

Swiss Run Greater Swiss Mountain Dogs

FOOD GUARDING

Guarding food or toys from other animals is a normal canine behavior. Dogs higher in the pack hierarchy may exercise the right to take the food from lower-ranking members. A pack requires strong leaders in order to survive. Life with dogs in our homes is safer when they do not guard their food. We need to be the pack leader and teach our pets from an early age how to behave with food and toys. Below are some ideas to follow.

Prevention-

1. Whenever you feed your dog make sure they have privacy from other dogs in the house. Either place them in different rooms or their crates. You want your dog to feel confident while eating and not worry about other animals. Meal times should be structured. They should eat at the same time everyday and not free fed.
2. Walk by your dog during a few meals, and watch for any reactions. Remember to maintain the dog's trust that meals are provided without the need to defend them.
3. Every once in a while walk by your dog while the dog is eating and drop something a little smellier and tastier than the regular food into the dish. The idea is that each time a person approaches the dish, a good thing happens. That good thing does not have to be a jackpot of food.
4. When you feel comfortable, touch the dog while they are eating. Add a treat to the dish at the same time. Every time keep increasing the amount of time you are petting and giving them a treat.
5. Include your children in the activity of walking by the dish and adding a treat, but only after you are comfortable the dog will not react. We do not want the children to get hurt. You also want to teach your children not to do this without supervision.
6. Feed the dog occasionally in different places. The idea is to keep the dog thinking of one place as being his space. It is good for the dog to feel comfortable eating in different places so that the dog will eat on trips, when boarding, or in other situations outside the daily routine.
7. You also want to do these exercises with toys. Take a toy and give a treat. You would want to repeat this frequently also with the children. If one toy is guarded strongly this toy may need to be taken away.
8. Never chase a dog down to get something the dog has stolen. This triggers the same instincts as food guarding, and also teaches your dog to run from you. Condition your dog instead to bring things to you for great trades, plus praise and other rewards.
9. When the family eats try to teach your family members not to feed your dog from the table. Not only does it teach your dog to beg, but it can also

- trigger food-guarding behavior. Some dogs will develop the attitude all food is dog food.
10. Teach your dog to “sit” and “down,” and from time to time have the dog perform one of these actions prior to your setting the food dish down for the dog to eat.

Rehabilitation-

For the food-guarding dog, remove the dog dish from the floor between meals. Leaving the dish out gives the dog something to guard.

Start by putting the dog bowl on the floor with no food. Step away from the dish, but keep the food in your hand. When the dog goes to the bowl and realizes there is not food, he should look at you. When he does, walk over and place a few kibbles in the bowl and step away. When the dog finishes that bit and looks at you again, walk up and place another few bits in the bowl and go back to your position. You're conditioning the dog to accept having a person approach the dish and putting a hand down to the bowl. You don't want to stand next to the dish because you want the approach to be positive for the dog. A good way to end the meal would be picking up the bowl and placing the last of the food on the floor. The dog should learn the dish being removed is a positive thing.

For a dog that is defensive with the dish, you could start with no dish. You would follow above, but hand feed. Eventually add the dish, but still hand feed. Once you are comfortable add the food to the bowl. This whole process may take a long time. Changes will not happen overnight. Whatever you do try to keep a positive attitude during the process. Negative energy may make things worse.

Hopefully these tips are helpful to help prevent food and toy guarding.