



Desensitization and Counter-Conditioning – Treating Resource Guarding for Food

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Discover the distance at which your dog is comfortable with you near his resource. This means that he is loose, relaxed and waggy, eating at a normal rate. Note: Signs that he is *over-threshold* is if he stiffens, stops eating or starts eating faster or with abrupt gulps, shows “whale-eye”, lifts a lip, shows teeth, growling, etc. Obviously, this means you are too close!

Now, with Fido in his crate or tethered by leash (for safety), approach him at his resource, stopping at the distance where Fido’s comfortable (i.e. under-threshold). Toss a fabulous tidbit of steak, boiled chicken, cheese, whatever your dog loves most, then turn to withdraw. Make another approach and throw another fabulous treat. Repeat this for the remainder of Fido’s meal.

What you’d like to see is that Fido leaves his resource in order to collect his tasty treat before returning to eating his boring old thing. You might even notice him anticipating your arrival because your approach is starting to predict wonderful things rather than being threatening – perhaps lifting his head upon your approach. If this happens, start marking the head lift with a happy “yes!” and toss a tasty treat.

Note: If he is *not* preferentially eating your treats, then they may not be high-value enough to capture his attention.

Over a period of days and weeks, you are looking for Fido to relax more and more with your gradual closer approach to his resources.

Remember that resource guarding is a relationship-based behavior, so these steps must be taken by each person the dog has a relationship with. What may take a matter of days with one person to progress through all the stages could take weeks for another person, because the dog’s level of trust with different people is different. (Children should always go last.)

The book “Mine!” by Jean Donaldson is a great resource for treating resource guarding.