

## Historical Context: The Evolution of Dog Training Methods

Our relationship with domestic dogs spans millennia, but formal dog training as we think of it today has undergone dramatic changes within the last century. In the early and mid-20th century, dominance-based approaches dominated the dog training landscape. Trainers believed that owners must establish an *alpha* position over their dogs, echoing what was then thought to be the structure of wolf packs. Methods from this era often relied on physical corrections and intimidation: techniques like leash yanks, alpha rolls (forcing a dog onto its back), and stern reprimands were commonplace. The underlying assumption was that dogs misbehave because they are vying for dominance, so a handler had to “show who’s boss” through forceful control. While these traditional methods could indeed suppress unwanted behaviors in the moment, they often did so at a cost. Dogs trained under heavy-handed regimens frequently exhibited signs of stress or fear, and any compliance was sometimes more a response to intimidation than true understanding. Both practitioners and scientists began to question the dominance paradigm – not only on ethical grounds, but also due to inconsistent results. Research into wolf behavior itself moved on: biologists like David Mech discovered that wild wolf packs are more family groups than hierarchical armies, undermining the simplistic “alpha dog” analogy. In homes around the world, owners found that treating a pet primarily as a subordinate often damaged the human–canine bond and could even *exacerbate* aggression or anxiety rather than resolve it. Such insights laid the groundwork for a new direction in training, as people sought gentler, more scientifically grounded methods.

By the latter half of the 20th century, dog training began its scientific turn. The rise of behavioral psychology – spearheaded by researchers like B.F. Skinner – introduced the power of *reinforcement* in animal learning. Skinner’s work on *operant conditioning* demonstrated that animals (dogs included) learn fastest when their desired behaviors are rewarded rather than when they are merely punished for mistakes. This research sparked a revolution: training philosophies shifted away from dominance and punishment toward positive reinforcement techniques. In practice, this meant swapping choke chains and scolding for *treats, praise*, and clickers. By the 1990s and into the 21st century, *reward-based training* had become the new gold standard in mainstream dog training. Obedience classes started to emphasize giving a dog a treat or a toy the moment it performed the correct action, thereby reinforcing that behavior. The clicker – a small device that makes a sharp “click” sound – became a popular tool to mark correct behaviors at the exact instant they occurred, to avoid any confusion in the dog’s mind about what it did right. These modern methods, grounded in behavioral science, were not only effective at teaching dogs specific commands, but were also widely considered more humane. Studies found that relying on positive reinforcement led to dogs that were more confident and less prone to fear or aggression compared to those trained primarily with punishment. Even fields that once leaned heavily on compulsion – such as military and police dog training – began incorporating more reward-based techniques as evidence mounted that dogs could learn complex tasks and remain highly reliable without the need for intimidation.

This paradigm shift from correction to reinforcement marked huge progress in the ethics and effectiveness of dog training. Today, it is common to see puppy classes focused on socialization and basic manners using nothing harsher than a timeout or a gentle “no,” and plenty of treats and toys for good behavior. The mainstream ethos encourages owners to *catch their dog doing something right* and reward it, rather than waiting to punish mistakes. When done well, positive reinforcement training produces dogs who are eager to learn, happy to engage with their

owners, and fluent in a variety of obedience cues. It's a far cry from the old-school image of a cowering dog obeying out of fear. Instead, the modern trained dog might joyfully perform a sit or recall, anticipating a piece of kibble or a favorite ball as a reward.

However, despite this encouraging evolution, questions and new challenges have emerged. Positive reinforcement drastically reduced the need for fear-based tactics, but many trainers and owners began noticing limitations in an exclusively reward-focused approach. For one, teaching obedience commands is not the same as raising a well-behaved companion. A dog might perform "sit" and "down" perfectly in class for a morsel of food, yet still exhibit unruly or anxious behavior at home or when not in "training mode." Some dogs also became so fixated on treats that they seemed unwilling to listen unless a reward was on offer – a case of "*will work for food*" taken too far. Conversely, owners adhering strictly to "no corrections, ever" often found themselves at a loss when their dog rehearsed truly undesirable behaviors (like jumping on visitors or chasing cats) that couldn't simply be ignored into oblivion. In practice, the humane modern methods, while kinder, sometimes struggled to achieve *real-life reliability*.

