

# Just Behaving: The Art of Raising a Well-Mannered Family Dog

## Introduction: A Philosophy Rooted in Relationship

At the core of the Just Behaving philosophy is the intentional cultivation of a deeply trustworthy and mutually respectful relationship between dogs and their human caregivers. This relationship hinges on clear, consistent communication and is deeply rooted in replicating natural canine social behaviors and structures. Recognizing that the relationship between humans and dogs will never be perfect - since dogs naturally retain their instincts and behaviors - Just Behaving focuses on building a profound foundational understanding during the crucial developmental stages of puppyhood.

## The Critical Early Window: 8–12 Weeks and the Following 60 Days

The period from 8 to 12 weeks, followed by the next critical 60 days, represents the most significant window for shaping a puppy's behavior, emotional balance, and social comprehension. During these formative weeks, puppies at Just Behaving are introduced to structured companionship through interactions with calm, emotionally balanced human caregivers and experienced mentor dogs. This approach closely mirrors the natural social dynamics found in balanced canine groups, where elder dogs clearly define and maintain boundaries, correct unwanted behaviors, and foster emotional regulation and stability in younger members.

## Prevention Over Correction

A defining characteristic of the Just Behaving approach is the proactive avoidance of behaviors that owners would later need to correct, such as jumping, biting, rough play, mouth play, tug-of-war, and excessive excitement. These behaviors are never intentionally introduced or reinforced. Puppies still have ample opportunity to naturally express playful and exploratory behaviors appropriate to their age and environment, but human caregivers do not directly interact with or encourage these specific behaviors. Instead, puppies quickly learn through consistent modeling and repetition that calm behavior results in positive outcomes, gentle physical interaction, and peaceful companionship. This deliberate and preventative approach dramatically reduces the need for correction.

## The “Snap and Point” Correction Method

When corrections become necessary, they are delivered subtly, unemotionally, and immediately - much like how balanced adult dogs naturally correct younger dogs. The correction typically involves a gentle auditory cue, such as a snap of the fingers combined with a firm but quiet verbal marker ("Heh!") and occasionally a subtle physical gesture or touch. Specifically, the correction method includes a clear "snap and point"

approach: a gentle snap of the fingers to interrupt unwanted behavior, combined with an extended finger to provide mild, non-threatening physical contact if necessary. This method of correction not only addresses immediate behavior but also builds a clear, consistent language of communication between humans and dogs, reinforcing their mutual understanding and trust.

### **Calm Parental Leadership - Not Playmate, Not Peer**

Central to this approach is the recognition of the human role as a calm and assertive parental figure rather than a playmate or peer. Unlike conventional methods where families mistakenly behave like puppies themselves, inadvertently reinforcing unwanted behaviors, Just Behaving emphasizes the importance of disciplined, calm, parental leadership. By consistently embodying calm leadership and clearly defining roles, boundaries, and expectations, families establish an environment of emotional stability and clarity. This parental-style relationship ensures puppies understand their place in the family hierarchy and develop respect and trust in their human caregivers.

### **The Indoor/Outdoor Distinction**

The philosophy also distinguishes clearly between appropriate indoor and outdoor behaviors:

- **Indoors:** The environment is purposefully structured to encourage calmness and composure, with human caregivers modeling quiet behavior and avoiding any interactions that could incite excitement. If a puppy becomes overly energetic indoors, they are either calmly ignored - thus removing reinforcement - or gently guided outdoors.

- **Outdoors:** Puppies are given freedom to fully express their natural instincts and energy - exploring, running, digging, chewing, and engaging with their environment freely. From the puppy's perspective, these activities may be energetic and vigorous, yet the human caregiver consistently maintains a calm, composed presence.

This distinction ensures puppies learn context-appropriate behavior and emotional regulation, seamlessly transitioning between calm indoor environments and dynamic outdoor spaces.

### **The Just Behaving Method: The Foundation for a Lifetime**

Ultimately, the Just Behaving method prioritizes building a deep-rooted foundation of trust, clear communication, and emotional balance. By closely replicating natural canine mentorship dynamics and adopting a disciplined, proactive, and intentional approach during critical developmental stages, puppies naturally adopt behaviors and emotional states that align with calm, balanced adult dogs. This deliberate methodology lays the

groundwork for a harmonious, enduring relationship between dogs and their human families, fostering mutual understanding, respect, and lifelong companionship.

## **Extended Q&A**

### **Q: How can I best introduce my puppy to new people and situations?**

A:

- Introduce your puppy thoughtfully, gently, and calmly. Carefully supervise each interaction, ideally by holding your puppy or staying close enough to calmly intervene or redirect behavior.
- This prevents unwanted behaviors such as jumping, mouthing, or excessive excitement, often unintentionally reinforced by excited human interactions.
- Educate family members and visitors about maintaining calm, controlled energy. Encourage soft, gentle tones, slow movement, and avoidance of sudden gestures or high-pitched vocalizations.
- Start interactions brief and positive, gradually extending as your puppy demonstrates consistent calmness.
- For new environments or experiences, begin with brief, controlled exposures. Let your puppy explore at their own pace, quietly supporting them as they encounter new sights, sounds, and smells.
- Model calm, steady behavior. Recognize signs of stress - yawning, lip licking, hesitation—and adjust accordingly.
- Regular, carefully structured exposure builds genuine confidence, emotional stability, and adaptability.

### **Q: What should I do if my puppy bites or mouths during play?**

A:

- Puppies typically bite or mouth during play because they've been unintentionally encouraged to do so.
- Never engage in behaviors that could lead to biting or mouthing - no play with hands, feet, clothing, or rough interactions.
- If your puppy has already started, immediately and gently correct the behavior using the "snap and point" method. Give a quiet but firm verbal cue ("Heh!") with a gentle snap of the fingers and extended finger to interrupt, then redirect to a chew toy or a calm activity.

