

### My Uncle Snoopy

I hated lap dogs. I hated their persistent jumping, clinging and attempts at any kind of human interaction. Unfortunately, every time I had visited my grandparents, I had encountered “Uncle Snoopy,” a three-year-old, Shitztsu -Poodle lap dog. He didn’t do tricks and surely didn’t comply with commands to stop jumping up on people. He was spoiled!

Also, he had replaced me on the family pedestal. For example, my grandparents would fuss over his eating schedule, warming his food seconds before he eats. When we talked over coffee, they also ensured that “Uncle Snoopy” was at the kitchen table because he “liked to be part of the conversation.” It was getting out of hand!

Indeed, my aunt had warned me that my grandparents were mad at me. My Grandpa had reportedly said: “If she doesn’t like Snoopy, then she doesn’t have to come over.” Because of my behavior toward their dog, it was jokingly rumored that I would be written out of their will. Yikes! Had I gone too far? Could I learn to love Uncle Snoopy No, but I could change his undesirable behavior.

My situation was tricky because I wanted my grandparents to see that I do not hate their dog. (My future financial security depended on this). To receive my grandparents ‘forgiveness’ and my rightful place on the family pedestal, I could not just ignore Snoopy. So, when my grandparents were present, I planned to offer Snoopy attention after his ‘more tolerable’ behavior. I also planned to reinforce Snoopy’s calm sitting with pets and praise while I disabled his jumping through response cost: removing Snoopy from my lap after he had jumped up. This way, my grandparents would be happy because I would be attending to their dog and I would be

happy because Snoopy would not be jumping on me and Snoopy would be happy because he would be receiving attention.

As usual, upon my arrival, “Uncle Snoopy” greeted me with repetitive jumping. Then, my grandma greeted me with: “Oh, bend down and pet him, he's excited to see you. He won't stop unless you say hi.” So what did I do? I decided to not enter the kitchen. Instead, knowing that Uncle Snoopy will not go down the basement stairs, I took two steps forward and sat on the steps to take off my shoes. Nonetheless, he waited and followed me into the living room, jumping on my legs. I sat down and Snoopy jumped up. Then, I lifted him off of my lap and placed him on the floor, but he tried to jump back up. He even jumped up onto one end of the couch, and slowly inched his way towards me! Without hesitating, I picked him up again and placed him on the floor. I could see his little beady eyes watching; waiting for me to give in. Throughout the visit, my grandparents witnessed this power struggle. I was not gaining favor.

After three visits of using response cost with Snoopy's jumping, I started noticing changes. Upon arrival, instead of jumping on my legs, he would jump near my legs, and circle. I also noticed some novel behaviors as I walked into the living room. Still following me, Snoopy ran toward my legs and circled near me. When I sat down on the couch, Snoopy did not jump up. For the first time, he sat at my feet looking at me. I immediately praised Uncle Snoopy and gave him lots of pets.

After dinner, I also reinforced his good behavior. Snoopy was lying about a foot from my feet for about three minutes, not looking at me. Upon noticing this, I bent down and gave him verbal praise and pets. Snoopy immediately rolled onto his belly which I rubbed. Both of my grandparents watched from their recliners and smiled.

Having modified Snoopy's behavior, I've reassessed my opinion of lap dogs. All along, it was unfair to say that I hated them, when I had only hated their jumping and clinging.

Now, my visits to my grandparents' home are much more pleasant. My grandma greets me with a proper hug and Snoopy and I get along famously. Look's like my status with my grandparents is improving and my rightful place will be restored!