

Training Plan: Teaching ‘Sit’ to Prevent Guarding

Why this cue is useful for your dog to know: Guarding resources (food, toys, locations, etc.) is a common and natural behavior in many dogs. They do it because they are afraid they’ll lose the resource. A lot of dog bites happen as a result of guarding. Implementing this training plan can help to prevent a dog from guarding, keeping him and everyone around him safe.

End behavior: While the dog has food or a high-value object, he sits when a human approaches, and allows the human to take the food or object.

Prerequisite: The dog should be able to sit consistently in response to a verbal cue (see the [training plan for teaching “sit”](#)).

Step 1: Tether the dog to a secure fixture so he’ll stay in place. Start with a neutral object — one that the dog has no interest in, such as a book. Place the object directly in front of the dog (so he sees it as “his”). Approach the dog from 10-15 feet away and tell him to sit. Pick up the object, [click with a clicker](#) (or give a verbal marker) and give the dog a high-value treat. Put the object back down in front of the dog, and walk away. Repeat.

When the dog is sitting consistently (at least 4 out of 5 times), proceed to the next step.

Tip: If at any point during this training plan you notice any signs of guarding, stop training. Trade for the guarded object by distracting the dog with something else of higher value, then remove the guarded object. Remember that signs of guarding can be very subtle, including freezing, staring, eating faster and avoiding. In your next training session, start with the previous step. If you’re unable to avoid the guarding behavior, contact a relationship-based behavior professional for help.

Step 2: Repeat Step 1 with an object that the dog likes but does not guard. For many dogs, this could be a low-value toy.

Step 3: Repeat Step 1 with an object that has moderate value to the dog. An example might be an empty Kong.

Step 4: Repeat Step 1 with an object that has slightly more value to the dog. An example is a Kong with a bully stick inside but not protruding at all.

Step 5: Repeat Step 1 with an object that has moderate-to-high value to the dog. An example might be a Kong with a bully stick protruding one quarter of an inch.

Step 6: Repeat Step 1 with a high-value object — for example, the bully stick with no Kong.

Proofing

Proofing means teaching the dog to generalize the behavior in different contexts.

Resource: Repeat Step 5, then Step 6, with different items that have high value to the dog.

Handler: Have other people start at the beginning of this training plan and work all the way through it. Try to get as many people as possible to participate in the training so that the dog can generalize the concept to all people and objects. You will probably observe that the more people the dog has practiced with, the faster they'll be able to work through the plan.

Note: **New people must always start at the beginning of the training plan.**

Location: Practice the exercise yourself in different locations with the dog, then have other people practice in as many locations as possible, and with as many items as possible.

Practice: Maintain the behavior by practicing it on a regular basis. Remember to give the dog a high-value reward every time something that he values is taken away from him.

Notes

- **If your dog is a severe resource guarder, or you feel at all unsure that you can implement this plan safely, please contact an experienced behavior professional.**
- Until this training is complete, make sure that the dog never gets access to any high-value object that he should not have. If he does get something that you need to get away from him, distract him with treats first, far enough away from the object that you can take the object away without fearing for your safety. Wait until the dog is eating the treats before removing the object.
- Teach children not to go near any dog who is eating or has any object (even a toy).

If you get stuck on any step, stop and take a break. When you try again, go back to the previous step in the plan. If necessary, create intermediate steps with intensity and duration that your dog is comfortable with. Don't rush: Take it at the dog's speed.