

The Pawsitive Pooch

NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE

The NILIF program is remarkable because it's effective for such a wide variety of problems. A shy, timid dog becomes more relaxed knowing that he has nothing to worry about; his owner is in charge of all things. A dog that's pushing too hard to become "top dog" learns that the position is not available and that his life is far more enjoyable without the title.

It is equally successful with dogs that fall anywhere between those two extremes. The program is not difficult to put into effect and it's not time consuming if the dog already knows a few basic obedience commands. I've never seen this technique fail to bring about a positive change in behavior; however, the change can be more profound in some dogs than others. Most owners use this program in conjunction with other behavior modification techniques such as coping with fear or treatment for aggression. It is a perfectly suitable technique for the dog with no major behavior problems that just needs some fine tuning.

These exercises provide your dog with the structure, boundaries and direction they need to be happy in our human world. "Freedom" to do what they want is unnatural to the canine existence. To them such "freedom" means no one is in charge. This can frighten and confuse your dog, leading to hyperactivity, barking, chewing, over dependence and possible aggression. Showing your dog that you are their leader does not consist of physically dominating the dog. In fact the old saying that "aggression begets aggression" holds true for most dogs and can provoke a bite. Most dogs are perfectly happy submitting to a leader; they actually gain confidence and a sense of security from having someone to follow. So how do we show our dogs we are the leader and they are the followers? By asking them to defer and wait for everything, to establish rules and hierarchies. This behavior is calming, and easy for the dogs to do. It teaches the dogs to pay attention to your signals and provides a way to quickly control your dog's reactions. Start these exercises with food treats or toys. Later, intermittent food or toys with constant verbal praises is indicated.

ATTENTION ON DEMAND

The program begins by eliminating attention on demand. When your dog comes to you and nudges your hand, saying "pet me! pet me!" ignore him. Don't tell him "no", don't push him away. Simply pretend you don't notice him. This has worked for him before, so don't be surprised if he tries harder to get your attention. When he figures out that this no longer works, he'll stop. When you give your dog attention on demand you're telling him that he has more status than you do. Timid dogs become stressed by having this power and may become clingy. They're never sure when you'll be in charge so they can't relax. What if something scary happens, like a stranger coming in the house? Who will handle that? The timid dog that is demanding of attention can be on edge a lot of the time because he has more responsibility than he can handle.

Some dogs see their ability to demand attention as confirmation that they are in charge, then become difficult to handle when told to "sit" or "down" or some other demand is placed on them. It is not their leadership status that stresses them out, it's the lack of consistency. They may or may not actually be leadership material, but having no one in the pack that is clearly the leader is a bigger problem than having the dog assume that role full time. Tension is created by a constant fluctuation of leadership.

EXTINCTION BURSTS

Your dog already knows that he can demand your attention and he knows what works to get that to happen. As of today, it no longer works, but he doesn't know that yet. We all try harder at something we know works when it stops working. If I gave you a twenty dollar bill every time you clapped your hands together, you'd clap a lot. But, if I suddenly stopped handing you money, even though you were still clapping, you'd clap more and clap louder. You might even get closer to me to make sure I was noticing that you were clapping. You might even shout at me "Hey! I'm clapping like crazy over here, where's the money?" If I didn't respond at all, in any way, you'd stop. It wasn't working anymore. That last try -- that loud, frequent clapping is an extinction burst. If, however, during that extinction burst, I gave you another twenty dollar bill you'd be right back in it. It would take a lot longer to get you to stop clapping because you just learned that if you try hard enough, it will work.

When your dog learns that the behaviors that used to get him your attention don't work any more, he's going to try harder and he's going to have an extinction burst. If you give him attention during that time you will have to work that much harder to get him turned around again. Telling him "no" or pushing him away is not the kind of attention he's after, but it's still attention. Completely ignoring him will work faster and better.

YOU HAVE THE POWER

As the human and as his owner you have control of all things that are wonderful in his life. This is the backbone of the NILIF program. You control all of the resources: Playing, attention, food, walks, going in and out of the door, going for a ride in the car, going to the dog park. Anything and everything that your dog wants comes from you. If he's been getting most of these things for free there is no real reason for him to respect your leadership or your ownership of these things. Again, a timid dog is going to be stressed by this situation, a pushy dog is going to be difficult to handle. Both of them would prefer to have you in charge.

To implement the NILIF program you simply have to have your dog earn his use of your resources. He's hungry? No problem, he simply has to sit before his bowl is put down. He wants to play fetch? Great! He has to "down" before you throw the ball. Want to go for a walk or a ride? He has to sit to get his lead snapped on and has to sit while the front door is opened. He has to sit and wait while the car door is opened and listen for the word (I use "OK") that means "get into the car". When you return he has to wait for the word that means "get out of the car" even if the door is wide open. Don't be too hard on him. He's already learned that he can make all of these decisions on his own. He has a strong history of being in control of when he gets these resources. Enforce the new rules, but keep in mind that he's only doing what he's been taught to do and he's going to need some time to get the hang of it all.

