

# How to Modify a Dog's Resource-Guarding Behavior

**1.** Prepare an ample supply of high-value treats that you can toss. Small bits of cheese or meat work well.

**2.** Tether your dog to an eye bolt affixed to the wall for that purpose, or to a solid, heavy object. Give him a valuable chew object (not a Kong – it will roll out of his reach!), or a small bowl of food.

**3.** As your dog chews or eats, walk past him, taking care to stay at a safe distance from him. This may be six to eight feet beyond the end of the tether, or it may be closer. As you pass, toss several treats where he can easily reach them, near the bowl or chewie. Keep walking; do not pause to toss the treats. If your dog growls, lunges, or shows other obvious guarding behavior, you are too close.



*No resource guarding here!*

**4.** Repeat Step 3 until, as you approach, you see your dog starting to look up in happy anticipation of the treats you are going to toss. When he does this consistently, decrease the distance between you by a few inches on your next passes.

**5.** Continue passing by and dropping treats, gradually decreasing the distance between you and your dog when you see that he is consistently happy (not showing any stiffness or signs of guarding) at each new distance.

**6.** When he is happy with you walking past at a distance close enough to touch him, pause as you pass, feed him a treat from your hand, then walk on.

**7.** When he stays happy with your pause-and-feed, gradually increase the length of time you pause and feed him. The increase should be no more than 1-2 seconds. As you increase the length of your pause, start talking to him in a happy voice as you feed him.

**8.** When you can pause for 10 seconds and he stays happy, occasionally bend slightly and drop a treat into his bowl or next to his chewie, then feed some more from your hand and walk on.

**9.** Repeat, gradually increasing the number of times you bend and drop treats for him.

**10.** Now gradually increase how much you bend over until you can touch the bowl or chewie. Remember, if you see any sign of tension you have moved too quickly. Back up a few steps and continue more slowly from there.

**11.** Finally, as you are pausing, bending, and feeding him, occasionally play the "trade game", always returning the bowl or object to him after he has happily allowed you to take it.

**12.** Now start the protocol over again at Step 1, with another person in your family serving as the passerby. Choose only an adult (or near-adult) who can follow your explicit instructions. Continue until your dog is comfortable with all family members approaching him, then repeat with trustworthy visitors, again starting with Step 1.

# Teaching the “Trade” Cue



In teaching your dog “Trade,” you are promising to give him something of value in exchange for the valuable item he has in his mouth. (Cat poop may be abhorrent to humans, but it is of very high value to many dogs!) Here’s how to teach “Trade.”

## 1. Say “Take it!” and give your dog a low-value object.

Offer your dog something he will easily and willingly give up in exchange for the high-value treat you will offer him next. (If his first instinct is to take the item and run, you may need to put a leash on him and step on the leash or tether him to something solid, so he can’t run off with the item before he realizes there are more potential benefits to this negotiation!)

## 2. Offer your dog some high-value treats.

You may need to hold the treats close enough to his nose that he can smell them, but don’t try to push them into his mouth; anything that resembles coercion will likely increase his resistance. Make sure you have a large enough supply of the high-value treats that it will take him a few moments to eat them.

If he doesn’t drop the object he has in his mouth in favor of your treats, you need a higher-value treat (think meat, not dry biscuits) and/or a lower-value item to trade for.

Notice you didn’t use a cue yet. We don’t add the cue until we know the dog will drop the item.

## 3. When your dog drops the item:

Click your clicker (or use a mouth click or verbal marker, such as the word “Yes!”), and while you keep him occupied nibbling at the high-value treats in one hand, with your other hand, pick up the object and hide it behind your back. This part is really important. You must use two hands! If you let him eat the high-value treat and then try to race him back to the object, you’re likely to lose the race – and you may elicit resource-guarding.

If you feel at all uncomfortable reaching for the item as your dog munches on the treats, you can sprinkle the treats in a short “Hansel and Gretel” trail, starting under his nose and leading to a spot a foot or two away from the dropped item. Engage his mouth with the treats in your hand after he follows the trail, while you pick up the item with your other hand.

## 4. As soon as your dog finishes eating the treats in your hand:

Bring out the object from behind your back, say, “Take it!” and give it back to him. This teaches him that he doesn’t always lose the item; he can trade with you and then get the item right back. This will make him more willing to trade again in the future. He gives you his good stuff, he gets more good stuff, and then he gets good stuff back again. It’s a win/win for him!

## 5. When you can reliably predict that your dog will drop the item when you offer your treats, add the cue.

Give your cue first (“Trade!”), and pause for a second or two. Then offer the treats, click (or say “Yes!”) when he drops the item, and pick up the item with your free hand while you keep his mouth busy nibbling treats from your hand.

## 6. After several repetitions, sometimes pause a few seconds longer before offering your dog treats.

Your goal is to get him to drop the object when you say, “Trade!” before you offer the treats. When he will do this reliably, it means you have the behavior “on cue” – that is, he is dropping the object because he heard and understood the cue, not just because you stuck high-value treats under his nose.

While ideally you will always have something in hand (or in pocket) to offer your dog in trade, if you train this behavior well enough and practice it often, in an emergency your dog will still give up that poisonous mushroom (or whatever) when he hears the “Trade!” cue. This is most likely to work if you use your cheerful “training game” voice and not an “Omigosh, it’s an emergency” panicked voice. Your training diligence might even save your dog’s life!