

GROWLING OVER FOOD AND CHEW BONES (POSSESSIVE BEHAVIOR)

Congratulations on adopting your new family member!

As your adoption counselor explained to you, your new dog has shown possessive behavior while in the shelter or in the previous home. Possessive behavior is very common in dogs. When a dog is possessive, he may show teeth, growl, snap, or even bite when things that are important to him are touched or approached. Common things that dogs possess are food, chew treats, resting or sleeping areas (couches and beds), and favorite people. We have found that many times, the possessive behavior does not occur in the home after adoption, but there is about an equal chance that it will. However, either way, if you follow these guidelines, you will be able to have a safe, happy, and long-lasting relationship with your new friend.

- Don't touch, pet, or disturb your dog when eating from the food bowl or chewing on a rawhide, bone, or toy. For the first month after adoption, only feed dry food.
- Don't give your dog delicious chews such as rawhides or pig's ears. Instead, give less delicious chew toys like non-edible Nylabones or Boodah Velvets. Your dog will be less likely to be possessive over them.
- When your dog's food bowl is empty, pick it up and put it away. Feed meals instead of leaving the dog food out all day.
- Do not touch your dog when sleeping. If your dog has a history of growling when resting or sleeping, do not allow your dog on your bed or furniture. Give your dog a dog bed instead.
- If you need to move your dog while resting or sleeping, don't physically pick up or push him or her. Instead, wake up your dog up with your voice, then call to come. If this doesn't work, toss a delicious treat (like cheese) away from the dog and resting area. When your dog follows the treat, praise him. An alternative is to allow your dog to wear a lightweight leash in the house only when you are home. When you want to move your dog, just pick up the leash and walk away.
- If your dog steals something, don't chase or reprimand. Instead, toss a delicious treat away from the dog and stolen item. When your dog drops the stolen item, praise him or her.
- If your dog is not possessive over toys, teaching a game of "fetch and drop" is a great exercise and helps to teach your dog to release items on cue. See [this cheat sheet](#) for how to teach your dog this great game.
- Advise all family members and visitors to follow the same rules. Do not leave food or chews around when visitors are at your house.
- Practice "Say Please." All family members should ask your dog to sit before they do anything for him: Before petting, greeting, leashing, opening the door, playing, putting the food bowl down, or giving a treat.

If your dog's possessive behavior becomes a problem, PLEASE CALL your adoption counselor. He or she will be able to direct you to a person who can help you.