

Choice, Permission & Food Manners! (updated February 2025)

Establishing 'Food Manners' from Day #1! As soon as your puppy or dog comes to live with you, at his very first meal, start good habits around food resources! Your dog will learn to 'generalize' these rules around other 'resources' as well! Be consistent! Be kind! Let your puppy eat in peace. Teach him that great things happen when you come around his food. Don't take or touch his food or put your hands in his bowl. Instead offer new, super tasty treats as you approach, while he is eating. Would you want someone to take your food before you finish dinner? You just might reach out and smack someone's hand, right? But, if I approached & offered cheesecake, you might be more happy about me coming near you while you eat!



Always wait for your dog to sit & wait quietly during preparation, and for his meals, treats, or bones.



Begin meal routines with your new dog, by handfeeding meals for several weeks, and continue periodically thereafter. The handfeeding always includes 'Choice & Permissions' - your dog waiting for the food to come to him. You are teaching that access to food requires permission, and also teaches that hands bring great things!

A note on helping to create a 'soft mouth'. Deliver treats between thumb & forefinger, hanging onto the treat until you feel only the dog's tongue or lips...never release a treat if you feel teeth.



Put his bowl in your lap. Wait for a 'sit' (or at least standing back). Mark ('yes, good boy'), then, reach into his bowl and hand-feed some of his kibble. Repeat for 10-12X.



Next, put his bowl on floor in front of you waiting for a sit, hand-feed 10-12 pieces, first. Then, give permission, allowing him to eat freely. (no touching or handling while he eats from his bowl)



As the dog is eating a meal, leave him to eat in peace. DO NOT take his bowl away from him, put your hands in his bowl, touch the dog, etc. These are 'old-school' methods that can actually lead to resource guarding as you dog fears he may lose his meal.



Occasionally, you can walk up & put a special treat near the dog's bowl while he is eating. NOTE: same exercise should be done with bones or toys he really loves & wants to hang on to. Walk by, drop a super special treat. Your dog learns that great things happen when you come close to him when eating or chewing!



Eventually, walk closer to him while he is eating, holding the 'special treat' and wait for him to stop eating, then, give him the 'special treat'. NOTE: same exercise should be done with bones or toys he really loves & wants to hang on to - walk by, wait for him to look at you, then give a super special treat. Your dog learns that there is no need to 'guard' his food or bone or toy - he'll get a great treat when you come close AND will be allowed to go right back to food or bones or toys!



Teach your dog to come away from his food or toy. At a distance where your dog is not concerned about you, make a kissing noise or 'pup, pup, pup' and as soon as your dog LOOKS up, toss a treat towards him. Eventually, replace the sound with his name, mark when he looks up from his food (or toy) and reward when he comes away from his food (or toy). You can also do a counting game, laying down treats as you count aloud - your dog will likely become interested and leave his bowl for the treats. Repeat 2-3 times to show him that great things happen when he leaves his bowl! Always give permission to go back to his food (or toy).

THINK ABOUT THIS: If I gave you \$50 when you came away from \$20, you'd do that all day long!



Put a bowl of treats down on your living room floor. Be there to watch it, and be ready, if he goes for it, to 'control' it, not 'correct the dog'. Simply cover the bowl with your hand. Wait. When he moves back from the bowl/treats or just sits or lies down, pick up the bowl, mark, and give him a treat! Put the bowl away!



Start leaving food bowls around the house, in random places (usually on a table or shelf). These are great to have around your house, at the ready, so you can reach for them when you catch great behaviors and want to reinforce what your dog is doing!



Practice walking with your dinner plate, or leaving your dinner plate on the coffee table! Remember, control the plate, not the dog. Give him a treat when he is no longer showing interest in your own food.



Stop 'begging' immediately by sending your dog to a 'place' while you eat and/or if he begs for food.

(Sources: Terry Ryan, 'How to Coach People...'; Ian Dunbar, 'Good Little Dog Book'; ASPCA: <https://www.aspcare.org/pet-care/dog-care/common-dog-behavior-issues/food-guarding>)

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