

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Over the past week, my soon to be six-month-old Border Collie has started attacking some of the other dogs in my household. And when I say attacking, I don't mean in a playful, "Hey, you want to have a little ramp kind of way." Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. What I've been seeing in my puppy is something called resource guarding, or it sometimes goes by the name of possession aggression.

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Today I'm going to share the experiences that I've seen and what I'm currently doing about the challenge. And if you're watching this on YouTube and you'd like to see more of how a professional dog trainer deals with their own challenges, go ahead and hit the like button for me right now. You see there's two forms of resource guarding.

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One is when a dog guards things against their human. And the other is when a dog guards things against other dogs. And what the dog is saying is I find this valuable and I don't want to lose it. This is something that is maybe scarce in my life. I want to hold onto it. That's what's going on in their brain.

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What I've been seeing with my puppy, This! is strictly resource guarding against other dogs. Now, what does that look like? You might see the overt sign, you know, is a dog that just growls, but it starts very subtly. So, you might see a dog suddenly freeze near what they call a resource. Now it could be a location.

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For example, This! likes to guard her nail cutting station because she's got some phenomenal treats every day for the past several months on that nail cutting station, it's a raised dog bed. So, she might guard that if a dog comes in the room, she might just get up and go in front of it and freeze. So, a body freeze. And just the eyes tracking the other dog. The body, the head doesn't move.

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It's not a relaxed posture at all. You might see a dog lip curl, which she doesn't do. You might hear a growl. Now with This!, it's not a confident growl. It's a growl that starts low but goes into a shrill peak. You might see something that she will do is charge at the dog and just body bump them. Or she might escalate to grabbing their face with her mouth.

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Now she's not like biting to draw blood. She's not getting in a fight. Other dogs might air snap, but all of these signs are directed at another dog in the presence of a resource is what's referred to as resource guarding. Personally, I find that resource guarding when it's against people is actually easier to counter condition and desensitize than it is when it's resource guarding against another dog.



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Resource Guarding: Dog vs Dog Aggression

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But it's not something that I have not seen before, because I have owned seven Border Collies in my life. A couple of them have been related. But every one of them has shown some sort of resource guarding. My first Border Collie Stoni resource guarded her food bowl and- quite badly against my other two Terriers.

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My second Border Collie Buzz resource guarded me against other dogs. And then Encore - massive resource guarder against toys. And funny enough when I picked her up from the breeder, the breeder handed over and said, "Oh, by the way, all the dogs in my line are resource guarders." And then when I got Feature, completely not even remotely related to the first three Border Collies I owned she resource guarded leashes and my shoes.

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And none of these dogs resource guarded against me - all against other dogs. So, it continues, it goes down the line. And for This! she resources guards locations, and resources like food, mostly food rarely toys, but it occasionally has been toys as well. And so, what happens with resource guarding is people take one of two approaches.

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And if you take one of these two approaches, there is a really good possibility that you will end up with an all-out aggressive dog as an adult. A dog that may have to be euthanized because of the decision you took here. So, what some people will do is they ignore it. They say, "Oh, he'll grow it a bit. I'll just, I'll just you know let him, let him grow up." Yeah, that's putting a lot of trust in that a dog might outgrow it. And a lot of dogs do not outgrow it. Oh listen, in actual fact the opposite happens. It escalates.

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The second approach is that people discipline it, and they discipline it because it doesn't make sense. Like think of it from a human being point of view. If you're at a party and somebody suddenly, you know, runs up when you go near the vegan chocolate chip cookies and pushes you out of the way and says, "Back off!" like instantly you say "That's weird. You're weird. You're wrong. You're being aggressive." And so that's the label people put on these little puppies or dogs when they do it.

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And so, they discipline them. They correct them. They tell them the wrong and it's like pouring gasoline on a fire. Because, let me tell you what else happens around the same time resource guarding shows up. At about five or six months of age your puppy goes through their second fear period, which if you've seen some of my videos, I've showed you This! going kangaroo barking off at things she sees in the distance that are zero threat, and that she's seen every day of her life.

