

When Your Dog Won't Give It Up

Understanding resource guarding,
avoiding conflict and building the trade



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This workbook is for you if

Your dog suddenly goes still when you get near his chew bone.

He eats faster as soon as you walk into the kitchen.

He carries things off when you enter the room.

He no longer gives back things he has picked up.

He gets grumpy on his bed or on the couch.

You don't know whether to step in or keep your distance.

You don't have to recognize everything. Two points are enough.

And when it's not the right workbook

Your dog has snapped at or bitten someone. Then you start with Part V, and the procedure in Part III is not what the two of you need right now.

You're looking for an exercise your child can do with the dog. It isn't in here, and that's on purpose. What applies in a household with children is in Part IV.

Your dog is guarding something you can't see. That belongs in Part V, too.

This isn't a rejection. It's the difference between a procedure you can build on your own and a situation where someone needs to take a look.

Part I • Reaching for the chew bone

The question this part is about:

What is my dog actually doing there?

The moment your dog freezes

Your dog is lying on the rug, chewing. You want to put the bone away because guests are about to arrive, and because he's been working on it for a long time anyway. You walk over and reach out your hand.

And then he goes still.

He stops chewing. He doesn't growl, he doesn't show his teeth, he doesn't do anything at all. He lies there, his head a little above the bone, and watches you out of the corner of his eye.

What you do in that moment depends on what you just saw. Most people see: nothing. The dog is just lying there. So they keep reaching, take the bone, carry it into the kitchen, and as far as they're concerned, that's the end of it.

For the dog, it isn't. He said something, and it didn't get through. Next time, he'll say it more clearly.

Those few seconds are what this workbook is about. Not the bite and not the growl, but what comes before them and is almost always there.

What this workbook does

It turns a confrontation into a trade.

For that you need two pieces of information, and you work them out yourself. The first is a ranking: what your dog guards and how strongly, from the toy he leaves lying around to that one chew you don't even go near. The second is a distance: how far away you can be while he stays relaxed with the thing.

Together, the two become your training plan. You start with the lowest value at a safe distance and work your way forward, always changing only one of the two at a time.

The procedure for this is the trade. It's old, it's unspectacular, and it has one catch that regularly makes it fail in practice. That catch is in Part III and not here, because here it would look like a side note.

What it doesn't do

It doesn't make a diagnosis. You'll be able to assess your dog, and that's something different.

It doesn't replace a veterinary exam. Some of the dogs who suddenly start guarding things are in pain. No workbook can find that out, and it's the first point in Part V.

It isn't a workbook for dogs who have already snapped at or bitten someone. If that has already happened with your dog, read Part V first. Not because anything in here is wrong, but because at that point you need someone who actually sees you and your dog.

And it contains no training between child and dog. What applies in a household with children is in Part IV, and it consists almost entirely of rules for adults.

It isn't quick, either. The time frame in which you can judge whether anything is changing is weeks.

What you need

Food at two levels of value. The ordinary kind your dog knows, and something he's really interested in. Cheese, sausage, cooked meat, whatever works for him.

A few objects he doesn't care about. A piece of cardboard, an old rag, a piece of wood. What you start with is explicitly not his favorite thing.

A place where you can put away the things he guards. A cupboard with a door is enough. That sounds trivial, and it's the most effective part of the entire workbook.

Plus the worksheets from the appendix and a pen. Nothing else.

How to read on

Part II is the part you must not skip. It tells you how to spot it early, and without that you won't know which situations you need to defuse in the first place.

Part III is the procedure. Secure, measure, trade, in that order.

Part IV applies to everyone who has children living in the household or visiting. It isn't meant to be read only after something has happened.

Part V is for when more is needed than a workbook can give.

The statements in this workbook are based on research. To keep the text readable, the sources aren't in the middle of it or at the end of each part, but collected at the end under "Where the knowledge comes from." If you don't need them, just skip them.

Why dogs guard things

Because it works.

An animal that has access to something valuable and keeps that access is better off than one that loses it. That's the whole logic behind it. It isn't limited to dogs, and it isn't a defect.

Guarding isn't a flaw in the dog. It's behavior with a purpose that shows up in the wrong place in our homes.

What people regularly mix up: it isn't the object that has the value—your dog gives it that value. That's why the same chew bone can be completely unimportant one day and the most important thing in the room the next. It depends on how hungry he is, how cramped the space is right now, who else is around, and whether he has learned that people take things like that away.

That last point is the one you can influence. The other three only to a limited degree.

And then there's the word that almost always comes up in this context. Your dog doesn't want to rule the household. He wants the bone. That's a much smaller and much more plausible explanation, and it leads to an approach that actually changes something. Anyone who sets out to win the dominance fight inevitably ends up doing what Part II lists among the things that make it worse.

What you take away from Part I

Your dog has probably already told you several times that he doesn't like something. You probably didn't recognize it as him telling you.

Worksheet A • The resource list

Write down what your dog guards and rank it by value. Don't estimate what he would guard—enter what you have seen. Leave blank whatever you haven't seen.

Dog: _____ List started on: _____

Object or place	Value 1–5	How I can tell	Where it happens

Value 1 is what he leaves lying there when you reach for it. Value 5 is what you don't even go near. You start with value 1, never with value 5.

This is the end of the preview.

When Your Dog Won't Give It Up

The complete workbook has 33 pages and 7 worksheets to print out. You get it as a PDF right after purchase.

€9.90, one-time payment, no subscription.

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