

Possession Aggression

A dog that has possession aggression (PA) is a dog that will; growl/snap/bite anything or anyone that comes near it while it has something of high value. Typically the object is their food/food dish, toy, or treat. Luckily PA is a learned behavior and thus can be worked with. Please remember that when working with your dog, they should always be leashed and you should have someone assisting you.

The first thing you need to do is get rid of everything that the dog claims as “theirs.” This means if the animal is used to sleeping on your bed, they now must sleep on a dog bed/blanket on the floor. If they are allowed on the furniture, they must not be given access to the furniture. All of their toys must be picked up and placed in a toy bin that they cannot get into. The same goes for their treats, and food/food bowls. It is imperative that the dog realizes that you are indeed in control and not them. You will be the one to decide when they can have these luxury items and when they cannot have them.

The second step is you need to teach your dog the “give it” command. With this command you will give your dog a regular toy. Let them play with it for a minute. You will then get something of high value to them (I usually use spoonful’s of canned dog food or peanut butter for this command). Once you have the high value treat, you will approach your dog offering the high value treat. When the dog releases the toy, you will say “give it” and then let them lick the spoon. You want the dog to realize that giving you something; they will in return get something great.

The third step is hand feeding your dog. In animal packs, the leader eats first and then allows the other animals to eat. By hand feeding your dog, you are showing them that you are in control of when they eat, and how much they can eat. To hand feed your dog you simply just hold their dish in your hand, and grab a small handful of their food. Once you have a small handful of their food, you ask them to perform a command for you. Once they have performed that command, you can kneel down to their level, and let them eat from your hand. The command should be simple and one that they know already, such as sit or down). You will do this until the food dish is empty. When the food is done, you will then put the bowl away and out of sight of the dog. You are going to need to hand feed your dog at least once a day for at least a month. After a month, you can cut down to 4 days a week, then 3 days, etc.

The fourth step is for the times that you are not hand feeding your dog, you must teach them that you or anyone else near their dish, is a good rewarding experience. To do this successfully it is going to take time. You will first need to make your dog sit, and stay for at least 5 seconds before you release them and give them permission to eat. If your dog is a fast eater, then you will need to put some tennis balls into the dog dish so they will be forced to slow

down their eating so you have time to do the training session. When your dog is eating out of the bowl you will want to stand about 4-5 feet away (or as far away that your dog is not showing any kind of aggression towards you) remember to keep a leash on the dog for safety . You will throw small pieces of a high value food items (deli roast beef, hot dog, chicken, steak, etc) into your dog's dish. Gradually you will want to get closer to the dog and eventually be able to take the dish away. When the dog is about half way done, you will want to call your dog over to you, and give them a lavish praise and lots of treats. Then you will want to let them go back to eating. Your dog will start to associate you being near the dish, as a good experience, and will no longer feel the need to guard it's dish.

If you have children in the home, your children should always be around while training your dog. This will show the dog that the children are just as in charge as you are. Of course, do not bring your children into the training sessions until the dog is comfortable with you first.

I cannot stress enough that this process must be done slowly. If you press your dog too hard too fast, things will end badly, usually with someone getting bitten. Please, take things slow. No dog is ever going to be fixed over night or in just one training session. Sometimes working with a dog can take months and you need to be prepared for that. I highly recommend that you stay in touch with a trainer while working with your dog.

If your dog's possession aggression problems are at the point where you are fearful of the dog, it is imperative that you work with a professional trainer or behavior consultant. This person will be able to carefully assess the situation and design a training protocol specific to your dog and family.