



Riff Raff is a four-year-old male, ex-racing greyhound who has lived with us now for about eight months. He settled in remarkably quickly, making himself very much at home. He also made friends with our other Greyhound Twiggy and our Labrador Quiff.

I've lived with dogs for over 20 years and for the vast majority of that time we have had a multiple dog household. Naturally, that can bring challenges sometimes. So, for me, one of the most important things is that all of our dogs feel that they are being treated fairly by the humans and with no favouritism. However, this short tale highlights how easy it is for any of us to make a mistake.

Riff Raff had been with us for probably less than two weeks when one evening I decided to give all of the dogs a puzzle toy each that contained some of their food and some squirry cheese. Probably a very relevant point for the rest of the story here is that Riff Raff was underweight and very food

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motivated when he arrived. Anyway, I gave everybody their puzzle toy and they each got on with interacting with it and eating the food. No problem at all. I noticed that Riff Raff had devoured the squirty cheese very quickly. I thought it would be a nice idea to let him have a little bit more. So, I went to the fridge, got out the tube of cheese and approached Riff Raff. At this time the puzzle feeder was lying next to him and he seemed to be showing no interest in it at all. I was very tired and had had a long day so was not really thinking properly. As I went to pick up the toy (with the best of intentions to give him a little bit more cheese in it) I was met with his jaws chomping down on my lower arm. This happened extremely quickly, and he let go immediately. He left no mark or bruise on my arm. However, I was left in no doubt that he had just given me a stern warning. Whilst I would've preferred him to have growled rather than gone straight for a bite, I could see things from his point of view. He had no idea that I was going to give him more of the cheese that he had just really enjoyed and didn't want to lose. In that moment, Riff Raff was protecting his new puzzle toy from me. This type of behaviour is often referred to as *resource guarding*. I realised my mistake and simply walked away to diffuse the situation. Much later on when he had forgotten all about the puzzle feeder and had gone into the garden, I removed it.

Of course this presented a potential problem. It is possible for animals to experience something called *single event learning*. This is where an experience is so potent that even if it only occurs once the animal remembers it and behaves in the same way the next time they find themselves in a similar situation. This phenomenon is something that I take advantage of when teaching an emergency recall. However in this case it could've caused a lot of trouble. This is because Riff Raff didn't know me very well at this time I needed to make sure that this single event didn't prompt him to feel threatened around food or objects that he valued in the presence of humans or other dogs. Some may say that I should have stood my ground and punished Riff Raff, bringing him down a peg or two to let him know he had done wrong. However, as I see it I had already inadvertently punished him by threatening to take his toy away (even though that wasn't my intention). This is a process called *negative punishment* (the removal of an anticipated 'reward'). I wanted to build a relationship of trust with Riff Raff. We worked on the approach of humans predicting good things happening. It didn't take long for him to cotton on.

These days he is calm around food and toys and happy to wait patiently while his meals are prepared. He is still a hungry dog due to weight loss caused by chronic pancreatitis. This has only been recently diagnosed and flare ups are painful. For all I know, Riff Raff may have been in discomfort when I wanted to give him a bit more squirty cheese. My reaching towards the toy may have been the last straw causing the reaction he had. Sadly, he can't have cheese any more owing to his medical condition. Fortunately, he loves his new special diet though. Imagine if I had 'put him in his place' that night. What damage would that have done to our fledgling relationship?

Since that event, we have worked on making sure that the approach of humans or other dogs towards Riff Raff when he has something of value to him means that even better things are going to come along too.

Resources guarding can pop up with any dog and sometimes over unexpected things. If you see this in your dog, help is available and there's no need for punishment.

About the blog author:

Julie Daniels is a certified companion animal behaviourist, professional dog trainer and academic scientist in the field of Regenerative Medicine and Cellular Therapy, where she has veterinary eye disease collaborations. Julie's specialist interest is in working with animal emotions, the critical and often misunderstood key to preventing and resolving problematic animal behaviours. Her knowledge and practical experience come from her COAPE Diploma, extensive CPD and now her

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education and research towards an MSc in Clinical Animal Behaviour with the University of Edinburgh. She is a full member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (UK), The COAPE Association of Applied Pet Behaviourists and Trainers, the International Companion Animal Network and the Pet Professional Guild. As a candidate member of the Fellowship of Animal Behaviour Clinicians, she is working towards becoming a Certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist. Julie offers training and behaviour modification for dogs and cats in Bedfordshire, UK. If you would like to learn more about how Julie could help you and your pet, click on this link <https://www.thinkingpaws.co.uk> or please feel free to contact her on juliedaniels@thinkingpaws.co.uk.