



Potter League
Enriching Lives

NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE – CATS

Does your cat demand to be petted or played with? Ignore you when you call him? Wake you up to be fed in the middle of the night? “Nothing in life is free” (NILIF) can help. NILIF is not a magic pill that will solve a specific behavior problem; rather it’s a way of living with your cat that will help him behave better, be more responsive and be more adaptable to environmental changes.

How to Practice “Nothing In Life Is Free:”

Using positive reinforcement methods, teach your cat a few behaviors and/or tricks. “Sit,” “down” and “come” are useful behaviors. “Shake,” “sit pretty,” and “rollover” are fun tricks to teach your cat.

Once your cat will perform a few behaviors on cue, you can begin to practice NILIF. Before you give your cat anything (food, a treat, a play session or a scratch under the chin), he must first perform one of the behaviors he has learned. For example:

YOUR CAT WANTS:

To get on your lap

HE MUST:

Sit and then, when given permission, step up

YOUR CAT WANTS:

Dinner

HE MUST:

Sit until you've put the bowl down

YOUR CAT WANTS:

To play with a toy

HE MUST:

Sit or shake at intervals during play



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Once you've given the cue, don't give your cat what he wants until he does what you want. If he refuses to perform the behavior, walk away, come back a few minutes later and start again. If your cat still refuses to perform the behavior, be patient and remember that eventually he will have to comply in order to get what he wants.

Make sure your cat knows the behavior well and understands what you want before you begin practicing NILIF.

The Benefits of This Technique:

Most cats assume an independent or demanding role toward people. Requiring a cat to work for everything he wants can decrease these behaviors and increase the cat's acceptance of interaction.

Some cats may display affection through "pushy" behavior, such as head-butting your hand to be petted or "worming" his way on to your lap in order to be close to you. The technique of NILIF gently reminds the "pushy" cat that he must abide by your rules.

Performing behaviors on cue can help build a fearful cat's confidence, which can help him better adjust to environmental or situational changes.

Why This Technique Works:

Cats are affectionate company, but they quickly learn how to manipulate us to get what they want. They may wake you up at 3 a.m. to be fed or insist on petting when you are trying to work on the computer. NILIF establishes a relationship in which the cat knows he can get what he wants without resorting to demanding or disruptive behaviors. Practicing NILIF effectively and gently communicates to your cat that he can rely on you during any type of change. Because children are small and can get down on the cat's level to play, cats often consider them to be threats. With the supervision of an adult, it's a good idea to encourage children in the household (aged eight and over) to also practice NILIF with your cat. This will help the cat trust the children to interact without causing harm.