

Nothing in Life Is Free (NILIF) Dog Training

by [shibashake](#) [38 Comments](#)

What is the Nothing in Life Is Free program?

NILIF is a simple and effective way to [control our dog's behavior](#), by controlling his most desired resources.

To implement NILIF, all we have to do is ask our dog to do something for us first, before giving him something in return. For example,

- If our dog wants to go out to the backyard, ask him for a **Sit** first, before opening the door.
- If our dog is looking for affection, ask him to **Go Bed** first, before scratching him on his favorite spots.
- If it is our dog's meal time, then ask him for a **Down-Stay** before starting to [prepare his food](#).

The Nothing in Life Is Free program is not a command or a single technique, rather it is a general strategy for dog behavior control.

With NILIF, we teach our dog that the best way to get what he wants, is to first do what we want.



Nothing in Life Is Free Dog Training

Why Apply the Nothing in Life Is Free Program



With NILIF we teach our dog to work for the things that he wants most.

With NILIF we teach our dog -

- To work for the things that he wants most.
- That *people* are the source of food, toys, play, and many other good things.
- That he gets the most resources by working together with us, staying calm, and following house rules.

This helps to [build a strong bond with our dog](#) that is based on cooperation, positive outcomes, and a good work ethic. It is an effective and non-confrontational way to achieve control.

Dogs have needs of their own. They are not mindless satellites that revolve around us, and that only live to serve us. With NILIF, we channel a dog's energy into positive activities, and reward him well for his good works.



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How to Apply the Nothing in Life Is Free Program

While applying NILIF on my dogs, I learned that it is very important to be consistent, firm, and fair.

1. Consistency

I set up a consistent set of rules, a consistent routine, and a consistent way of communication. My dogs understand what things they get rewarded for, and there is always ample opportunity for them to work for their supper.

Clear communication is also very important, so I identify good behaviors with a yes-mark (**Yes** or **Good**) and bad behaviors with a no-mark (**Ack-ack**). Similarly, they have [a good dog name](#) and [a bad dog name](#).

Finally, dogs do not come with a ready-made human rulebook in their heads. For health and safety, we must teach a dog our very human rules. These rules will likely make very little sense to him, which is why we want to tie them to the things that he values most.



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2. Firmness

If my dog fails to perform a command or only puts in a half-hearted effort, then I do not reward him for his lackluster performance; no matter how cute he looks.

For example, my Shiba Inu will sometimes only perform a half-down when I give him the command. When he does this, I just give him a look and wait for him to do it properly. When he sees that he will not get rewarded unless he does a good job, he puts in the extra effort.

He works even harder when I do group obedience sessions and he sees that my Siberian Huskies are being rewarded well for their good performance.



Shiba works even harder when I do group obedience sessions and he sees that my Siberian Huskies are being rewarded well for their good performance.

3. Fairness

All my dogs follow the same rules and get *similar rewards*. Their rewards are not always identical because they each have different temperaments, and are motivated by different things. For example, both my Siberian Huskies are very motivated by food, especially Shania. My Shiba Inu is less motivated by food and more motivated by freedom, new objects and experiences, as well as chasing games.

Husky Lara likes to chase, jump, and weave between a person's legs. Husky Shania loves [meeting people](#), [getting tummy rubs](#), and licking faces. A big part of being successful with NILIF involves understanding our dogs, and identifying what motivates them most.



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I always try to set my dog up for success. In particular, I give him tasks where he has a good chance of completing. For example, I start by teaching him simple commands such as **Look** and **Sit**. I wait until he has mastered more basic commands before moving on to **Fetch**, **Come**, or **Go Bed** which are more complex commands, that include a sequence of actions. The more successful he is, the more confident he will become, and the more quickly he learns that working with me is a very rewarding activity.

Instead of throwing my dog into a situation that I *know* he cannot handle, I start small and we take small steps together. He works for each step, and gets rewarded for it with food, play, affection, and more.

I make sure to only reward good behaviors, and not give him anything for bad behaviors, including my attention and affection. Instead, when he does something undesirable, he may lose a reward or privilege.

In this way, [a dog learns](#) to repeat good behaviors because he gets what he desires most. Similarly, he stops bad behaviors because it gets him nothing, or he loses something that he desires. With NILIF dog training, we build a relationship that is based on trust and respect, rather than one that is based on confrontation and fear.



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The Spirit of NILIF



My ultimate goal is to provide my dogs with as good a quality of life as I can.

Some people interpret the *nothing* in NILIF in the most extreme way. In particular, they give a dog access to some resource **if and only if** he completes a *requested task*. At other times, the dog is kept in a kennel or crate, so that he does not have his freedom, which in itself is a desired resource.

Confinement also prevents the dog from getting other desired resources on his own, including sticks to play with, or objects to chew on. In short, the only way he gets any and all resources is through us.

This may be one of those instances where we are trying so carefully to follow the letter of the law, that we end up defeating the spirit of the law.

The spirit of NILIF, as it is widely used today, is to build a strong bond with our dog that is based on trust and respect rather than on confrontation and physical force. We would hardly be doing this by keeping our dog locked up all day, with short bursts of freedom to hero-worship us. Such a strategy focuses purely on the human, and leaves nothing for the dog.

I train my dogs and use NILIF, not to boast about my dog training prowess, or to follow random rules for no reason. My ultimate goal is to provide my dogs with a good quality of life. Constantly depriving them of freedom and activity would hardly achieve this goal. Common sense dictates that this extreme interpretation of NILIF is not only untenable, but also unproductive.



The Spirit of NILIF

When I implement NILIF, I reward my dogs for good behavior. It does not matter whether I asked for a behavior or not; if they behave well, they get rewarded. They are still working for their resources by behaving well, therefore they are not getting resources for free. However, I see absolutely no need to explicitly control every single action by my dog.

If my dog follows house rules, then he gets to roam freely in the house, play, rest, drink water, chew on toys, or whatever else. If he breaks an important house rule, then he may lose a reward, or very temporarily lose the privilege of his freedom.

Sometimes, I also reward my dogs with food and affection when they are resting calmly together. They get rewarded for sitting while greeting people. They get rewarded for staying calm while out on walks, and much more.



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Isn't the ultimate goal to get our dog to behave well on his own? Isn't that much better than dictating his every move – like a robot controlled dog? It is extremely unhealthy to set ourselves up as the sole focus of our dog's world, and take away all of his freedom and options. It is unhealthy for us, and unhealthy for our dog.

I like giving my dog options and helping him fulfill his needs. In my book, that is what trust and respect mean. That is also what love means.

We can nitpick on terms until the cows come home, and twist words to win online debates. At the end of the day though, what matters is not the terms used but what we do, and how we

strive to give our dogs what they deserve – a good life that is safe and filled with happiness.



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