



## *Enhancing the bond between dogs and their families*

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### **Possession Aggression**

Published in the December 2005 [Colorado Greyhound Adoption](#) Newsletter. Although this article was written for greyhounds, it applies equally to all breeds of dogs.

#### **Question:**

I reached down to take a bone away from my dog and he growled at me. I was told that is a sign of dominance and to not let him get away with it. What is the best way to handle this?

#### **The Trainer Answers:**

Do NOT punish the dog nor reach in and take the bone away. Growling is unacceptable behavior, but when he has possession is not the time to address this issue or you could be bitten. From his perspective, he has given you fair warning for whatever happens next.

If you need to take a bone (or any other object) away, encourage your dog to leave it to do something else, such as go outside or play with a toy. Once he no longer has access to the bone, remove it. He should receive no more bones until you are able to overcome this issue.

Growling over a bone does not mean your dog wants to dominate you in his evil plot to take over the world. This is referred to as resource guarding or possession aggression. A dog might guard one particular thing or several things, such as food, bones, toys, beds, and even people. (People often mistake possession aggression for a person as protection, which can be quite dangerous.)

The following are general guidelines and are not meant to be a complete course of treatment for possession aggression. First, your dog should not have free access to any items he guards. Next, place him on a strict Nothing in Life is Free Program. He must now earn access to all valuable resources, such as meals, playtime, walks, and your attention. This will give your dog a different job to do so he can retire from his guarding duties. Your dog will learn you are a fair but firm leader who controls all valuable resources. Through a strict management and training program, your dog will learn to trust you to handle all situations. I also recommend object exchanges, starting with items of little to no value to the dog. Gradually, the dog will learn to readily give up items and not guard any resources. He will learn the resources are yours, and it is not his job to guard those objects. I also strongly recommend you learn to observe the many other signals dogs give to indicate they might bite. You and your dog will be less stressed and happier.

For everyone's safety, be cautious and seek professional assistance if you are not absolutely certain how to proceed. Find an experienced professional who understands dogs and will use dog-friendly positive reinforcement methods. Punishment-based training could potentially increase aggression and your chance of being bitten.



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