



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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Nothing in Life Is Free

Does your dog: Get on the furniture and refuse to get off? Nudge your hand insisting on being petted or played with? Refuse to come when called? Defend his food bowl or toys from you? "Nothing in life is free" can help. "Nothing in life is free" is not a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem; rather it's a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he will learn appropriate ways to earn everything good in his life.

How to practice "nothing in life is free:"

- Using positive reinforcement methods, teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks. "Sit," "Down" and "Stay" are useful commands and "Shake," "Speak" and "Rollover" are fun tricks to teach your dog.
- Once your dog knows a few commands, you can begin to practice "nothing in life is free." Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, a massage) he must first perform one of the commands it has learned:

For example:

YOU:

Put your dog's leash on to go for a walk
Feed your dog

Play a game of fetch after work

Rub your dog's belly while watching TV

YOUR DOG:

Must sit until you've put the leash on

Must lie down and stay until you've put the bowl down

Must sit and shake hands each time you throw the toy

Must lie down and rollover before being petted

- Once you've given the command, don't give your dog what he wants until he does what you want. If he refuses to perform the command, walk away, come back a few minutes later and start again. If your dog refuses to obey the command, be patient and remember that eventually he will have to obey your command in order to get what he wants.
- If your dog does not perform the behavior you are cueing, it's most likely because your dog does not know the meaning of the command in this context. Maybe your dog is a whiz at following the command 'sit' indoors, but he doesn't really get it outdoors yet. Make sure your dog knows the command well, in varying contexts, and understands what you want before you begin practicing "nothing in life is free."

The benefits of this technique:

- Nothing in Life is Free teaches your dog appropriate ways of earning all the good things in his life. Instead of pawing at your lap and whining for physical contact, he can roll over to be pet. Instead of jumping on you repeatedly, trying to knock the food dish out of your hands, he can sit and stay quietly to earn his food. If your dog performs inappropriate behaviors such as jumping up, barking, or mouthing you for attention, it's much easier to teach him acceptable ways to earn what he wants than to punish the bad behavior.
- Dogs who may never display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping, may still manage to manipulate you. These dogs may display affectionate, though "pushy" behavior, such as nudging your hand to be petted or "worming" their way onto the furniture in order to be close to you. This technique gently reminds a "pushy" dog that he must abide by your rules.
- Obeying commands helps a fearful dog build confidence and feel more secure. In the case of very fearful dogs, Nothing in Life is Free should supplement a well-formulated classical conditioning protocol.

For more information, please contact our behavior specialists by phone at 713-869-7722, ext. 187, or email us at animals@hspca.org.