In parallel, the dog training world became polarized. On one side, traditionalists clung to the belief that without firm authority and the occasional punitive consequence, dogs would run amok. On the other side, an increasingly vocal force-free movement insisted that any correction or denial of a reward was detrimental. Caught in between were ordinary dog owners, often confused by the conflicting advice. Should they be a disciplinarian "alpha" or a dispenser of endless treats? The result has been a pendulum swing in popular dog advice – from the harsh dominance-based credo of "show them who's leader," to the modern mantra of "distract and reward." Both approaches aimed to produce a polite pet, yet each in its own way fell short of addressing some fundamental aspects of canine behavior and the human–dog relationship.

This historical journey – from coercion to cookies – set the stage for Just Behaving to emerge. It became clear that a new paradigm was needed, one that could integrate the humane values and scientific insights of modern training with a deeper understanding of canine development, communication, and intrinsic behavior. Where traditional methods overemphasized control and modern methods overemphasized rewards, there was an opening for a philosophy that emphasized something else entirely: *understanding*.

### **Critique of Mainstream Training: Beyond Obedience and External Control**

To appreciate why *Just Behaving* proposes a different path, we must examine the limitations of conventional dog training as it is typically practiced. Mainstream training - whether old-school corrective or modern positive - tends to focus on getting the dog to do or not do specific actions on cue. In other words, the goal is usually *obedience*: does the dog sit when told, not jump when told "off," walk without pulling on a leash, come when called, and so on. Certainly, having a dog that responds to commands is valuable. But this obedience-centric mindset can overshadow a more important question: does the dog truly understand *how to behave* in everyday life when it's not being actively commanded?

Think of the average obedience class experience. Owners work diligently on drills like "sit-stay," "down-stay," "heel," and "leave it." The dog might earn a training certificate after performing these skills in a controlled setting. Yet once back home, that same dog might still dash out the door, steal food off the coffee table, bark incessantly at squirrels, or become hyperactive whenever guests arrive. The training succeeded in teaching responses to specific cues, but *failed to teach general life manners*. This is a common scenario: a dog is "well-trained" in the

narrow sense but not necessarily well-behaved in a broader sense. Why does this gap exist? Largely because the dog's compliance is tied to external control. The dog behaves when the owner is actively giving a command or holding a treat; in the absence of those explicit cues, the dog defaults to whatever behavior comes naturally (which often isn't what the owner wants).

This reveals a core limitation of many conventional approaches: they rely heavily on external motivators and controls and often neglect the dog's intrinsic development of self-control and understanding. In traditional punitive training, the external motivator is fear of correction – the dog obeys to avoid a leash jerk or a scolding. In purely reward-based training, the motivator is the lure of a treat or toy – the dog obeys to earn a prize. In both cases, the driver of behavior is coming from *outside* the dog. What happens when those external factors are absent? The fear-trained dog might “get away with” misbehavior when it thinks it won't be caught. The treat-trained dog might decide it's not “worth it” to listen if it doesn't anticipate a reward. In neither scenario has the dog internalized why a given rule or behavior is desired; they are performing or refraining mainly because of external consequences.

Moreover, an overemphasis on obedience can inadvertently reduce the dog to a reactive subject of commands, rather than an active participant in the household with its own learned manners. Dogs are highly intelligent, social creatures. They are capable of learning not just *what* we want them to do in response to a cue, but *how* we want them to conduct themselves in general. Yet mainstream training often doesn't trust this capability. It's as if we assume a dog left to its own devices will inevitably make “bad” choices, so we must continuously manage or command it. This mindset leads to what could be called “micromanagement” of the dog. For example, if a family wants their dog to settle down in the evening, a typical training solution might be to teach a “place” or “mat” command and require the dog to stay on a mat for a duration – effectively *imposing* calmness through a command. The dog complies because it has been conditioned to, but it may be internally restless, just waiting for release because it hasn't truly learned to be calm of its own accord.