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She might start barking in the building at things that I'm not sure what's going on. So that's a puppy that's going to her obvious fear period. Side bar on puppies going through fear periods. What's my reaction when that happens? Well, if you've saw in that video, I generally just laugh. I stay grounded and calm and I'll say things like, "Whoa, did that car scare you? That's a big, scary car out in the distance."



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Or “Did you see a boogeyman? I didn't see a boogeyman. How about you come back here and tug?” And the other thing I do once I see my dog going into a fear period like that, I try to be sure that I take another dog out with me when we're going places so that she can [borrow confidence](#). And even if she does go off, she might look at the other adult dog going, “Uh, what's your deal?” And the puppy is going, “Oh, I'm a little embarrassed. I thought there was something. There's nothing, right?” “No, there's nothing youngster.”

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And so, I borrow that confidence. But the important thing is I don't get frustrated or disappointed or angry. Remain grounded, remain calm, observe and then decide what's going to happen next. Now, super important, I cannot say this enough, if you're dealing with any kind of aggression in your dog please see a Certified Veterinarian Behaviorist. And I say Veterinarian Behaviorist, because if you go to a Veterinarian Behaviorist, yes, you're going to pay more money. But you're going to get somebody who's a science-based trainer. Who has gone through— Has got a degree to prove that they understand the behavior of dog.

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There's also people who call themselves dog behaviorists. And those are people who've just grown up with dogs and think they know they understand their behavior. I have been around dogs and I actually studied behavior in university, but I still call myself a dog trainer. So please if you have a problem, don't mess around. This could end your dog's life. So, if this is a serious problem, take it seriously and get a consult just to make sure you're on the right track.

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Say, “Hey, this is what I learned from Susan Garrett's podcast. You think I'm on the right track?” And hopefully they're gonna say, “Yeah, you got a puppy? Is it a fear period?” So, fear period, I don't have confidence therefore “He's just going to take my stuff, man. I got to go. I got to check my stuff.” Who knows what goes on in that little brain?

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Also, when a puppy goes from puppyhood and they're becoming an adolescent, what happens to a female when they become an adolescent? Somewhere in the next few months, I'm going to have her first heat period. Well, I'm not going to have it, actually she's going to have it. But hormones are going to re— that she's going to be six months old in another week.

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That first heat could happen at any time from now until whenever. So, hormones could be involved with This!. And so, you've got to recognize that what we want to do is number one, help to create confidence in that dog. That's an important thing. And number two, we want to eliminate these rehearsals of resource guarding, if at all possible. Now it may not be possible unless you keep your dog in a kennel and never let them see another dog. And I don't think that's very good either.

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Let me just share a great resource [Jean Donaldson's book Mine!](#) - if you're dealing with dog, human resource guarding, this is a great book. It's a great book at any kind of resource guarding, anything from Jean Donaldson is amazing. A fellow Canadian, by the way. She's awesome. Shout out to Jean.



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So, here's what I'm doing. Here's what I'm doing with This!. First of all, I've changed her living environment. Let me, let me just take a step back. When did I first notice this? I first noticed that This! was coming on a month ago. And so, I managed, and what I saw was when we had food sitting out on the counter to thaw for the dogs in the dog area, she would just, if there was another dog that was going to go down in that area, she would just run down ahead of them and just sit by the food.

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Not growling, not doing anything just like, "Yeah, I got this. You don't need to come near. I got it." And that escalated to just a little growl in the last couple of weeks. I noticed if she had a bone in her ex-pen, now her ex-pen is in the middle of the kitchen, her exercise pen. She might charge at the fence. Not growling, not snapping, just charging to make a noise at the fence. And so, what we've done is we've moved that ex-pen up against the wall. My hallucination and again guys, we do not know what our dogs are thinking. All we can do is make the best choices to help create more confidence and comfort.

