

## Annie, a reformed resource guarder

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I got Annie, a nine month old female Belgian Tervuren puppy, in the middle of November. She'd been with her breeder and due to Life Stuff happening to her breeder, Annie spent a lot of time with a couple of other younger dogs, including two of her littermates.

The other two dogs ("the boys") in my household are Hunter, a nine year old male Belgian Tervuren, and Orion, a seven year old male Belgian Sheepdog. There are also four female cats ("the girls"), Holly, Mist, Daisy and Lily.

When Annie came here, we noticed immediately that she had a very exaggerated resource guarding response from the other animals in the household. If she had a toy or chewie and another animal so much as twitched in the same room, she was up, shrieking and growling loudly, hackled and showing teeth. Sometimes she air snapped at the offender but it was always at a distance of more than six feet. It was worse with the boys but it was pretty bad even with the cats. It was certainly a reaction that was way out of line with the magnitude of possible threat. Her breeder confirmed that she'd been resource guarding before she left. I did a little careful testing and discovered that Annie had no problems with a human offering a trade or even just taking the object from her.

So, it was just directed at other animals, dogs in particular but also cats.

The rule in my household is that no one steals from another animal. If it's in another animal's mouth or between that animal's front paws, it belongs to that animal. But once that animal leaves the toy or chewie, it is fair game for anyone else. The dogs are pretty good at observing this rule, the cats need occasional reminders (my cats are horrible about bullying the dogs).

Hunter and Orion have always been good about just backing off if a fearful dog makes a threat display and Annie's displays seemed pretty fearful. I kept an eye on the situation and whenever one of the boys turned away from Annie's fits, I gave them quiet verbal praise. They were welcome to come to me for special scratches as well and frequently did so.

Over the first two weeks she was with us, she became much calmer about toys and chewies when the boys were around. She was a little slower to calm down with the cats, since they are so bad about violating the personal space of the dogs and it took a few verbal reminders from me to the cats to back off before Annie could finally relax with them as well.

By the middle of December, Annie was no longer making any threat displays. In fact, she was secure enough to do ceremonial trades with Orion when we handed out pig ears. Hunter is a methodical pig ear chewer; he just lays down and methodically consumes his ear. He doesn't care about any other ears, he just concentrates on the one he has. However Orion and Annie are both shoppers. They chew the ear they were given for a few minutes, then they start looking around

and clearly wondering if someone else's ear might just be better than what they have.

So Orion and Annie now have a ritual at pig ear time. They lie down in the sphinx position facing each other and with their front feet about two feet apart. They each chew their own ear until one of them stops chewing and starts to eye the other's ear. It's pretty evenly divided whether Annie or Orion starts the eyeing. After a few seconds of mutual eyeing, they get up, switch positions and chew on the other's ear for a few minutes. It takes them about half an hour to consume a whole ear (we buy the specially sorted jumbo ears!) and they usually trade five or six times.

We feed homemade food and about every other meal for the dogs consists of frozen chicken hindquarters. Frozen chicken parts encourage each dog to thoroughly chew rather than just gulping them whole. And with the horrid winter we're having, they need all the chewing they can get to ward off cabin fever!

I realized Annie was completely over the resource guarding when I saw Hunter and Orion each walk past her, less than six inches away while she finished her chicken and Annie had absolutely no reaction at all.

The cats are back at their old game of fishing treats out from under dog noses with lightning fast scoops of the paw. They now include Annie in their depredations and Annie has no reaction at all except to look to the human dispensing treats for her replacement treat.

At least so far as my own household is concerned, Annie is a reformed resource guarder. We'll see how she feels about other people's dogs later this month when I take care of a friend's dogs for a few days. I know my friend's dogs also have good toy and chewie manners, so I'm not really anticipating any problems.

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