



### **The teddy bear story – Blue steals the lilac rabbit**

Blue has found Fluffy, the lilac rabbit on the floor. He grabs it in his mouth and jumps onto the sofa. While Simon is looking for his rabbit he sees Blue chewing on it. He reaches out his hand and pulls at the rabbit. Blue shows his teeth as if to say, "Leave me alone, this is my rabbit now".

### **Why is Blue showing his teeth?**

When Simon grasps the rabbit and starts to pull, Blue does not understand why Simon is taking away Blue's new toy. Blue therefore considers this to be a challenge and reacts in a defensive way by showing his teeth and growling at Simon.

### **How to prevent this situation?**

*Children* – Dogs consider the present time and so take opportunities as they arrive. So even though the Lilac rabbit belonged to Simon just a moment ago, Blue considers it to be his once he has it in his grasp. Children should be encouraged to solve conflict situations by calling their parent (or an adult) for help. Challenging the dog to give back a toy might provoke a bite.

*Parents* – Make sure that the toys belonging to the dog and the child differ significantly such they can be easily recognised by either of them. Buy typical “dog toys” for the dog and avoid giving him old children’s toys or stuffed animals as this may lead to confusion and trigger risk situations.

*Dogs* – Try to be consistent when training the dog. If he has stolen a child’s toy, stay calm and encourage him to bring the toy to you. If successful, reward him (never punish) and trade the child’s toy for one of his own. It is only by rewarding the desired behaviour (bringing the child’s toy back to you) and encouraging him to play with his own toy that he will learn to behave as required.

### **What about your dog?**

Does your dog often steal the children’s toys? Does he easily give back the toy when you (the parent) ask him for a trade? You should be concerned if your dog shows signs of distress or aggression (growling, biting, snapping) while playing with a child’s toy. Contact your veterinarian or an animal behaviour counsellor for help to solve the situation in a safe way.