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So, I've moved the ex-pen up against the wall and we've put a blanket around that ex-pen so that she can see out in one side, but it's more like a den for her so that she doesn't feel like, you know, like she's on display and she has to protect her stuff. Right. So, we've created a different environment for her. Number one thing you're going to do. If you have a puppy or a dog who's resource guarding, if it's a dog, please, you know, don't mess around with this. Get your Veterinarian Behaviorist on speed dial.

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The first thing you're going to do is get yourself a **journal**. I just took a regular notebook and everybody that's in the house right now, we're tracking what's going on. And so, what we have is every day I write the time and we're writing the good things and the not so good things. The time, the resource that the puppy was guarding, the location she was guarding, the dog she was targeting, what her action was, what the outcome was.

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And the outcome is because we're never leaving her alone with other dogs, one of us is going to be around to respond. To respond and all that I'm doing right now is we are getting her to jump in a Hot Zone or a dog bed. That's where she's going to go. I want to break the trance of her fixating on that other dog. So as soon as we see that stiffness, we'll ask her to go. And if she's in her ex-pen, I've put two dog beds in there. So, she can just jump from one to another - that's enough to get her out of that state. And we instantly reinforce her for getting into the other bed.

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Okay. So, by journaling, I know that her main target is Tater Salad. Now, Tater and This! love to play tug. But what has happened in the last, I would say three weeks with Tater is if he sees the puppy has a toy, he runs up and grabs it out of her mouth.

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Now he does that, our thought process was, "Oh, he's trying to play tug with her." But could that have led to her wanting to guard her resources? Who knows? As I mentioned, this is something I commonly see with Border Collie puppies. So, it's not that anything we did or didn't do is the cause.



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There is definitely a nature, a genetic component, and there is a nurture. And this is what I want you guys to get right. Because if you get the nurture part wrong, you could end up with a lot of problems. Remember, do not ignore it hoping it goes away. Do not discipline the puppy. It's telling them they're bad. Do not. If you discipline a growl, you're going to get a bite. Right? Okay. So, journal, journal, journal, journal. And then you're going to know, what are the top resources.

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So, you want to **identify what are those triggers and remove them**. Remove them - so if you know like I knew Feature as a puppy only guarded leashes and my shoes. I just started putting my shoes away and hanging the leashes up. She never resource guarded anything else with the other dogs. And eventually she— we gave the confidence, you know, all of the great behaviors we did to help build confidence. And never had a problem with her when she became an adult dog.

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All right. So, identify and remove the triggers. Unfortunately, for me with This! there's a lot of triggers. It's toys, it's food, it's locations. And so, it's not going to be as simple as that. So, number one journal. Number two, identify and remove those triggers. Number three **create a safe environment** for her. And that's where I've done with the ex-pen, moving it back against a wall and covering it on three sides. And then you want to have to **rank your reinforcers**. In [podcast number 59](#), I gave you an exercise where I told you it's really important to know what's really high ranking and what's lower ranking.

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If we were working on resource guarding against people, it would be a different protocol. And I would start with really high value food. But the challenge is when it's resource guarding against another dog. If we put outrageously high value food, like on the counter so that I could reinforce her when another dog goes by, she's just going to guard that outrageously reinforcing food.

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So, what I'm doing, and what I suggest you do is you go to middle of the road food. So, it doesn't— So she doesn't go, "Oh my gosh, that's my best. I got to guard this." All right. So, you're going to know what your food is. And you're going to focus on playing games like [ItsYerChoice](#), as I said, the *Hot Zone*, a *retrieve* so she'll bring things to you when she feels she has to guard it. I asked her to bring it to me. I give her a reinforcer, ask her to get in the Hot Zone. Ask the dog to get in the Hot Zone. And I reinforce them both.

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I spend a lot of time calling the dogs - and now you can't do this if your dog is really escalating, but you might start with dogs across the room and just throw reinforcements to each one. With This! I can get the dog super close and just hand out cookies. And that's what I've been doing since I saw her sitting about a month ago, sitting in the dog room, looking up at the food on the counter. I started this. Calling dogs in and just giving everyone cookies.