A further shortcoming of conventional methods is the neglect of emotional development and understanding. Traditional training largely ignored the dog's emotional state – a “sit” was expected whether the dog was anxious, excited, or afraid, and misbehavior was often attributed to defiance rather than distress. Modern positive training is certainly more attuned to emotions (for instance, counter-conditioning fear with treats), yet it still often addresses symptoms (barking, lunging, etc.) piecemeal through training exercises, rather than cultivating an overall stable temperament from the start. There's a tendency in mainstream training to compartmentalize “behavior issues” and solve them with protocols (teach a counter-command, use a better reward, manage the environment after problems arise). What this approach misses is that by the time a problem behavior needs fixing, the dog's underlying *habit or emotional pattern* is already formed. The training then is remedial – trying to undo or override something that might have been prevented in the first place if the dog had been guided differently during development.

Consider socialization, a critical aspect of early upbringing. Conventional wisdom urges owners to expose their puppies to a wide variety of people, dogs, and environments during the “critical socialization period.” While the intent is good – to make the puppy friendly and adaptable – the execution frequently goes awry. Puppy classes and well-meaning owners sometimes create chaotic social scenes: puppies are passed around to countless strangers or allowed to play unchecked with other pups, all in the name of socialization. The problem is that *not all*

*experiences are equal.* A young dog may learn from these encounters, but what it learns might be hyperactivity, over-excitement at the sight of people or dogs, and even anxiety. An overstimulated puppy that is constantly encouraged to “go say hi” or to play wildly might end up associating people with excitement, or other dogs with rough play or conflict. Thus mainstream socialization, when done without mindfulness, can backfire – it risks *teaching* the very behaviors (jumping, leash-pulling toward people, excessive barking) that owners do not want. Traditional training didn’t emphasize socialization at all (beyond perhaps avoiding outright aggression), whereas modern training sometimes overemphasizes quantity of exposure at the expense of quality and calmness. In either case, the nuance of guiding a puppy’s *state of mind* during new experiences is often lost.

Another important critique involves the human perspective encouraged by mainstream training. Under a purely obedience-focused regime, owners might come to see training success in terms of checklists of commands and tricks, rather than deeper harmony. It’s not uncommon to hear an owner brag, “My dog knows five commands and can do agility,” yet still struggle with the dog’s manners at the dinner table. The emphasis on *performance* can overshadow the importance of simply raising a dog to be a pleasant companion. On the flip side, in some positive-training circles, owners are taught to avoid saying “no” at all and instead redirect every unwanted behavior into a wanted one (e.g., “don’t punish jumping, just ask for a sit”). While redirection is a useful tool, if used in isolation it can mean the dog never receives clear feedback that any behavior is outright unacceptable – they only learn that doing something else yields a treat. This can lead to dogs who are *persistent* in testing behaviors because the worst outcome from their perspective is simply no cookie, not a clear signal to stop. Dogs, much like human children, benefit from knowing not just what to do, but also where the firm boundaries are.

Traditional and even modern positive training methods frequently overlook a critical prevention-based principle: never initially encourage or invite behaviors that you ultimately want to avoid. Common playful interactions such as encouraging jumping, tug-of-war, or mouthing - though often initiated innocently - create deeply ingrained behavioral patterns that must later be corrected. Just Behaving explicitly emphasizes proactively avoiding such invitations from the outset. Rather than allowing puppies to engage in these behaviors even momentarily or playfully, we deliberately avoid introducing these behaviors entirely, recognizing that preventing behaviors from forming in the first place is far simpler and more humane than correcting them later.

