

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Possession Guarding

Protocol to be used for shelter dogs who exhibit low-medium level possession guarding behavior (stiffening, whale eye, growling, air snapping).

1. Teach the dog the **“drop it”** command. Allow the dog to have an item (start with lower value items that the dog does not guard). Approach and show the dog a high-value treat. When the dog drops the item to get the treat, say “drop it” and give the treat. Then pick up item and return it to the dog. Repeat this several times. Once the dog has associated the words “drop it” with the action of dropping the item (after a dozen or so times), start to use “drop it” as a cue to elicit the behavior. When the dog has an item – say “drop it” and when he/she does – give the treat. Eventually increase the value of the item that the dog has (you may also have to increase the value of the treat). Repeat this daily with as many different items as possible.

2. Teach the dog the **“leave it”** command. Have a helper tempt the dog with low value treat and when the dog shows interest in the treat lure him/her away with a higher value treat saying “leave it” AS the dog moves away from the treat that the helper is holding. Reward the dog with the treat when he/she has moved several feet away. Repeat this a dozen or so times until the dog has associated the words “leave it” with the act of moving away from the treat that the helper is holding. Next, tether the dog and place a low value treat on the floor just out of reach and lure the dog away with a higher value treat, saying “leave it” AS the dog is moving away from the treat on the floor. Once you have successfully paired the words “leave it” with the behavior, you can use the cue “leave it” to elicit the behavior.

Counterconditioning Exercises (to be done along with or after the above work)

**The dog should be tethered during these sessions.*

- **Step 1**- give the dog a desired item (chew item, toy, etc.) and let him/her settle with it. Then approach the dog, stopping about 6 feet away, and toss a high value treat to the dog and then walk away. Repeat this step until the dog happily anticipates the treat when you approach to this distance.
- **Step 2** – over the course of several sessions, continue as above moving increasingly closer to the dog before you toss the high value treat.
- **Step 3** - when you can walk right up to the dog and drop the treat next to the item that he/she has without the dog reacting negatively, increase the value of the item the dog has and start over with step 1.

If at any step the dog demonstrates any guarding behavior (including growling, stiffness, freezing), move back to a previous step and proceed more gradually.