



FOOD AGGRESSION IN DOGS



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Does your appearance in the kitchen at mealtime elicit a growl? If so, your dog might be suffering from canine possession aggression (CPA), also known as food or object guarding.

The Trouble with Kibbles

In most cases of CPA, the dog no longer views you as the provider of good things, but rather as someone who might take away food, treats, or toys. If you remove these items as a punishment when he growls, it will only convince your dog that his suspicions about you were right all along.

Make a Date with Your Dog—for Dinner

How often have you heard, “Leave the dog alone while he eats”? While it makes sense to keep toddlers clear at mealtime, a dog can get an inflated sense of himself if left alone while he eats. Family members should be present while the dog eats, starting when he or she is a puppy. Approach the bowl periodically and add a little something extra—some scrambled egg, a bite of hotdog, or some cheese.

Bowling Him Over

If you have an older dog who is already set in his bad eating habits a different strategy is needed.

- **Step One** is to do away with his food bowl entirely for a week or two and feed by hand.
- **Step Two** is to return the empty food bowl. Pass by and drops a few kibbles in it from time to time. After those are eaten up, drop small handfuls into your dog’s bowl at intervals of one to three minutes until the whole meal has been consumed.
- By now your dog will be eager for you to approach his bowl. In **Step Three**, put down a semi-filled bowl and drop in a few treats as you pass. On your next pass, add the remaining kibbles.
- **Step Four** is to put a full food bowl on the floor as your dog holds a sit and stay. Release him with a cheery “okay.” Then, once or twice a week, call your dog away from his bowl during mealtime and reward him with a tidbit for coming to you. Using your sit/stay, wait, and take-it commands with the dog will make it clear to Shep who owns the kitchen and the tasty morsels in it.

Each of these steps should be undertaken for 10 - 14 days before going to the next step. Your dog should wear a leash as a safety measure while working on this behavior, but don’t use it to control him unless you are in jeopardy of being hurt. Since guarding behaviors can often signal other problems, a basic obedience course is recommended to underscore handler leadership. Finally, if you experience any backsliding, return to Step One. If you do not succeed or your dog is severely aggressive around all food products and paraphernalia, hire a certified dog trainer to help bring this conflict to resolution.