

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol **Resource Guarding – Possession Aggression**

Protocol to be used on shelter dogs who exhibit low-medium level possession aggression (stiffening, whale eye, growling).

1. Teach the dog the **“drop it”** command. Allow the dog to have an item (start with lower-value item that the dog does not guard). Approach and show the dog a high-value treat. When the dog spits out the item to get the treat, say “drop it” and give the treat. Pick up item and return it to the dog. Repeat several times, then leave the dog with original item. Once the dog has associated the words “drop it” with the action (after a dozen or so times), start to use it as a command. When the dog has an item – say “drop it” and when he does – click and give him a treat. Eventually increase the value of the item he has possession of (you may also have to increase the value of the treat you use to get him to release the item). Repeat this daily with as many different items as possible.

2. Teach the dog the **“leave it”** command to move dog away from something. Have a helper tempt the dog with low-value item (dry food, boring toy). When the dog shows interest in the item lure her away with a higher value treat saying: “leave it” AS she is moving away from the item the helper is holding. Reward the dog with the treat when she has moved several feet away. Repeat this a dozen or so times until the dog has associated the command “leave it” with the act of moving away from something. Next: place a food treat on the floor just out of reaching range for the tethered dog and repeat the above (luring away several times and pairing the cue “leave it” with the act of walking away from the treat). Then start to use “leave it” to elicit the behavior. Allow the dog to become interested in something and say “leave it” without displaying the treat. When she comes away from the item – click and reward. Start with low value items and work your way up to more valuable items.

Counterconditioning Exercises (to be done along with or after the above work)

The dog should be tethered during these sessions:

- Step 1 Give the dog an item (bone, toy, etc.) and let him settle in with it (start with lower-value object). Then approach to within 6 feet and toss a piece of chicken (or other wonderful treat) to the dog (hopefully landing near the item he is chewing).
- Step 2 Repeat this at this distance until you see the dog anticipate the treat when you approach.
- Step 3 Repeat at increasingly closer distances over the course of several sessions.
- Step 4 Repeat steps with a higher-value object.

If at any step the dog demonstrates any guarding (including growling, stiffness, freezing), move back and proceed more gradually.

A person who has not participated in the behavior modification program should retest the dog when it is appropriate.