

# Instinctual Behaviors and Raising Balanced Adult Dogs

## Introduction

The natural world provides a clear and effective blueprint for raising young: a short, purposeful cycle where adult mammals guide their young into maturity through direct correction rather than prolonged nurturing or excessive praise. Whether in wild packs or human families, this approach focuses on creating boundaries, fostering respect, and preparing the young for independence.

At Just Behaving, we embrace this philosophy as the foundation for raising well-mannered, balanced dogs. Modern training methods that rely solely on energy, excitement, and positive reinforcement often prolong "puppy-like" behaviors, delaying a dog's transition into adulthood. By contrast, our method emphasizes instinctual correction, calm leadership, and prevention - guiding puppies to grow into confident, respectful adult dogs. While positive reinforcement plays a vital role in training, it must complement a foundation of manners, boundaries, and structure, much like effective parenting.

## Instinctual Behaviors: What Mammals Teach Us

### 1. Correction Over Replacement

- In the wild, adult mammals confront unwanted behavior immediately and directly. They don't "replace" undesirable actions with distractions or rewards. For example, an adult dog will growl or nudge a puppy that nips or invades its space, setting a clear boundary without introducing confusion.
- Similarly, parents in human households instinctively redirect toddlers from unsafe actions with calm, firm guidance rather than distracting them with toys or treats. This direct approach builds trust and clarity, teaching young ones to self-regulate and respect limits.

### 2. Prevention as a Foundation

- Prevention is a cornerstone of natural learning. Adult mammals do not create opportunities for misbehavior only to correct it afterward. For instance, parents don't wrestle with toddlers and then reprimand them when they get too rough, nor do adult dogs initiate high-energy play like tug-of-war and then chastise the puppy for taking it too far.

- Families should adopt this preventative mindset by avoiding activities that encourage behaviors they wouldn't want in adulthood, such as jumping, mouthing, or hyperactive play. Instead, they can set puppies up for success by creating calm, structured environments from the start.

### **3. The Missing Step in Modern Training**

- Many contemporary training methods skip the critical "parenting step," where boundaries and manners are taught. Without this foundation, positive reinforcement alone may fail to address core issues like respect for personal space or impulse control. Training methods that apply rewards during bad behavior risk reinforcing the very habits families want to eliminate. Correction and prevention work hand-in-hand to guide puppies toward adulthood while allowing positive reinforcement to shine in the right contexts.

## **The Role of Calm Leadership**

### **1. Mirroring Pack Behavior**

- In a pack, the leader's role is not to entertain but to provide stability and structure. Adult dogs maintain a calm, confident demeanor, using subtle cues and direct corrections to guide the behavior of younger members. This calm leadership fosters security and clarity.
- Families can mirror this approach by remaining composed, using body language and tone to communicate expectations, and avoiding excitable reactions that might escalate unwanted behavior.

### **2. Confrontation Builds Respect**

- Well-mannered adult dogs tolerate a puppy's exploratory behavior at a distance but confront it directly when it crosses personal boundaries, such as jumping or mouthing. This direct correction teaches respect for space and fosters a shared "language" between the adult and the puppy.
- Similarly, families should not ignore behaviors like jumping or nipping when they encroach on personal boundaries. Calm, immediate corrections—such as stepping forward or withdrawing attention—help puppies understand limits and develop respectful habits.

### **3. Balancing Correction with Positive Reinforcement**

- Once boundaries are established, positive reinforcement can be used to reward desired behaviors, such as calm greetings or sitting quietly. The

balance of correction and rewards creates a comprehensive learning environment where puppies understand both what to avoid and what to pursue.

## **Prevention in Action: Practical Guidelines**

### **1. Avoid High-Energy Triggers**

- Activities like tug-of-war or excessive roughhousing promote excitement and competition, which can lead to behaviors like aggression or hyperactivity. Instead, engage puppies in calm, cooperative activities such as structured walks or exploring new environments together.

### **2. Create a Safe Zone**

- Designate a calm, low-stimulation area in the home where the puppy can retreat and decompress. This reinforces the idea that quiet behavior is the default and provides a space for self-regulation.

### **3. Set Clear Boundaries**

- Use tools like baby gates or leashes to define physical boundaries and prevent opportunities for undesirable behavior. For instance, if jumping on guests is a concern, manage the puppy's environment to limit access until they've learned proper greeting manners.

## **Relatable Analogies for Families**

### **1. The Toddler Analogy**

- A puppy's behavior is much like that of a toddler exploring their world and testing boundaries. Toddlers might grab objects, wander into unsafe areas, or exhibit other impulsive behaviors. Parents instinctively step in to confront the behavior with calm, firm guidance. Similarly, puppies learn through consistent, direct correction rather than replacement or distraction.
- For example, if a puppy mouths during play, withdrawing attention teaches them the behavior is inappropriate. Over time, consistent corrections build an understanding of acceptable boundaries.

### **2. Workplace Leadership**

- Think of a calm leader in a household as you would a respected manager in the workplace. Good managers don't micromanage or control every action; instead, they establish clear expectations, address issues promptly, and provide steady guidance. Similarly, families should model calm

authority for their puppies, creating a stable environment where the rules are clear and consistently enforced.

- A key to leadership is prevention. Just as a manager doesn't create chaos by introducing distracting activities and then correcting the fallout, families shouldn't encourage behaviors like tug-of-war games and later scold a puppy for playing too rough. Prevention sets the stage for success.

## **Structured Correction in Action**

### **1. Jumping**

- Instead of engaging with or scolding a puppy for jumping, calmly step forward into their space, blocking the behavior. Consistently redirecting to a sit position reinforces respectful greetings without escalating excitement.

### **2. Mouthing or Nipping**

- A firm but calm vocalization (e.g., "ah-ah") followed by withdrawing interaction mimics how an adult dog might correct a puppy. This teaches the puppy that mouthing ends the interaction.

### **3. Excessive Barking**

- Remove the puppy from the source of overstimulation and redirect their focus to a calming activity, such as sitting quietly. This approach reinforces patience and self-regulation.

## **Conclusion: Raising Balanced, Confident Dogs**

By focusing on instinctual behaviors, direct corrections, and prevention, families can guide their puppies through the natural cycle of growth into respectful, well-mannered adult dogs. Emphasizing calm leadership and clear boundaries mirrors the way mammals naturally raise their young, creating a foundation of trust and mutual respect.

At Just Behaving, we believe that raising a puppy is not about prolonging their "puppy phase" but about nurturing their natural progression to adulthood. Through intentional, instinctual guidance, we help families and puppies build lifelong bonds rooted in harmony and understanding.