

Food Guarding

Food guarding (and food aggression) is the tendency for dogs to protect their food from people or other dogs. Food guarding is specific to guarding the dog food and is different from other types of resource guarding or possession aggression. Any dog can show food guarding, it is not specific to any breed, sex, or age.

It is important to practice safe food handling when your dog gets home. When a dog shows food guarding at the shelter, we do not know if they will continue to guard food in a home setting.

Food Guarding Behaviors:

- Hovering head over the food dish or the place where the food dish belongs.
- Eating food very quickly.
- Dog is standing very still and stiff or tense.
- Dog watches you out of the corner of their eye.
- Dog stares at you intensely.
- Growling, Snarling, or Snapping when you come close to the feeding area.
- Growling, Snarling, or Snapping when you place food into the bowl or place the dish on the floor.

Please note, these are not All the signs of food guarding, and you should never try to pet the dog, take food away, or put your hands near the dog or their food while they are eating.

Management:

It is important to stay safe and ensure feeding is as least stressful as possible. The easiest and safest way to manage food guarding is to prevent situations where your dog display food guarding or aggression.

- During feeding, place the dog in a crate, behind a baby gate, or in a separate room with the door shut.
- Do not allow children or other pets near the dog while they are eating.
- Wait until the dog is completely done eating and has left the bowl before removing the bowl from the dog.
- Consult a veterinarian to make sure the dog is getting proper nutrition. Food guarding can become worse if the dog is always hungry.

Do **NOT** punish the dog for guarding. Punishment will not work, and it will cause more aggression in the future, or even cause the dog to bite you.

If you want to work further to decrease food guarding, you will want to contact a trainer to work on some training strategies and work slowly with the dog on counter conditioning. Food guarding can be worked with, but it is more involved training and is best managed with a professional. Additionally, the ASPCA has laid out helpful techniques you can find at the web address below:

<https://www.aspc.org/pet-care/dog-care/common-dog-behavior-issues/food-guarding>