Finally, mainstream approaches often treat training as a time-bound activity – something you do in discrete sessions, after which “real life” resumes. But real life is when most behavior actually happens. Many owners have experienced the frustration of a dog that performs beautifully in a structured class or when a trainer is present, but reverts to unruly behavior outside of that context. Part of this is due to *context-specific learning*: dogs don’t automatically generalize a lesson from one context to another. If they learn “sit” in the kitchen for a treat, they may not realize “sit” also applies at the noisy park unless similarly trained there. Beyond context issues, there’s a conceptual oversight: treating training as separate from daily living can signal to the dog that it only needs to behave during those formal sessions. It compartmentalizes the learning. The dog may think, “When the treat pouch is on and the clicker is out, I follow the rules. Otherwise, anything goes!” Inadvertently, mainstream training sometimes creates *two different dogs* – the obedient one in class and the impulsive one the rest of the time – because it has focused on conditional obedience rather than an integrated way of life.

All these critiques point to a common theme: conventional training often prioritizes external control over internal development. Whether that control is exerted through fear of punishment or hope of reward, it remains something imposed on the dog from without – focusing on moment-to-moment behavior rather than long-term character. What's lacking is a framework that nurtures the dog's own capacity to make good decisions, to stay composed, and to cooperate out of understanding and habit, not just immediate incentive. In short, what's missing is a way to raise a dog that behaves well by default, not because it has been constantly constrained or enticed, but because it has genuinely learned how to live harmoniously with humans. In contrast, Just Behaving explicitly integrates structured companionship, combining appropriate playful and exploratory activities within clearly defined contexts, explicitly enabling dogs to transition seamlessly from active engagement to calm companionship, without relying on constant external management.

### **The Need for a New Paradigm: Toward Understanding and Intrinsic Growth**

The shortcomings of mainstream methods do not mean those methods are wholly ineffective. Indeed, generations of dogs have been trained to an acceptable standard through both old and new techniques. However, “acceptable” is a far cry from optimal – especially when we imagine the ideal canine companionship. An ideal we might envision is a dog who is *a joy to live with*: one who can relax at home without being told, interact politely with people and other animals, and respond to guidance when needed not out of compulsion or bribery, but out of a kind of mutual understanding. Achieving this ideal consistently was not fully possible with the existing paradigms alone. Dominance-based training could produce control, but often at the expense of trust and welfare. Reward-based training could produce eager responses and a happier dog, but often at the expense of reliability when the dog wasn't being “managed” with cues or treats. There remained a gap between training and living.

Into this gap steps the Just Behaving philosophy. The need for a new paradigm arises from recognizing that raising a dog is not the same as training a performing animal; it's more akin to guiding a developing mind. Just as good parenting is not just about getting a child to follow orders but about instilling values and self-regulation, raising a dog can be approached as an education in how to live as part of human society. The call for a new paradigm is really a call to elevate our approach – from one that is narrowly behaviorist to one that is *holistic and humanistic*, treating the dog as a learner with emotions and social instincts that we can nurture constructively.

One reason this paradigm shift is needed is humane efficacy. We want methods that are gentle and respectful, yet also consistently effective in producing well-adjusted dogs. Positive reinforcement swept through the training world because it promised (and delivered) a more humane way to influence behavior. But to truly be humane in the broadest sense, a method must consider the animal's overall well-being, not just the absence of fear or pain. A dog that lives under a regime of constant treat-dependence and hyper-excitement – bouncing from one stimulus to the next without ever learning to calm itself – might not be experiencing pain or fear, but is it truly flourishing? The Just Behaving philosophy contends that there is an even more *compassionate* approach: one that respects the dog's nature and developmental needs so deeply that the dog is guided into a state of contentment and stability, not just kept superficially “happy” with treats. It's a vision of humane training that goes beyond avoiding aversives, aiming

instead to proactively cultivate emotional balance and understanding in the dog. This is arguably more humane because it results in a dog who lives with far less confusion, anxiety, and conflict. Rather than the dog constantly testing boundaries or being frustrated by mixed signals (“Sometimes I get a treat for jumping, sometimes I don’t – I’m excited and I don’t know what to do!”), the dog raised under the new paradigm experiences a consistent, calm world where good behavior is *the path of least resistance and greatest reward* in a very natural sense.

