

What is Positive Dog Training?

If you have been researching dog training classes lately, you have undoubtedly come across many confusing terms to describe different dog training methods. Positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, correction, punishment, behavior modification, conditioned reinforcer, dominance theories, etc.

The good news is the study of dog behavior is a constantly evolving field. We are becoming more knowledgeable about the ways that dogs learn. The downside is that the amount of information out there can be very difficult to weed through.

Which training method is the right one? There is no one right way to train all dogs. If there was, we'd all be walking around with Lassie on a leash (and what fun would *that* be?). There are, however, some things for you to consider when it comes to training your dog.

Training through Positive Reinforcement

Very simply, that means we reward our dogs for doing what we want them to do and remove an anticipated reward when they do something we feel is inappropriate. The key is that we don't physically punish our dogs when they misbehave. The very latest studies in dog behavior indicate that dogs learn better when rewarded for what they do right rather than being punished, or corrected, for wrong choices.

Unfortunately, many of us tend to pay more attention to our dogs when they do something wrong, instead of when they do something right. For example, your dog is playing quietly on the floor and you think to yourself, "Whew, a break from the constant energy," and you walk by, ignoring the dog. Five minutes later, your dog hops on the furniture and you yell at him and push/pull him off. What a fun game to your dog. The result? More couch jumping for the dog and more frustration for you. Had you given him a scratch behind the ear or tossed a toy for him when he was playing quietly on the floor, he may not have tried the couch-game for attention. Just as with children, negative attention is better than no attention at all.

How Does Positive Dog Training Work?

Very simply, dogs are rewarded when they do the right thing, and the anticipated reward is removed when they make the wrong choice. Positive training methods are fun for both you and your dog, and you can teach your dog just about anything by using positive training. When they obey your requests, they're given tasty food treats, a toy or attention from you.

If they choose not to obey, the food treat or attention is not given. You will be amazed at how quickly a dog figures out what behavior gets a food treat and what doesn't.

Training with the Use of Punishment

A good example of "punishment-based training" is the long-standing, popular training technique using a "choke" chain or pinch collar. Dogs are given a leash correction when they make the wrong choice, and the result is an uncomfortable, often painful correction to the dog. Studies have shown that this type of correction can lead to soft tissue damage around the neck and possible damage to the trachea.

While it is true that some dogs react appropriately to the use aversive training, the questions are:

- Are they learning?
- What are they learning?

Some studies indicate that dogs trained with positive methods instead of aversives discover how to think through situations rather than being physically manipulated, thus they retain the information longer.

What is Positive Dog Training?

Consider training your dog or puppy using positive training. It will not only put you on the road to having a well-behaved pet, but it will also help to strengthen the bond between you and your dog.

How to Train with “*NOTHING IN LIFE IS FREE*”

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 his 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 living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts you as his leader and is confident knowing his place in your family.

Using positive reinforcement methods, teach your dog a few commands and tricks. “Sit,” “Down” and “Stay” are useful commands and “Shake,” “Speak” and “Rollover” are fun tricks to teach him.

Once he knows a few commands, 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), he must first perform one of the commands he has learned.

For example:

YOU:

Take your dog for a walk
Feed your dog

Play a game of fetch after work
Rub your dog’s belly while watching TV

YOUR DOG:

Must sit until you have put the leash on him
Must lie down and stay until you put the bowl down and say “OK”
Must sit and shake paw each time you throw the toy
Must lie down and roll over first

Once you have given the command, **do not give your dog what he wants until he does what you want.** If he refuses to perform the command, walk away. Come back a few minutes later and start again. If he still refuses to obey the command, be patient and remember that eventually, he will have to obey your command to get what he wants. Make sure he knows the command well and understands what you want before you begin practicing “*Nothing in Life is Free.*”

The Benefits of this Technique

Most dogs assume a neutral or submissive role toward people, but some dogs will challenge their owners for dominance. Requiring a dominant dog to work for everything he wants is a safe and non-confrontational way to establish control.

Dogs who may never display aggressive behavior such as growling, snarling, or snapping, may still manage to manipulate you. These dogs may display affectionate, though “pushy” behavior. Nudging your hand to be petted or “worming” his way on the furniture to be close to you are common behaviors. The “*Nothing in Life is Free*” technique gently reminds the pushy dog that he must abide by your rules.

Obeying commands helps build a fearful dog’s confidence. Having a strong leader and knowing his place in the hierarchy helps to make the submissive dog feel more secure.



What is Positive Dog Training?

Why this Technique Works

Animals that live in groups, like dogs, establish a social structure within the group called a dominance hierarchy. This dominance hierarchy serves to maintain order, reduce conflict and promote cooperation among pack members. For your home to be a safe and happy place for pets and people, it's best that the humans in the household assume the highest positions in the dominance hierarchy. Practicing "*Nothing in Life is Free*" effectively and gently communicates to your dog that his position in the hierarchy is subordinate to yours. From your dog's point of view, children also have a place in this hierarchy. Because children are small and can get down on the dog's level to play, dogs often consider them to be playmates, rather than superiors. With the supervision of an adult, it's a good idea to encourage children in the household (aged eight and over) to also practice "*Nothing in Life is Free*" with your dog.

For more information about pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at michiganhumane.org**.