

# Guard, Stop and Swap

Dogs guard things because they think resources are scarce. The behaviour can be learned and **reinforced accidentally**.

In the past, too many trainers told us dogs should always give up the things we want, out of respect. An idea that led to conflict and mistrust between dogs and their people, **swapping is a much better lesson to learn**.

When a dog guards something, whether it's food, toys or even a person it's through **fear of loss**. We should **NEVER** directly confront the dog for the resource, as this will trigger aggression and make the dog believe that he must **bite** to keep the obviously precious resource, as everyone seems to want it.

**Any dog** that protects items such as toys or food treats can be taught to **swap**.

Swapping is an effective approach because it **defuses conflict** and **builds trust**. It should always be done carefully and in a **relaxed** manner and should set you and the dog up for **success**.

**Start slowly** and build up the things you can swap, until your dog knows that swapping anything at all, is **rewarding!** Begin by swapping things the dog does not normally guard and offer something much **better** as an alternative. This is known as working under threshold because the dog is learning in a **relaxed** and **happy** state of mind.

Learning to swap will begin with a **higher value reward** than the item the dog already has. So, if he has a ball, we offer a squeaky ball. If he's guarding a biscuit, we offer a bit of ham. A higher value reward will be extremely **motivational** for your dog. If you try to swap something of lower value, don't be surprised if your dog is reluctant.

Add a **cue word** to the act of swapping, it can simply be **"drop it"** and reward immediately. Then give the first item back. Practicing this only a few times will start to show your dog how rewarding it is, not to guard something. The relaxation will spread and instead of being scared to give something up, they will **look forward** to getting something in return.

**Swap things regularly with your dog and it will soon become second nature.**