And a lot of the times you'll see resource guarding there with puppies where they'll start snapping at the adults. Have never seen that with her. All right. So, have those go-to behaviors. And again, for me they are *Hot Zone*, Recalls or *recalls* so that she will come get in Hot Zone. And [ItsYerChoice](#) so she has control if there's a cookie on the ground, she doesn't try and grab it and eat it. And if another dog comes near her, she snarks at it.



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My puppy knows that cookies on the ground are not for her to grab. And the *retrieve*, the *Bring Me!*. Now all of those behaviors I've been teaching since she was a wee puppy. So, she knows them brilliantly. She will drop a toy when I say out. So, if there's a resource that she's got, and I think another dog, I might ask her out, come back to me and she can earn high-value reinforcement.

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All right. So, **you've got to journal**, you've got to **create a safe environment** for your dog to live in when you can't be supervising, you've got to always **supervise** your puppy when there's another dog around. You're journaling to pick out what are those triggers, and then you're removing the triggers.

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You're **ranking your reinforcement**. And then we're working on **desensitizing** the dog and **counter conditioning**. It's a long process. And if you have a serious problem again, I remind you, seek out the help of a Certified Veterinarian Behaviorist. If you don't have those behaviorists, I talked about *Hot Zone*, *recall*, *ItsYerChoice*, *Bring Me!* and *out*. Then I'm going to do something I've only done one other time. And that is on a previous podcast. I said, I will let you join. I'll open registration for my podcast listeners to join [Recallers](#). I believe this is such an important thing. You've got to get those behaviors under control.

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So, if you [send my team an email](#) and it says, 'I need help' in the subject line, that's what it needs to say. They will know you listen to this podcast episode. Episode number 66. They will know that you want help with your dog to learn those basic behaviors. Now, of course, Recallers is so much more, but those are the things that we're going to focus on. And they're going to give you access to for registration link so you can join.

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But again, this is just for people who are listening to this podcast now. Because it's serious. You can't ignore it. Please, please, please don't listen to anybody that tells you, you need to discipline your dog when he does this. Because the disciplining a dog for doing something they don't really have control over is going to make them more anxious.

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And when they get more anxious, they're going to respond more what we call with the lizard brain, and you're going to have a lifetime problem. It doesn't need to be a lifetime problem. All of my Border Collies grew up, none of them ended up being resource guarders. I would take maybe Stoni, the very first dog that Border Collie I ever had. She maybe had a little bit of it, but very little, none of my other dogs had it.

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So, you can fix this. But the most important thing that you have to be patient because it's a boring process. Anytime we have a behavior issue, we want to keep our dog under threshold, so they don't rehearse that behavior. And keeping a dog under threshold. Training under threshold is boring. But overcoming behavior challenges, in that case boring is beautiful. So, I love boring training when it results in creating a confident dog who doesn't have these lingering resource guarding problems. All right. So that's it.



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Remember send an email to my team if you are in need of help - 'I need help'. And we will give you access to join Recallers today. All right. You know, normally it's not open. It's not open. You go to my website. It'll say Recallers is closed. You listen to this podcast, it will be open for you to register today.

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Please leave me a comment. Let me know what you've done to help your dog overcome any resource guarding. And please don't take this lightly and please trust the people who have really great experiences with this. And leave me a comment if you'd like me to do a follow up to let you know more about what I'm doing or what's helping in helping This! with this challenge. I'll see you next time on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 45: My Dog Just Got Jumped. Now What?](#)

[Book: Mine! A Practical Guide to Resource Guarding in Dogs by Jean Donaldson](#)

[Podcast Episode 59: Why Your Treats Aren't Working for Your Dog](#)

[Game: Learn How to Play ItsYerChoice \(IYC\)](#)

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[Recallers](#)



About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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