sock, and you go and pull it out of his mouth. Next time Milo picks up a sock, he sees you approach and remembers last time you took it from him, and so runs away from you. You manage to catch him and retrieve the sock. The next time Milo picks up a sock, he remembers how running away from you didn’t work and he still lost the sock, so this time he decides to stand his ground and growl and snap at you when you try to take it from him. Now you can’t take it from him, and Milo has learnt to use aggression to resource guard.*

Teaching your dog or puppy to relinquish something is a very important exercise and should be taught as soon as possible. If your dog/ puppy learns you do not take things away that he wants, but you will exchange them for something better, this helps to prevent guarding.

Whenever your dog/ puppy picks something up that he shouldn’t have, give him a signal that tells him you will exchange the item for something else he finds rewarding. The signal can be any word such as: mine, thank you, give, etc. (Remember then not to leave that item in the puppy’s reach again!)

Show the dog the reward, this will depend on what your dog finds rewarding, and, at this stage, must mean more to him than the item he already has possession of. Give the dog/puppy the reward in exchange for the item he already has.

When playing with toys it is important that your dog/puppy learns to give you the toy when you want it but it is not necessary for the human to always have possession of the toy at the end of the game. Sometimes it is fun for your dog to win the toy at the end of the game. If you teach the dog/puppy that most fun comes from sharing the toy with you he will bring the toy back to play with you again.

To recap -if the dog/puppy has an item you want:

* Show the dog the reward (close to his nose)
* Give the release signal, such as ‘drop’
* When the dog releases the item give him the reward
* If you are teaching your dog to play with you - restart the game by giving your dog a different signal (get it, let’s play, yours, etc.) and start playing with the toy again

It is important not to get hold of the item until your dog releases it. It can often help to sprinkle a handful of treats, as a reward, onto the floor next to your dog’s nose when starting to teach this exercise.

As your dog/puppy starts to understand the exercise he will probably start to bring you various objects he finds. Never discourage this, it is much better to have a dog who wants to give you items than a dog who wants to run off with possessions or guard them.