Communication methodologies also significantly differentiate Just Behaving from conventional approaches. Mainstream training often relies on command-heavy communication, creating dependence on verbal cues and constant reinforcement. In contrast, Just Behaving employs a developmental communication approach that evolves with the dog's maturity—starting with clear, physical guidance during puppyhood and gradually progressing toward subtle, minimal communication as dogs internalize expectations. This naturalistic communication method mirrors how well-adjusted adult dogs interact with younger dogs, providing immediate, clear feedback within the critical 1-3 second window of association. By emphasizing timing, appropriate tone, purposeful silence, and the handler's emotional regulation, Just Behaving creates a communication framework that enhances all aspects of the dog-human relationship without creating dependence on treats, commands, or corrections.

Another compelling reason for a new paradigm is effectiveness for real families. Not every dog owner is a professional trainer or even an avid hobbyist who wants to spend hours a week on training exercises. For many people, the appeal of having a dog is companionship, not a complex hobby in canine obedience. Traditional training often placed a huge burden on owners to be disciplinarians at all times; modern training places a different burden, requiring one to be an almost full-time behavior technician armed with treats and strategies to preempt every misstep. The reality is that average families have jobs, children, and countless responsibilities – they need a dog who can fit into their life relatively *seamlessly*. A paradigm that requires “*near-constant training*” or expert handling to yield a calm dog is simply not practical for most people. And when training efforts fall short due to their complexity or intensity, it's the dog that often suffers (perhaps being rehomed or kept isolated due to behavior issues). Thus, a new approach was necessary – one that would be effective yet achievable for typical dog owners, emphasizing getting things right from the start so that owners are not later forced into an endless cycle of correction or management.

Just Behaving answers this call by redesigning the very notion of what it means to raise a dog. It proposes a shift from *training sessions* to continuous upbringing. Instead of focusing on obedience in specific moments, we focus on shaping the dog's character and habits through every interaction, especially during puppyhood. It seeks to replace the paradigm of *external control* with one of intrinsic development – guiding the dog in such a way that it naturally grows into a well-mannered companion, rather than having manners “installed” via drills. This is a profound change in mindset: from training a dog *what to do*, to raising a dog into *who to be*.

Such a philosophy did not arise in a vacuum. It emerged from the collective experience of many dogs and owners grappling with the shortcomings of other methods, and from thoughtful observation of dogs themselves. Imagine watching a group of well-socialized adult dogs interacting with a puppy. The puppy learns almost invisibly: when it becomes too boisterous, an older dog may give a quiet growl or simply get up and walk away, withdrawing attention. When the puppy is calm and respectful, the adult might allow close contact or play gently. Over time, the puppy *internalizes* what behaviors lead to positive social outcomes and which do not. There

is no formal “class,” no treats for sitting, no punishments per se – instead, a natural social feedback system is at work. This kind of learning, rooted in mentorship and social cues, is what Just Behaving set out to harness in a deliberate way. The insight was that if we can imitate the conditions under which puppies naturally learn to behave in a dog pack – with ourselves as the stand-in for wise adult dogs – we could raise dogs who behave appropriately out of habit and understanding, not merely in response to command-and-control training.

In summary, the new paradigm is needed to fill a void: the space between not training enough and training in a way that doesn’t translate to daily life. It is needed to align our methods with how dogs actually learn and develop from infancy onward. And it is needed to ensure that our quest for a well-behaved dog never compromises the dog’s welfare or the joy of having a dog. We shouldn’t have to choose between a happy dog and a well-behaved dog, or between being humane and being effective. The Just Behaving philosophy insists we can have both – by changing *how we think about the problem* of behavior in the first place. It’s not about choosing between dominance or permissiveness, or between correction or reward; it’s about stepping outside that old dichotomy altogether and focusing on *partnership, guidance, and understanding*.

Having laid out the “why” of this approach, we can now delve into the “what” and “how.” What exactly does Just Behaving entail, and how does it work in practice? The answers lie in a set of core principles that form the backbone of the philosophy. These principles reorient our approach to dogs, turning away from control and towards *mentorship*, away from reactivity and towards *prevention*, away from momentary excitement and towards *calm fulfillment*. By exploring these foundational ideas, we set the stage for a richer, more humane way to live with our canine companions.

