

Dinner bowls for dogs are a primary distinction for us and dogs. If it were not for their dinner bowls, dogs would still be wolves or wild packs of dogs. Our domesticated dog, still DNA wolf, is the same when it comes to survival skills AND their digestive system, with the exception that most of their food is now roasted, broiled, baked, processed AND chosen by humans!

Using feeding time as an integrated part of daily living with our dogs builds a trusting relationship that can be shared with most members of the family with supervision. Dinner bowls and feeding are a daily occurrence, just as supplying wholesome nutrition for our energy and activities. It is an easy way to begin training with puppies or reshaping behaviors with any dog. It is quick - and helps to build a trusting relationship while teaching the dog how to pay attention with a watch-me, sit, down, come and wait. It helps begin the process of desensitization and being gentle taking food from human hands.

Whether it is welcoming a new puppy, adopted dog or changing behaviors of present dogs in the family, using “diner” training is empowering for you as a respected pack leader who supplies life rewards (what dogs need to survive and thrive). Most dogs find great pleasure in ... FOOD. Puppies are the number one species for food lure training (Dr. Ian Dunbar).

Most puppies (dogs) are fed twice a day. Oftentimes, three is the recommendation. For sake of keeping this short and easy to digest in our busy day-to-day lives, let's explore 2x a day feeding. If you are

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Let me repeat. Feeding your dog 2X a day gives you 14 training opportunities every week! Eight week old puppies are a clean sponge ready to soak up lessons. They will sit on their own, while waiting a few seconds as you hold their dinner bowl saying, “watch me” and “sit” before giving them one or two kibbles (kibbles being used as an example). If they jump, put the dinner bowl back on the counter and repeat the sequence. Jump too much, walk away for a few seconds, observe and breathe nose-to-navel. Learning to relax is good for you and your dog.

This takes approximately 10-15 seconds. Dogs eat their food in about 30 seconds, more if they are older, recovering from illness or introspective!

Begin slowly and with compassion. Mouthing pups quickly learn how to take food “gently”. Children under 12 are perceived as littermates and need supervision. However, this is a good opportunity to let children, one-at-a-time, teach a puppy/dog to sit and gently take a kibble, hand opened flat.

Multiple dogs, or if integrating a new dog into the household, requires separate dining areas, especially if one is a puppy, older adult who may eat slower, or an unpredictable adopted dog. True colors usually don't present themselves until dogs are settled in. Older, survival coping mechanisms may kick in. Being mindful of these transitions can help you prevent incidents like biting or resource guarding.

We have multiple dogs, often integrating an adopted one like our Greyhound Cali-Rose. The most easy, safe and successful way of feeding multiple dogs, especially those who have a spatial bubble or are food obsessed, is doggy diner training. Each dog is taught where their dog diner is and to sit. This may take practice depending on your individual situation or dog. When I say “DINER”, they find it a joy and game, (even the oldest dog) to get to their diner first. When they sit, they get their food. Of course there are exceptions at various life stages - *and days of YOUR life too*. If a dog is older, slower or sick, they deserve preferences. Puppies need quality time and space to learn. If you are in stressed or in hurry, a stuffed Kong or KONG WOBBLER (our favorite) in a crate will help a pup/dog expend some energy foraging for food.

Raising awareness between children and dogs is valuable, teaching them to respect another species. Again, children can be involved teaching the basics of sit, watch-me and the bearer of all things good ... FOOD, with supervision, one behavior at-a-time, and calmly.

With practice and routine, most dogs comfortably settle into our household routines. Be mindful that when learning, there is no “wrong” way for the dog to do this, as long as they give you something you like/desire. If they aren’t giving you what you expect, then you need to teach your expectations (shaping behaviors) in a language and way that they understand and that is pleasurable. Simply praising and smiling BIG when they lie down, saying GOOD DOWN is teaching a desirable behavior.

Desensitization, gently taking food from hands and learning how to live in pack begins with Doggy Diner!

This is not a behavior modification plan for resource guarding dogs that see their dinner bowl, space or the entire neighborhood as their possessions. It is one of the most empowering changers of unwanted behavior when YOU take responsibility as a respectable pack leader, set understandable boundaries, communicate effectively, and practice. You become the giver of life rewards – what our dogs need anyway (food, toys, exercise, play, love).

Think about this the next time you automatically fill the food bowl and throw it on the floor without knowing what your dog is doing. Intentional, in the moment training, is by far more effective than robotic training.

Being conscious of life rewards (resources) that your dogs needs and loves is powerful and empowering. You begin teaching new behaviors, maintaining that special connection with your dog, and changing behaviors that you do not like. In the process, we grow as individuals too in this waggy busy world, while living and learning with our beloved dogs. Enjoy the Journey!