



The teddy bear story – Blue’s favourite bone

Blue runs into the living room with Sarah’s teddy bear in his mouth. When he sees his favourite bone on the carpet, he throws the teddy bear underneath the cupboard and starts chewing his tasty bone. Sarah is looking for her teddy bear and sees Blue chewing his bone. She reaches out her hand and wants to stroke Blue. But then oh!... Blue growls and shows his teeth, as if to say: “Go away from my bone.”

Why is Blue growling?

Blue has found his favourite bone and he is enjoying it on the carpet. When Sarah approaches, he thinks she might want to steal his bone. Therefore, Blue considers this a challenge and reacts defensively towards Sarah.

How to prevent this situation?

Children – Children should learn that particular objects, such as a bone, might be a very highly valued resource for the dog. They may understand this better by comparing it to one of their own prized possessions – eg a boy may value a particular truck or a train toy and girls a particular doll. How would they feel if someone tried to steal this special toy? So by explaining that dogs might feel the same about their bone might help the child to understand why it is useful to leave the dog alone when chewing a bone.

Parents – Parents can talk with their children about how the dog might feel about his own toys, rating them in order of importance. Get into the habit of limiting access to highly valued items (eg: bones or pigs' ears) to when the dog is within his kennel with the door closed; avoid leaving them lying around in the house. When the children learn this rule, they can be encouraged to tell their parents when they see a bone lying around, rather than approaching it.

Dog – Bones or rawhide can be important resources for a dog, even when he is not chewing them at that very moment. Therefore, if a child approaches the bone it may be considered as a competitive action ("Someone wants to take my bone away"). Anticipating risk situations at different levels is advisable: Control the dog's access to bones and rawhide to suitable times and situations. Ensure they are not lying around in the house by keeping them in a closed box. Remember that chewing a bone might take some time, so restrict access to those times and situations when he is on his own rather than when the children are playing around.

What about your dog?

How does your dog behave when in possession of his bone? Does he readily give it back when you (the adult) ask him for it? Does he take a defensive attitude when you approach the bone or when someone passes by? If you observe any signs of distress or aggression (growling, biting, snapping) in your dog around a bone consider these signals as serious. Contact your veterinarian or an animal behaviour counsellor.