## **Core Principles of Just Behaving: Foundations of a New Philosophy**

At the heart of the *Just Behaving* philosophy are five **interconnected principles** that guide every aspect of raising and living with a dog. These core concepts – **Mentorship, Calmness, Structured Leadership, Indirect Correction, and Prevention** – work in synergy to create a framework for canine companionship that is markedly different from conventional training approaches. Rather than standalone techniques, they are best understood as pillars that support one another. Each principle contributes to the overarching goal: a dog who is not just obedient in spurts, but holistically balanced and well-behaved as a way of life.

Before examining each pillar in detail, it’s important to see how they interrelate. For instance, *Prevention* flows naturally from a mindset of *Mentorship* – if we think like mentors, we anticipate and guide, which prevents misbehavior rather than waiting to correct it. *Calmness* underlies everything: a mentor’s guidance is given calmly, indirect corrections are done in a calm manner, and a structured leader maintains a calm household routine. Achieving *Structured Leadership* (sometimes thought of in terms of providing structured freedom) makes prevention easier, because a dog who trusts its leader is less likely to go astray. And *Indirect Correction* ensures that even when the dog errs, the feedback doesn’t shatter the calm or the trust that the other pillars build. In essence, these principles form a coherent philosophy of “raising” a dog versus “training” a dog. Let us now explore each one, with real-world illustrations of how they play out.

## **Mentorship: Learning Through Guidance and Example**

The first pillar of Just Behaving is Mentorship. This principle encapsulates the idea that dogs learn best not through formal instruction or mechanical reward loops, but through *social learning* and guidance from more experienced beings – both dogs and humans. Mentorship means we don't view ourselves simply as rule-enforcers or treat-dispensers; instead, we see ourselves (and any older, well-behaved dogs in the household) as role models and guides for the young or untrained dog.

In nature, puppies learn how to “dog” primarily by observing and interacting with adult dogs. Long before humans invented obedience classes, canine behavior was passed down organically in the context of the pack or family group. A puppy romping with its mother and littermates gets constant feedback: too rough, and a yelp or a nip from mom tells it to tone things down; too far wandering, and a quick retrieve by the scruff or a blocking body stance guides it back to safety. When the pup offers a polite behavior – say, sitting quietly or using a calm greeting signal – it is rewarded with warmth, play, or access to resources (nursing, for example). By the time a wild or feral puppy grows up, it has learned the “code of conduct” for its society without a single formal lesson. This natural mentorship is powerful, and it's something traditional training has largely ignored or even disrupted (for example, removing a pup from its mother too early, or isolating dogs in training to prevent “distractions”).

Just Behaving seeks to harness the power of mentorship in a deliberate, structured way. From day one, a puppy in the Just Behaving program is not just trained *at* – they are *brought up*. If there are stable adult dogs available, they play a critical role as canine mentors. A well-mannered adult dog can teach a puppy things that no human ever could, in the native “dog language.” For example, a puppy that jumps at an older dog's face to solicit play might be gently but firmly pushed away or momentarily ignored, teaching the pup that over-exuberance doesn't always get a social reward. When that puppy tries a more polite approach – perhaps a play-bow a few feet away or a calmer wag and sniff – the adult dog may then engage, reinforcing the better behavior. This kind of immediate, context-specific feedback is far more intelligible to a puppy than a human saying “No” or even turning away, because it is exactly how a dog expects social cues to be given. In a multi-dog Just Behaving household, puppies learn the household rules by watching the older dogs: if the adult dogs don't bark when the doorbell rings and instead calmly walk to the entryway, the puppy will mimic that composure over time. If the adult dogs wait patiently while the humans prepare dinner, the puppy picks up on that routine as well.

