

Pawsitive Results Critter Academy

Where people learn to lead...and pets love to follow!

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An Ounce of Prevention

Behavior counselors get many calls from owners with dogs that growl or bite over chews, food or handling. Luckily, these problems can usually be successfully resolved with professional help. Unfortunately, few people realize that these problems can often be avoided in the first place by practicing a few simple training exercises. Many of these problems begin in adolescent and adult dogs that never showed any guarding or handling problems as puppies, so everyone needs to practice prevention!

If your dog already shows signs of guarding or body handling problems, you need to work with a behavior counselor to address the problem. These exercises are for prevention only. Signs of guarding include: running away or avoiding people when they have a chew or other prized object, freezing when approached or touched, eating faster or hovering over food, chews or other objects, and growling, snarling, snapping, or biting over handling, chews, food, or any other prized object.

In all of the following exercises, you will be rewarding the dog with a very valuable (to him) food treat that he does not get very often. Do every step of each exercise in order. Only move on to the next step when the dog is clearly thrilled with the step you are currently working on. The dog should be giving you their "I'm really happy because I know I'm about to get a great treat!" look. Every family member should do these exercises, starting with the adults. Children should always be closely supervised with dogs, and parents need to be actively involved when children are training the dog. Friends and relatives should also be recruited to give the dog experience with even more people. Every person needs to start with the first step and work all the way through each exercise. At first, exercises should be done several times a week. Continue at least monthly practice until the dog is 2-3 years old. If you see any signs of guarding during any step, stop the exercise, walk away from the dog, and get professional help. Your goal is for your dog to be relaxed and happy when people do these things, NOT to get into a battle with your dog!

Sharing Chews and Bones

- 1) When your dog has a chewie, walk up to him and drop a tasty treat, then walk away. Repeat several times whenever your dog has a chewie. Remember to practice each step until your dog shows happy anticipation at your approach.
- 2) Approach your dog when he has a chewie. Reach down and touch the chewie, and then deliver a tasty treat and walk away.
- 3) Now when you approach, pick up the chewie and give your dog a special treat. Then give the chewie back and walk away.
- 4) Sit with your dog and hold a chewie while he chews on it. Occasionally pet the dog and then immediately deliver a treat.

Food Bowl Manners

- 1) While your dog is eating, approach his bowl, drop in a tasty treat, and then walk away. Remember to practice each step until your dog shows happy anticipation at your approach.
- 2) Approach your dog while he is eating, touch his back, then drop a treat into his bowl.
- 3) Now when you approach, ask the dog to sit and then drop a treat into the bowl.
- 4) Approach the dog while he is eating, ask him to sit, and then pick up the bowl. Add a treat to the bowl, tell the dog to “stay”, and then put the bowl back down. If the dog gets up, pick the bowl back up and tell him to sit. When the dog holds the sit-stay while you put the bowl down, release him to go back to the bowl and eat.

Forbidden Treasures

Dogs are scavengers that love to pick up everything they see. Out of concern for our possessions and/or our dog's health, we usually rush to take these treasures away from the dog. Some dogs learn to pick up these things so their human will play a rousing game of chase, but others may start to run away, growl, or quickly swallow even inedible items to prevent humans from stealing their prizes. To prevent this from happening:

- 1) Keep off-limits items out of reach, and on walks be alert for goodies in the gutter and bushes. Don't give your dog a chance to grab it, and you won't need to take it away.
- 2) If your dog does get something, stay calm. Happily call your dog to you and offer him a really special goody in exchange for his prize. If your dog won't approach you, try running away from him and/or tossing a bunch of treats on the ground for him.
- 3) If you absolutely have to take something away from the dog by force, talk happily while you do so and follow it with extra rewards to soften the blow as much as possible.
- 4) Practice exchanging the dog's toys for treats so he gets lots of practice at giving up stuff and then getting it back. This also shows the dog that playing with his toys is a good way to get attention- don't ignore the dog when he's picking up the right things!

Handling

- 1) Practice grooming, holding, poking, and prodding your dog when he is relaxed. Pair this handling with really high value treats. If your dog shows dislike of any type of handling, slow down and work extra hard to make those areas fun and rewarding. Keep handling sessions short- stop the game before the dog is tired of playing it!
- 2) Have a wide range of people- different ages, sexes, races, etc.- practice handling the dog. Remember to keep it very rewarding, and get professional help if your dog begins to show any signs of guarding (think of it as the dog guarding his body from people). Remember, we don't want a dog that just tolerates handling- we want a dog that loves all types of handling from all types of people!
- 3) It is very important to make your dog's early experiences with the veterinarian and the groomer fun. First impressions are hard to change! Take your puppy to the groomer or veterinarian just for pets and cookies several times before the first real visit. Continue to intersperse fun visits with real visits so your dog won't dread these trips.