



Potter League
Enriching Lives

NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE – DOGS

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 its 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 creating a positive relationship with you and your dog that is mutually beneficial.

How to Practice “Nothing in Life Is Free:”

- Using positive reinforcement methods, like clicker training and teaching your dog a few behaviors and/or tricks. “Sit,” “Down,” and “Stay” are useful behaviors and “Shake,” “Speak,” and “Rollover” are fun tricks to teach your dog (see our handout: “Dog Clicker Training”).
- Once your dog knows a few behaviors on cue, you can begin to practice “Nothing in life is free.” Before you give your dog anything (food, a treat, a walk, or a pat on the head) she must perform one of the behaviors she has learned when you ask. For example:

YOU: Put your dog’s leash on to go for a walk

YOUR DOG: Must sit until you’ve put the leash on

YOU: Feed your dog

YOUR DOG: Must lie down and stay until you’ve put the bowl down

YOU: Play a game of fetch after work

YOUR DOG: Must sit and shake each time you throw the toy

- Once you’ve given the cue, don’t give your dog what she wants until she does what you want. If she refuses to perform the behavior, walk away, come back a few minutes later and start again. If your dog still refuses to perform the behavior, be patient and remember that eventually she will offer the behavior in order to get what she wants.
- Make sure that your dog knows the behavior well and understands what you want before you begin practicing “Nothing in life is free.”
- Don’t always ask for the same behavior, make it variable so the dog is waiting for the cue and focused on you.



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The Benefits of This Technique:

- Requiring a dog to work for everything it wants is a safe, non-confrontational way of reinforcing the positive ways a dog behaves in the relationship.
- This technique even works well with the affectionate, “pushy” dog. A dog doesn’t have to display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping, to influence a situation. They can nudge your hand to be petted or “worm” their way on to the furniture in order to be close to you.
- As a dog succeeds in learning more behaviors and tricks, their continued success will increase their confidence, which will reduce their stress and lead to them feeling comfortable in any situation.

Why This Technique Works:

- Encourages good behaviors by providing the guidance that dogs need.
- It is an effective but gentle way to build healthy communication within the relationship.

“Nothing in life is free” and children

Because children are small and can get down on the dog's level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates. With supervision of an adult, it's a good idea to encourage children in the household to also practice “Nothing in life is free” with your dog.