But mentorship is not only canine-to-canine. Human mentors are equally crucial, especially since not every family will have an older dog to do the teaching. As human caretakers, adopting the mentorship mindset means we *continually demonstrate* the behaviors and responses we want from our dog. It starts with something as simple as tone of voice and body language. For instance, if we want a puppy to greet guests politely, we ourselves greet guests in a calm, friendly manner and we orchestrate the greeting such that the puppy observes us exchanging pleasantries without chaos. We might hold the puppy or keep it on a leash at first – not to force submission, but to gently show: “This is how we meet people – we stay relaxed and polite.” Over repeated exposures, the puppy learns that *calm greeting behavior* is just “how things are done” in its family. Contrast this with a non-mentorship approach: if one were using obedience training alone, they might try to teach a “sit-stay” for greetings. But if the owner's own energy is excited and the situation overwhelming, the puppy is unlikely to execute the sit-stay reliably. Without mentorship, the puppy is essentially left to figure out the appropriate behavior on its



own (amidst frantic human commands). With mentorship, the puppy has a guiding hand and example every step of the way.

A key aspect of human mentorship in Just Behaving is that our role evolves over time. In the beginning, raising a puppy, we act more as a parental figure – setting boundaries and keeping the pup safe, much like a mother dog would. There are times we simply prevent the puppy from making mistakes (much more on Prevention later). We might, for example, block off certain areas of the house, or gently pick up the pup when it's about to do something undesirable, redirecting it. As the dog matures and shows understanding, our role shifts from parent to mentor in the stricter sense: less direct management, more subtle guidance. Instead of always physically intervening, we start using indirect cues (a snap of fingers, a pointed look, a calm “uh-uh”) that mimic the natural communication dogs use with each other. By adolescence, the dog should view its human as a trusted mentor – someone to look to when unsure, someone whose behavioral cues it has learned to read, and someone whose own calm and confident demeanor it strives to mirror. Indeed, a remarkable thing happens when mentorship is done well: the dog begins to adopt the human's patterns as its own. If we live a calm, orderly life, the mentored dog becomes calm and orderly. If we model friendliness to strangers, the dog takes strangers in stride. Essentially, the dog has been *socialized into our way of life*, not through force or bribery, but through constant, gentle alignment with our expectations.

A practical real-world example illustrates mentorship in action. Imagine a family bringing home an 8-week-old Golden Retriever puppy. In a traditional training mindset, the focus might be on teaching the puppy basic commands right away and managing mischief with stern “no's” or frequent crating. In a Just Behaving mentorship mindset, the focus in those early weeks is instead on immersing the puppy in the rhythms of the household with guidance. For instance, on the first morning, the puppy might whine for attention from its crate or pen. Instead of immediately coddling or, conversely, harshly ignoring it, the human mentor calmly goes to the puppy and waits for a moment of quiet, then opens the pen with minimal fuss. The day proceeds with the puppy following the mentor around (perhaps on a light leash for safety) and the mentor calmly narrating or signaling what is happening. If the puppy starts chewing a table leg, the mentor quietly intervenes by gently removing the pup and giving an appropriate chew toy, staying nearby and showing by example that *this* toy is for chewing, not the furniture. If the puppy gets overly excited during play, the mentor might simply stand up and become still for a moment – modeling that play stops when things get too wild. When the puppy lies down calmly, the mentor softly praises or offers a gentle stroke, reinforcing that calmness is appreciated and earns companionship (arguably the most valuable reward to a social creature). Over days and weeks of this constant low-key guidance, the puppy learns a host of lessons: people are calm and kind but have boundaries; if I'm gentle and composed, I get affection and inclusion; if I'm over-the-top, I momentarily lose their engagement. The puppy is effectively being taught how to navigate life, not through sporadic training drills, but through *living alongside a mentor*.

