

Does Your Dog Trust You?

Does Your Dog Trust You? by Marilyn Anderson

What happens when you "drop it" or "give"? Be honest, now!

A dog's basic nature is to hang onto or defend things which they feel belong to them. Because many dog guardians usually accept this as a natural behavior, it is one of the reasons dogs often are allowed to make their own rules and set their own boundaries. It might help to know that dogs have a comfort zone. Also, they understand fairness. There is a fair way to nurture a dog's second nature by tapping into their comfort zone, teaching them to relinquish any object without argument or struggle. Unless we, as Leaders [of the Pack] take time to first teach our dogs what a certain word or phrase means-drop it, give, sit, no bite, stay-it is not fair to expect them to respond to that command. Rehearsal is necessary to produce the desired response until the desired response become second nature.

Rehearsal: The act of practicing in private for a public performance.

Begin with an object of little or no interest to your dog, something you almost have to place into her mouth (an empty paper towel roll or maybe a wooden dowel). It should be large enough so that your hand is still holding it while it is in her mouth. Politely request Drop It or Give as you remove it from her mouth while warmly praising her. Rehears with this same object over and over for a few days.

Next, advance to rehearsing for a few days in the same way with an object in which your dog has a mild interest. When you feel that your dog understands what is expected when she hears the command, you are ready to advance to an object she likes but is not overly possessive of, perhaps one of her toys.

Follow the same procedure, but now offer her a treat or another toy while praising her for releasing the object. Advance to practicing with things she really likes and reward her intermittently with a treat or another equally special object. You must also on occasion pretend to examine or admire the object as you praise her for the release of the object, and then give it back to her. This is a very important part of her lesson. You, the Leader, are fair. You can be trusted. Your ultimate goal here is to teach your dog to feel comfortable giving up any object when requested to do so.

How you present your request (tone) is just as important as your praise. Be polite, positive, and confident. Dogs respond in kind to our attitude and the manner in which we speak to them.

If you have a food bowl-guarding problem, do not leave food available for your dog to eat whenever he feels like it. Measure out the amount you want to give, place a small amount in the bowl and stand right next to him as he eats it. Pick up the bowl and add another small amount. Repeat this procedure, but leave the bowl on the floor as you now place a small handful in the bowl, each time waiting for him to finish and repeating the process, until he is finished with his measured amount. Softly praise him each time he relaxes as your hand reaches into the bowl. If he tenses up or growls, do not scold him. Be calm and confident. You are not taking, you are giving-and you have every right to do it your way.

If your dog has previously snapped in a food-related situation, prepare yourself in advance with BBQ tongs to pick up the bowl. (Teeth will bite hard metal instead of soft hand.) This is a serious problem to work out, so go slowly, but do not give up. Providing "bonus" tidbits of cheese or cooked meat may also help your dog want you to put your hand into his bowl! Always praise sincerely for cooperation. This lesson must be handled by adults only! This is not a problem a child can or should work to eradicate.