

Say Please (Nothing In Life Is Free)

How does your dog ask for what he wants? Does she get dinner by barking? Does he get through the door by shoving past you?

In any home, whether it has dogs in it or not, good manners are appreciated. Things like pushing past your parents to rush outside or bugging them for candy while they were working were probably not allowed when you were young and they show that your relationship with your dog is not as strong as it could be. There's no need to yell at your dog when he does things like bark or whine at you for attention or defend his dog food dish. What you need to do is teach your dog how to SAY PLEASE.

As with all of the training methods that we recommend, we want you to set your dog up for success. Tell the dog what you want her to do (in words that she knows or by reinforcing behaviors you like), and ignore the tricks you don't want in your dog's attention-grabbing toolbox. You get what you pay for with dogs. If it works for them, they'll keep doing something, even if you don't like it.

The Say Please Protocol is also called "Nothing In Life Is Free," because you allow the dog to earn his keep. It's a way of living with your dog that will help him behave better because he trusts and accepts your leadership and is confident knowing his place in the family.

How to teach your dog to Say Please

- First, teach your dog some behaviors that he can do on cue. Use positive reinforcement methods to teach him some cues. At first, SIT is quite sufficient. This will be your dog's default way of asking you for something. DOWN and STAY are also useful behaviors. "Bow," "Speak," "Sit Pretty", and "Roll over" are fun tricks to teach your dog.
- Once your dog has mastered one or more cues, you can begin to ask him to Say Please. Before you give your dog the things that it likes most in life, (food, a treat, a walk, a pat on the head) he must first respond to one of the cues he has learned. One way is to simply have your dog sit for everything, so that he his default method for getting what he wants is to sit. Soon, you won't have to ask for it; you can just stand there waiting and he'll offer a polite sit, to see if it works. You can ask him to do other cues as well, although the sit is your dog's primary way to Say Please. For example:

Before any human in the family over 8 years old does this:	FIDO must:
Put Fido's leash on to go for a walk	Sit until the leash is on.
Feed Fido	Lie down and stay until the bowl is set down AND he is released.
Play a game of fetch after work	Sit Pretty/down/sit/etc. each time you throw the toy.

Rub Fido's belly while watching TV	Lie down and roll over before being petted.
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- Once you've given the cue, don't give Fido what he wants until he does what you want. If he barks at you or knowingly refuses to perform the behavior (unlikely - he probably just doesn't understand), walk away, come back a few minutes later, and start again. Keep in mind that he may not actually know the cue in the context you are asking, and may need extra help at first. Or he may be so excited about the toy/treat/leash that he temporarily forgets everything he knows. "Extra help" includes a visual signal or even a lure. If you think the dog knows the cue and you end up using a lure, don't feed the dog the treat that you used for the lure at that time (we don't want to reward non-compliance!).

The Benefits of Teaching Your Dog to Say Please

The best benefit is that your dog practices the cues that you have taught in many situations, with many different kinds of rewards. Instead of having to do a long training session, you can practice behavior that the dog already knows throughout the day.

Your dog no longer has to ask, "Why should I listen to my human?" because the rewards are things that he wants in his everyday life, not just food.

Some dogs display affectionate behavior that borders on being "pushy," such as nudging your hand to be petted or "worming" their way onto the furniture to be close to you. You may appreciate the nudging but Aunt Marge may not. A dog might consider it normal to whine or bark for your attention. Dogs don't do these behaviors because they are mean or bad dogs. They do them because they work. Period. Requiring your dog to Say Please first shows your dog the polite way to get what it wants. If you simultaneously ignore the unwanted behaviors, they will disappear and be replaced with a nice sit.

Fearful dogs may become more confident by 'obeying' cues, because it allows the dog to understand some of the rules of the game.

Making your dog or puppy Say Please before dashing off to do what she wants can help keep her out of harm's way (in the car, at the door, et cetera).

In a multiple-dog household, making each dog Say Please and releasing them by name can bring some peace and order to your life!

This excellent article is written by Grisha Stewart from <http://ahimsadogtraining.com/blog/>.

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