



WHY DOES MY DOG.....

GUARD FOOD?

Before embarking on any training and behaviour modification programme you must remember that dogs only do what they find rewarding. A 'reward' can be something positive such as a pat, smile or titbit but it can also be something negative such as a smack, a glare or a raised voice. Dogs also find lots of behaviour such as digging, jumping up and barking 'inherently' rewarding i.e. they are 'normal' behaviours and therefore enjoyable for the dog to practise. They also exhibit these behaviours when stressed as a means of displacing their anxiety. All other non beneficial behaviours are quickly abandoned as dogs, as unlike humans, don't waste their energy on things that do not benefit them.

Imagine, you are about to tuck in to your favourite meal, Sunday roast with all the trimmings, when someone walks past the table and snatches your plate away!

What would your reaction be? Gobsmacked!

Imagine if this happened a second time when someone walked past your plate.

I bet you would be good and ready for them on the third occasion - prepared to guard *your* food!

Why would your dog feel any different if you took the advice of many old-fashioned dog trainers, and removed your dog's food bowl? This method, far from teaching your dog not to guard his resources, is far more likely to have the opposite effect. At best, you will have built in a mistrust of anyone approaching his bowl. The dog may well suppress his anxiety, but if one day there were to be other negative factors in play, perhaps the dog is unwell, an unfamiliar child accidentally bumps into the dog when he is feeding, the dog reaches its bite threshold - with disastrous results.

Now, what if every time someone approached his food bowl a wonderful thing happened - a delicious treat is dropped into his bowl, and this event happens on fairly regular basis. How would *this* make him feel about hands near his dinner?

This illustrates very clearly the difference between training your dog using **Reward v Punishment**.

If your young dog or puppy has no history of negative events near his food bowl, build up the following positive experiences -

- Sit with your pup, holding his bowl whilst he is eating and, from time to time, drop a piece of chicken into the dish.

- Feed in instalments - weigh up his food, then place the empty dish on the floor. Take 1 piece of kibble and drop it in the bowl. Approach again with a second piece and gradually increase the amounts, periodically adding something really tasty, until all food has been eaten. Repeat this process for several weeks.

If your pet has a history of food guarding, DO NOT approach his bowl whilst he is feeding. You will need to proceed with caution to modify his behaviour,. Please come and talk to us and we will advise on a tailor-made strategy to fit your particular situation.

