

These protocols contain general advice on those animal-related matters which, in Collier County Domestic Animal Service's experience, affect animal lovers and pet owners most often.

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### **Nothing In Life is Free (NILIF)**

Let's talk about dominance. TRUE dominance—not the popular stuff you hear on TV or the internet. Scientists in Zoology, Ethology, and Animal Behavior define dominance as having control over limited resources. That's it! It's not about who's bigger, stronger, socially in control. It's about who has control over who gets to use limited resources like food, water, shelter, soft cushy chairs, petting from people (yes, people can be a limited resource). *Not: if you look up Nothing In Life is Free on the Internet, you will find around 100 different definitions/descriptions. Below is what I mean by it, and it's very effective.*

Dogs that are “in control” of resources are dominant. The important, and often missed, detail is that dominant animals very rarely have to show it. They are the *least likely* to get into fights (until they age out or get too sick and are challenged by younger, stronger...). They are usually the most relaxed. Everyone *knows* that they are dominant—they don't have to prove it. So if you have two animals fighting, or an animal keeping you off your own couch—this is not a dominance action—it's actually a “I'm not sure whose really in charge” action. And we're going to (very benignly) put you back in charge. NO scruffing, shaking, rolling, or other physical punishments—dogs use these very seldom and they are counterproductive. These don't establish dominance, they create fear and a confused dog that is also afraid is even more likely to bite, rather than less likely.

Your dog needs to learn that you are the “go to” person in your family. It needs to know that it should look to you for what to do in confusing situations, and that you are “in charge” at all times. However, “traditional” dominance training (flipping on back, scruffing down by the neck, and so on) is counterproductive because it increases anxiety. Usually, it makes dogs worse. Sometimes it can even create fear aggression.

Instead, we want to teach your dog that you are in charge, because good things happen when you are in charge. To do this, we implement “NILIF,” (Nothing In Life Is Free). From now on, anything your dog wants, it has to earn it by performing a requested behavior. The dog has to do a trick or trained behavior for everything. This includes for petting, for going out to the yard, for coming back inside, for getting a leash on, for getting daily food, a favorite toy, for everything. If your dog doesn't know any tricks or behaviors on command, take a few minutes to teach a few. At a minimum, every dog should learn “sit.” Use treats to lure the dog into the proper sit position (show treat, and move treat over and behind dog's head slowly so it follows it back and sits). Any other command will also work like “gimme kiss,” “shake paw,” (all the informal commands/tricks that owners and dogs tend to develop).

This is not obedience training. We will never force the dog to obey our command. We “ask once.” If the dog doesn’t comply when you give it the command, don’t make an issue of it. Don’t force the behavior. Walk away, wait a few minutes, and then give it the command again. Dogs learn very quickly that they get great stuff if they obey and nothing if they don’t. You will have a dog that listens to you eagerly, because good things happen when it does. This technique works well even with stubborn or hyperactive dogs. It helps them learn to focus and helps them understand that you are “in charge,” but happily, because they *like* what happens when you are in charge.

This means you have to plan your schedule a little—it may take 10 minutes longer to feed than usual. Do this for everything, play sessions, snuggle time, going in the house, leaving the house, et cetera. This will teach your dog to obey, and get it in the habit of listening to you. Everyone living in your home should do this. Visitors should be taught to do this too.

For example, at feeding time: Set up the food as usual but instead of putting the bowl down right away, hold it in your hand at waist height. Tell your dog “Sit!” in your usual command voice. If it sits, say “Good dog!” and put the bowl down. If the dog doesn’t sit, *don’t* ask again. Instead, put the bowl on the refrigerator and walk away. Don’t say anything to the dog, just put the bowl up and leave! Wait a few minutes and go back and ask again. If everyone is consistent with this in all circumstances, the dog will very quickly learn to obey for everything. This may take a few weeks to develop but it is a very effective way of “gaining dominance” over your dog

Note that if you have two dogs, you will want to do NILIF with each dog. For object items like food or toys, if one dog sits and the other doesn’t, the dog that obeyed may have to wait for the other to comply, especially if one dog is food or toy aggressive. If the obeying dog has to wait too long, however, feed or give toys in separate rooms for a while until both are obeying you. (Use your judgment in this, it may not be necessary, or it may make things easier to do this right away.)

Do note that severe resource guarding in a dog (growling, snapping, biting) may require the help of a professional behaviorist, in order to modify the behavior safely.

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