

Trading Up

Sometimes dogs can become possessive of items that they perceive as “theirs”. This can escalate into a serious problem if not resolved. If you teach your dog early on that it pays to trade off, you may be able to prevent guarding behaviors from ever presenting themselves. I use this exercise to teach a dog or a puppy to relinquish items readily.

Trading toys: Have on hand two toys of equal value, for instance two tennis balls. You may want to have the dog or puppy on a leash to prevent him from running away with the toys. If the dog does grab the toy and run away with it, don't reward them by chasing. Simply stop the game and walk away.

Toss the toy a foot or so away. When the dog picks the toy up, say “give” or “drop it” and immediately show him that you have the other ball or toy. He should drop the toy in his mouth so that he can get the toy in your hand. When he does, toss the toy in your hand and pick up the toy he just dropped. When he picks up the toy you have tossed, say “give” or “drop it” and immediately show him the toy that you are holding. When he does, toss the toy in your hand and pick up the toy he just dropped. Repeat this exercise until the dog is readily dropping the toy each time.

Trading Food: Start with a fairly high value item such as a pig ear, a rawhide or cow hoof filled with a little squeeze cheese. You must have a very high value treat available such as pieces of chicken or roast beef.

Give the pig ear to the dog and as he takes the item in his mouth, say “drop it” or “give” and then wave the piece of roast beef in front of his nose. The dog will spit out the pig ear to take his food. When he does give the dog the roast beef and with the other hand pull away the pig's ear. Repeat this exercise 3 or 4 times and then let the dog finish the pig's ear in peace.

Next day, try simply reaching for the pig's ear. If you have done the first exercise, your hand reaching in should predict that good things are about to happen and the pup should release the item before the food appears. Repeat this as often as you can with as many items as you can.