- Consistency and clarity are essential. Every family member and visitor must avoid interactions that encourage or reward biting or mouthing.

- By consistently setting expectations and proactively preventing this behavior from being reinforced, your puppy will quickly learn appropriate boundaries and become a calm, balanced adult.

**Q: Is it okay to play fetch or other active games?**

A:

- Fetch and similar active games are acceptable but require careful consideration and clear structure.

- Wait several weeks after bringing your puppy home before introducing fetch; build a strong relationship and clear boundaries first.

- Consider whether fetch aligns with your vision for your calm family companion. Fetch is fundamentally more of a structured job for a dog than just a simple game, and regular fetch can create a dog without an "off switch" for arousal.

- If introduced, ensure fetch is controlled, structured, and calm from your perspective. Clearly signal the start and end of the game, maintain calmness, and transition back to quiet activities afterward.

- This approach supports your puppy's emotional balance and helps maintain a harmonious family environment.

**Q: How do I manage interactions between my puppy and young children?**

A:

- Manage interactions with guidance and close, calm supervision.

- Teach children that puppies are companions needing gentle handling, not playmates for roughhousing.

- Guide children to pet gently when the puppy is calm, speak softly, and avoid abrupt or overstimulating actions.

- Help children recognize signals - yawning, licking lips, backing away, or tucking tail - that mean the puppy needs space or rest.

- Don't allow chasing, squealing, or waving hands; these prompt unwanted excitement like jumping or mouthing.

- By establishing clear guidelines and modeling calm, you foster mutual respect, emotional stability, and genuine companionship.

**Q: What if my puppy frequently jumps up on people?**

A:

- Frequent jumping indicates someone is unintentionally encouraging or rewarding the behavior - any attention, even negative, can reinforce jumping.
- To eliminate jumping, everyone in the household must commit to consistent, appropriate responses. Calmly correct using the "snap and point" method with a firm, quiet "Heh!".
- Educate family, guests, and regular visitors: No excitement, eye contact, touching, pushing, or talking when the puppy jumps. Calmly turn away, avoid eye contact, give no attention until the puppy is calm with all paws on the ground.
- Proactively reinforce calm greetings from day one. When your puppy settles, quietly acknowledge with gentle petting and praise.
- This approach - prevention, consistent correction, and aligned responses—teaches polite, calm greetings and creates a harmonious family environment.

**Q: Should I crate-train my puppy?**

A:

- Just Behaving does not discourage crates, but does not promote them as a primary training or containment method.
- Our philosophy is structured freedom and natural learning - not confinement. Overuse of crates can cause stress, learned helplessness, and excessive compliance, rather than real emotional stability.
- Puppies develop best with freedom to move, explore, and interact with their environment.
- If you use a crate, do so thoughtfully and sparingly. It can be a safe, quiet space if introduced positively, but should never be the puppy's main environment or restrict critical learning.
- Avoid using the crate for punishment or to manage normal energy. Introduce gradually, and always associate with positive experiences.
- Rely instead on structured freedom, mentorship, and indirect guidance - fostering resilience, confidence, and a trusting relationship.
- The goal is not compliance through containment, but a dog who makes thoughtful decisions and adapts confidently to life. Consider the long-term implications before deciding to use a crate.

## **Just Behaving Philosophy: A Deeper Reflection and Summary**

### **Is This About Suppressing the Puppy?**

Not at all. The Just Behaving approach isn't about dulling or diminishing your puppy's natural joy or playfulness. It's about guiding those instincts so your puppy can mature into a happy, emotionally balanced, and respectful adult companion. Puppies are irresistibly cute, and it's natural to want to play with them, but ask yourself: Is that what's best for their long-term well-being?

### **What Do Mammals Really Do?**

In nature, mature mammals rarely engage in playful interactions with their young just for fun. Instead, they provide boundaries, structure, and calm leadership - mentoring their young into maturity and self-regulation. Behaviors that seem harmless in puppyhood - like jumping, biting, and wild play - are usually curbed early by elder dogs. The mentorship dynamic produces resilience and emotional regulation.

### **Well-Mannered Family Dog vs. High-Drive/Performance Dog**

A well-mannered family dog is fundamentally different from a dog trained for agility, sports, or specialized work. Performance dogs require hours of daily stimulation, drive-building, and continuous training. Most families, busy with daily life, cannot provide that level of energy channeling, and it may not be fair to the puppy or the family to try. The Just Behaving approach asks you to reflect: Is a dog's role in your home to be a non-stop playmate or to be a calm, integrated family companion?

### **What Happens When You Get It Right?**

A well-mannered dog will still be overjoyed to see you, will play, wag, and delight in life - just without the biting, jumping, and chaos that create problems down the line. Calmness becomes the default, and respect for boundaries is woven into daily life, not imposed through constant correction or external control.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Prevent, don't correct: Avoid creating habits you'll later struggle to change.
- Calm is not dull: Calmness is the foundation for trust, love, and real affection.
- Mentorship, not management: Puppies need boundaries and structure, not a human who imitates puppy play.
- Family fit matters: Your dog should match your life - not the other way around.
- Consistency is kindness: Everyone in the family must model and reinforce the same calm boundaries for lifelong harmony.

## **A Final Reflection**

Just Behaving is a compassionate, evidence-based 60-day journey that guides your puppy toward becoming a truly integrated family companion. You'll honor your puppy's curiosity and exuberance while teaching them the skills and emotional regulation necessary for a fulfilling life. This approach ensures your dog will be not just well-behaved, but happy, confident, and deeply connected to your family.