You're going to have to pay attention to things that you probably haven't noticed before. If you feed your dog from your plate, do you just toss him a green bean? No more. He has to earn it. You don't have to use standard obedience commands, any kind of action will do. If your dog knows "shake" or "spin" or "speak" use those commands. Does your dog sleep on your bed? Teach him that he has to wait for you to say "OK" to get on the bed and he has to get down when you say "off". Teach him to go to his bed, or other designated spot, on command. When he goes to his spot and lays down tell him "stay" and then release him with a treat reward. Having a particular spot where he stays is very helpful for when you have guests or otherwise need him out of the way for a while. It also teaches him that free run of the house is a resource that you control. There are probably many things that your dog sees as valuable resources that I haven't mentioned here.

The NILIF program should not be a long, drawn out process. All you need to do is enforce a simple command before allowing him access to what he wants. Dinner, for example, should be a two or three second encounter that consists of nothing more than saying "sit", then "good dog!", then putting the

bowl down and walking away.

ATTENTION AND PLAY

Now that your dog is no longer calling the shots you will have to make an extra effort to provide him with attention and play time. Call him to you, have him "sit" and then lavish him with as much attention as you want. Have him go get his favorite toy and play as long as you both have the energy. The difference is that now you will be the one initiating the attention and beginning the play time. He's going to depend on you now, a lot more than before, to see that he gets what he needs. What he needs most is quality time with you. This would be a good time to enroll in a group obedience class. If his basic obedience is top notch, see about joining an agility class or fly ball team.

NILIF DOES *NOT* MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO RESTRICT THE AMOUNT OF ATTENTION YOU GIVE TO YOUR DOG. The NILIF concept speaks to *who* initiates the attention (you!), not the amount of attention. Go ahead and **call your dog to you** 100 times a day for hugs and kisses!! You can demand his attention; he can no longer demand yours!

Within a day or two your dog will see you in a whole new light and will be eager to learn more. Use this time to teach new things, such as 'roll over' or learn the specific names of different toys.

If you have a shy dog, you'll see a more relaxed dog. There is no longer any reason to worry about much of anything. He now has complete faith in you as his protector and guide. If you have a pushy dog he'll be glad that the fight for leadership is over and his new role is that of devoted and adored pet.

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Your dog must sit, stay, look and wait for the 'OK' signal (release cue) before:

- Receiving attention
- Going out and coming in
- Eating food or treats
- Putting on the leash and collar
- Going through any door or doorway
- Greeting people
- Getting in the car
- Jumping up onto the bed or couch
- Playing or relinquishing toys
- Petting, touching and grooming

Develop dependency

- Hand feeding at random times throughout the day
- Tie downs for rest time
- Attach training sessions to play session so that your dog learns to obey while he is excited

Play only when you initiate it
Stop playing before he wants to
Play hide and seek in the house (We want him to worry about where you are)
Be aloof at all times (I want to keep him guessing as to how to please you)
Exhaust the dog twice a day, but do not do it in the same place every day - (Each time a dog visits an old haunt, he becomes more confident, we want him slightly insecure and needy)
No going to the dog park unless he is on the long line and there are no other people/dogs there. (Unsupervised play teaches that they don't need their owner nor do they have to obey anyone, and that their play is not under the owner's control)
When entering or exiting any place, your pet must be behind you - this applies to going up and down the stairs too
While on walks practice loose leash walking and change directions often. Preferably, your pet will be next to you or slightly behind you, if he is ahead of you and the leash gets taught call him to you and reward him. Alter the route of your walk as often as possible.
Practice distraction often on walks - use his favorite toy or food. The only time he gets to play with this toy is while on walks or when he is working. The reward for his doing what you want him to do is that he gets the toy. After he has had it for a few minutes take it away from him.
Practice your wait every 10 feet or so.
When you see another dog approaching - either change directions or make a huge arc so that he doesn't pass the other dog. If that is not possible, put your pet in a down stay and jackpot him with food until the other dog passes.

Remember

Don't forget to praise your dog and tell them they are wonderful when you ask anything of them and they comply
If your dog whines, paws on you, grabs you, they must be asked to sit/stay/look AGAIN.
If your dog ignores you, repeat your request. You may need to be more interesting than distraction making a noise, using their name or following them and standing in front of them while repeating your request.
Only make your dog wait a few seconds until you give the next signal
If your dog nudges your arm, sits on your feet or turns its back when you ask it to sit, move and ask again
These exercises are designed to teach your dog to say "please" in dog language

The NILIF program is an accepted standard in dog training/behavior but it is not, and is not intended to be, a substitute for an in-person, professional evaluation of your dog's behavior.