

FOOD BOWL EXERCISES

READ THIS FIRST!!

There is **ALWAYS** a risk of injury when working with an aggressive dog. You may be bitten while performing these exercises. Following the instructions outlined below **does not** guarantee safety or ensure that a bite or attack will not occur. Never use these exercises or any others designed to change an aggressive dog's behavior unless you fully understand the methods and principles of the exercises and are willing to risk injury.

Preconditioning

1. Spend at least two to four weeks at this level.
2. Feeding: Feed two to three times daily. Confine the pet to an area away from feeding room. Place its food in the feeding room. Bring the pet to feeding room, leave and close the door until the pet finishes or 30 minutes pass.
3. Attend class or review obedience training, occasionally using highly desirable food treats as reinforcers. Practice until the pet will do a very reliable sit/stay.
4. Perform leadership exercises:
 - a. Make the pet sit or lie down before it gets **anything** it wants.
 - b. Don't allow the pet to acquire anything by demanding it.
 - c. Make the pet stay and wait for a release to follow you out of a room, up and down stairs, through hallways, and in and out of the home.
 - d. Continue indefinitely as long as the pet is exhibiting any signs of aggression.
5. Increase the amount of time spent exercising with the pet or engaging in other types of pleasurable, safe activities.
6. Teach 'fetch' and 'drop it' using only positive reinforcement.
7. Avoid situations that elicit aggression from the pet.
8. Avoid punishment.
9. *Do not begin the following conditioning exercises if:*
 - a. You cannot guarantee complete control of access to food by the dog at **all** times (a difficult task if young children live in the home).
 - b. The pet will not perform a reliable sit/stay on command.
 - c. The pet lunges toward a person with a highly desirable food treat in the hand.
 - d. You lack confidence, lack control, or feel exceptionally nervous in the presence of the pet.
 - e. You don't completely understand all aspects of the training program.
 - f. You have **any** reservations about conducting the exercises.

PHASE ONE: Habituation to the owner's presence

- Necessary equipment: 2 bowls, dry food, highly desirable food treats (quarter to half-inch pieces of meat or cheese), 6 feet of rope.
- Optional equipment: leash, head halter.
- The room in which to do the exercises should be at least 10 feet by 10 feet wide. If the pet is more likely to be protective in the room in which it is usually fed, start the exercises in a room other than that room. Later in the program, the exercises can be moved to the original feeding room.

First week of food bowl conditioning

1. To provide a higher degree of safety, a head halter and leash can be attached to the pet and a second person hold the leash for control. Use a very happy tone of voice during all of the exercises.
2. Begin the session by requesting several obedience responses that are rewarded with highly desirable food treats.
3. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.

4. Request a sit/stay.
5. Place the bowl on the floor and release the dog to eat.
6. Place another portion of food in the second bowl, walk a safe distance away (6 to 10 feet), ignore it and wait for the pet to finish eating.
7. When the pet finishes, call it, request a sit/stay, place the food bowl on the floor and release it to eat.
8. Place the third portion of food in first bowl, walk a safe distance away (6 to 10 feet) and wait for the pet to finish eating.
9. When the pet finishes, call it, request a sit/stay, place a bowl of food on floor and release it to eat.
10. Repeat until the meal allotment is finished.
11. Occasionally (every second or third trial, at random) slip a highly desirable food treat into the food bowl before placing it on the floor.
12. Occasionally drop a highly desirable food treat into the bowl just as the pet begins eating.

Second week

1. Repeat the above exercise but decrease the distance between the areas where the bowl is placed by one foot.
2. Gradually request longer stay responses. Vary the duration of the stay.

