

How to Identify

Body Language Consistent with

Resource Guarding








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What is Resource Guarding?

Resource guarding refers to a dog attempting to physically protect the possession of a resource. This resource can be a variety of things:

-  Food
-  Food Bowl
-  Treats
-  Chew Toy
-  Plush Toy

It can even include things like a specific location or space, people, or other dogs. This article is addressing a specific aspect of resource guarding. What does it look like? How do you know a dog is resource guarding? If you can identify that the dog is resource guarding this is a huge step towards preventing a dog bite.













Identify the Signs



The dog above is resource guarding her food dish, probably the most common situation in which resource guarding occurs. Here are all the clues in her body that she is resource guarding:

-  Head is lowered over the food bowl
-  Corners of her mouth are pulled forward
-  She has stopped eating
-  She is growling (not something you can see, but part of canine communication no less)
-  Her front legs are spread apart in a stance preparing her for pouncing or lunging
-  Her back is curved in a hunched fashion
-  Her hind legs are spread apart in a stance preparing her for pouncing or lunging
-  Her tail is tucked

When you look at each part of her body like this it becomes very obvious that this dog is stressed and worried that her food will be taken from her. It is very common for strays that have experienced starvation to resource guard.



Border Collies are one of my favorite breeds and I will always have at least one but they are famous for having resource guarding issues. Here you can see a Border Collie guarding his disc from another dog. Again, let's break down each part of his body that is visible in the photo.

- 🐾 His eyes are oriented to and keeping track of the other dog
- 🐾 His eyes are wide a sign of arousal/stress
- 🐾 His mouth is tight holding onto his resource as best as he can
- 🐾 He is displaying the typical 90-degree head turn that is consistent with distance increasing warning behavior
- 🐾 He is moving away from the other dog, not pictured
- 🐾 He has the beginnings of a piloerection, the hair on his back is standing on end. This is not necessary a sign of stress but can just indicate arousal, but given the context it is clearly something to pay attention to

The Dachshund to the right is resource guarding a toy. Again, let's look at all parts of her body and identify the clues





- 🐾 Eye contact with the person she is guarding the toy from, also the person who is taking the picture
- 🐾 Corners of the mouth pulled forward
- 🐾 Use of front legs to stand on and hold down the toy
- 🐾 Widened hind leg stance preparing to pounce
- 🐾 Body is stiff in general, spine is straight, this is a big red flag



You can see how some of these body language signals could be missed if a person is not closely paying attention. It is also easy to understand how the body language could be seen as play instead of resource guarding. If you are not sure if the dog you are working with is displaying actual resource guarding or playful resource guarding assume it is actual resource guarding. It is always best to err on the side of caution.



The dog pictured to the left is resource guarding a bone. Here are the clues:

-  Eye orientation to the human the bone is being guarded from, who again is taking the picture
-  Laying down and hiding behind the bush
-  90-degree head turn toward the person she is guarding the bone from
-  Tight mouth (not relaxed)

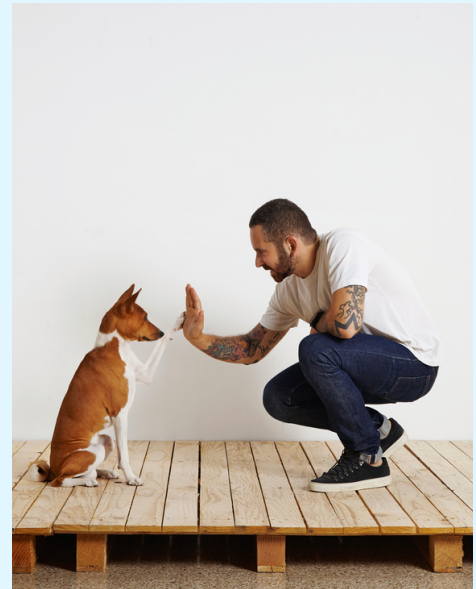
This picture really helps us understand how easy it could be to miss resource guarding. A child playing in the yard with this dog would likely have no idea what is happening. Even adults may mistakenly think this dog is laying in the shade rather than identifying the resource guarding.



What to Do

So now that you have a better understanding of how to identify resource guarding, what do you do to resolve this problem? Professionals use a simple Counter Conditioning and Systematic Desensitization protocol to remedy resource guarding. Jean Donaldson describes this process in detail in her excellent book, [Mine!](#).

If you are a pet owner, use the Pet Professional Guild trainer locator search on their website at <https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/Zip-Code-Search> to find a trainer who can help you. Most dogs only need one or two sessions to learn new behaviors that replace the resource guarding.



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