

Toy Guarding

Puppies should learn from the beginning of their lives with their new families that **humans are the givers of all good things** and, **when necessary, the takers of all good things**. If your puppy growls when he is being approached while playing with a toy, address the behaviour now. **PUPPIES DO NOT GROW OUT OF BAD HABITS—BAD HABITS JUST GET WORSE IF NOT ADDRESSED!**

You must remind your puppy who the toy giver is if he feels the need to guard toys. If your puppy guards all of his toys, then all of the toys must be taken away. If your puppy guards one specific toy, then that specific toy must be taken away. This can be done while your puppy is in the crate or in a secure area. Once all the toys have been put away, offer your puppy his least favourite toy to play with for a minute or so.

Then, using one of your puppy's favourite treats, give the cue ***drop-it*** or ***leave-it***. Whichever cue you choose, stay with that cue; do not change to a new cue later on. When your puppy drops the toy for the treat, mark the behaviour with "yes" or a click from your clicker and **give him the treat in exchange for the toy**. Repeat this exercise just a few times a day. Once the puppy begins to quickly respond to the ***drop-it*** or ***leave-it*** cue, it is time for the next step.

Put away the toy you were using, and the next day bring out another toy he likes to play with, but not his most favourite toy. Repeat the exercise with the new toy just a few times a day over the next few days, until he quickly drops the toy when he hears the cue "Drop-it" or "Leave-it." Once he will consistently listen to your cue of "Drop-it" or "Leave it," it is time for the next step.

Take your puppy's favourite toy out and give it to him. Give him five or ten minutes to enjoy his toy, and then walk over to him and give the cue "Drop-it" or "Leave-it," and **offer him a very special treat**. If he does not drop his toy, you can use a higher-valued treat, such as chicken or cheese, to lure the toy away from him. Once he finishes the treat, give him back his favourite toy and walk away. For now, let him play with his toy undisturbed for at least a half hour. Then repeat this exercise a few more times that same day, always allowing him time to enjoy his toy for a while first. Repeat the cue with his favourite toy a few times a day over the next few days. Remember to mark the release of the toy, reward him with the treat, and give him the toy back to play with.

Over time, he will learn to quickly drop whatever is in his mouth when he hears the cue. Once he gets to this level, rewards should be intermittent: one reward this time, three rewards next time, zero rewards the next time, and two rewards the next. Keep him guessing. Will he get one, three, or no treats when he gives the proper behaviour?

Unless your puppy has something dangerous, **never pull the toy out of his mouth**. This will only **cause him to want to guard the toys more fiercely, and you could get hurt**. If you offer the cue "Drop-it" or "Leave-it" to your puppy and he growls at you at any time, just say "Too bad" and walk away. Do not look at, play with, scold, or say any more words to him. For now, **leave the room and completely ignore him**. If he follows you to another room in the house, completely ignore him for the next five minutes. When it is time for him to go outside or to eat a meal, pick the toy up and put

it away. In fact, if he continues to growl at you after you have tried the above methods, and the only toy he still guards is this favourite toy, simply throw the toy away.

You will not want to punish him for growling, as a growl is an important early warning system dogs give that asks others to stay away. **A GROWL IS THE PRE-REQUISITE FOR THE BITE!** **If you are concerned for your safety, stop and walk away.** **IF AT ANY TIME YOUR PUPPY BECOMES AGGRESSIVE AND TRIES TO BITE YOU WHILE SHAPING THIS BEHAVIOUR, CONTACT OUR PRACTICE!** **IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT THIS BEHAVIOUR IS ADDRESSED NOW BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.**



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us