Following weeks

1. Every one to two weeks, decrease the distance between the areas where the bowl is placed by another six to 12 inches.
2. During the exercises, watch closely for signs of problems, especially during the phases when you remain close during feeding:
 - Growling, lifting lip, hackles up
 - Slow, stiff tail movement
 - Prolonged gaze toward a family member
 - Hesitancy approaching food
 - Slow, stiff, or cautious behavior
 - Nervous glancing
 - Eating slower
 - Yawning
 - Change in carriage of the ears

If you note these behaviors by your pet, stop the session, call the pet to another area of the home, and leave it. Return to the feeding room and place the remaining food in the bowl and return the pet to that room to eat on its own. On the following day, continue the sessions at a previous, less interactive level. If you have **any** doubt about how to proceed if a problem occurs, be sure to call the behavior therapist before proceeding.

PHASE TWO: Dog and owner together

1. Begin this phase when you have been able to safely stand next to the pet through the whole session of sit/stay, give food bowl, sit/stay, give a second bowl, etc., for at least two weeks.
2. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.
3. Wait until the dog has eaten several allotments of food. While the dog is eating, call its name, show it a highly desirable food treat (meat or cheese), ask it to sit/stay, give it the treat, release it to finish eating.
4. Continue to interrupt the dog at random intervals to sit/stay while it is feeding, gradually increasing the length of the stay.
5. Occasionally slip a highly desirable food treat into the bowl before giving it to the pet.
6. Stay at this level for at least two to four weeks.

PHASE THREE: Bowl in hand

1. Request a sit/stay, release the dog to stand and eat out of the bowl that is being held in your hand.
2. Occasionally slip a highly desirable food treat into the bowl before giving it to the pet.
3. Occasionally interrupt the pet with a sit/stay and hand feed a treat.
4. Stay at this level for at least two to four weeks.

PHASE FOUR: Withdraw bowl while hand feeding

1. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.
2. Request a sit/stay, release the dog to eat out of the bowl that is being held in your hand.
3. Occasionally call the pet's name, ask it to 'stop' in an upbeat tone, give it a highly desirable food treat, and withdraw the bowl at the same time.
4. Ask it to sit/stay, extend the bowl to the dog and release it to eat from the bowl in your hand.
5. Repeat.
6. After seven to 10 days, occasionally say 'good dog' instead of giving a treat.
7. Stay at this level for at least two to four weeks.

PHASE FIVE: Take the bowl on the floor away with a rope

1. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.
2. Attach a rope to the bowl so that it can be pulled away from a distance.
3. Request a sit/stay.
4. Place the bowl on the floor and release the dog to eat.
5. After the pet has eaten about half of its ration, occasionally ask it to 'stop,' sit/stay, and give a highly desirable food treat. Immediately repeat the 'stay' command as you pull the bowl away with the attached rope.
6. Pick up the bowl.
7. Repeat. Gradually use a shorter rope.
8. Stay at this level for at least two to four weeks.

PHASE SIX: Picking up the bowl

1. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.
2. Request a sit/stay.
3. Place the bowl on the floor and release the dog to eat.
4. Occasionally ask the pet to 'stop,' sit/stay, and give it a highly desirable food treat as you pick up the bowl.
5. Give it another treat.
6. Repeat. After seven to 10 days, occasionally say 'good dog' instead of giving a treat.
7. Stay at this level for at least two to four weeks.

PHASE SEVEN: Touching the pet

1. Place 1/8 of the dog's meal ration in the first bowl.
2. Request a sit/stay.
3. Place the bowl on the floor and release the dog to eat.
4. Occasionally ask the pet to 'stop,' sit/stay, and give it a highly desirable food treat or say 'good dog.'
5. As the pet takes the treat from one hand, move the other hand toward its head or shoulder (whichever it is more likely to tolerate), but stop at a safe distance of approximately 24 inches away.
6. As the weeks pass, repeat the above steps. Very, very gradually move the hand toward the pet until it can be lightly touched for one second as it accepts the food. Very, very gradually during following sessions make longer contact with the hand. Work on other areas of the body.

PHASE EIGHT

Repeat the above exercises, starting with phase one, in other rooms of the home.