Mentorship makes use of a dog's strongest natural learning tools: *imitation* and *social feedback*. By leveraging these, Just Behaving reduces the need for explicit training of every single behavior. Puppies start to “get” things without being formally commanded in the conventional sense. A well-mentored dog might never have had a treat-based lesson in not bolting through doors, yet it always waits at the door because it has internalized over time that humans go through first and that patience is just what one does. Similarly, a puppy may not need a strict “off” command for furniture if it has been consistently guided to chew toys and praised for calm

behavior – it naturally gravitates to those behaviors that are reinforced socially. This is the difference between a conditioned behavior and an embodied understanding. Just Behaving aims for the latter. It's the difference between a dog that sits because it was cued and expects a treat, and a dog that offers a sit when visitors appear because it has learned that sitting politely is the natural way to earn a greeting. In short, mentorship creates dogs who think and adjust rather than just react for rewards or out of fear.

Of course, mentorship does not mean we never explicitly teach anything or never use rewards. It means those techniques are embedded in a larger context of relationship and example. We still praise the puppy for making good choices; we might still use a treat here and there to positively reinforce something (especially if the dog finds it very motivating). But we are always mindful that our goal is to cultivate the dog's *intrinsic* understanding. We don't want a dog that behaves only when we're standing there with a snack; we want a dog that behaves because it truly knows what's expected and feels right doing it. The focus is on developing the dog's character and habits, not just its responses to commands.

Mentorship also sets the tone for the human's behavior. It challenges us to be consistent and self-aware, since we know the dog is always learning from us, even when we're not formally "training." If we occasionally lose our temper or act unpredictably, the dog is learning from that too (perhaps to be fearful or excitable). Thus, embracing mentorship often means the owner grows alongside the dog – developing greater patience, emotional control, and clarity in communication. This two-way growth builds a powerful bond of trust and respect. The dog sees the human as a steady, reliable guide, and the human sees the dog blossoming under their guidance, which positively reinforces the human to continue in that mode. It's a virtuous cycle.

By emphasizing mentorship, Just Behaving diverges from mainstream training's transactional view of teaching and replaces it with a relational view. The human-dog relationship itself becomes the vehicle for learning. As we proceed to the other pillars, this theme will reappear: a strong, trustful relationship and a dog's willingness to follow our lead (because we have shown them the way) are far more reliable in the long run than any bribe or threat. A mentored dog doesn't behave well just because it's told to – it behaves well because it knows what is appropriate and genuinely wants to cooperate, much like a well-raised child who behaves in a restaurant not because someone is hovering with a punishment, but because they've internalized good manners.

### **Calmness: The Default State of Being**

If mentorship provides the *method* of teaching in Just Behaving, Calmness provides the *emotional foundation* for everything. One of the most distinctive aspects of the Just Behaving philosophy is its insistence on calmness as the default mode for both dogs and handlers. Where some training philosophies might celebrate a dog that is constantly exuberant and hyper ("look how excited he is to work!"), Just Behaving values an underlying tranquility. This doesn't mean dogs never play or get excited – they certainly do – but it means that excitement is a temporary state, consciously managed and not inadvertently promoted as the norm. The goal is a dog who can be content and self-possessed most of the time, rather than a dog who lives in a perpetual state of arousal that must be continuously channeled or quenched.

Why so much emphasis on calmness? Through both experience and scientific understanding, we know that a dog (or a human, for that matter) learns best and lives best in a calm state of mind. High arousal – whether from stress or even joy – tends to narrow focus and make an

individual less receptive to subtle cues. An overly excited dog finds it hard to listen or think; an anxious dog likewise struggles to absorb guidance. By contrast, a calm dog can observe, process, and respond thoughtfully. Beyond learning, calmness is linked to better health and well-being: chronic excitement or anxiety can lead to elevated cortisol levels, impulsive behavior, and various stress-related issues over time.

In mainstream dog culture, there's a common notion that "a tired dog is a good dog" and that to achieve calmness, one must exhaust the dog through exercise or play. Many people equate a dog's happiness with it being constantly active, tail-wagging, and stimulated. Just Behaving turns this idea on its head. It suggests that a fulfilled dog is a calm dog, and that calmness itself can be a source of contentment for the dog. Rather than burning off a dog's energy after it becomes wound-up, we strive to *prevent excessive arousal in the first place*. (This circles back to the Prevention pillar.) In practice, calmness is something we actively cultivate from puppyhood. We don't wait for a dog to get frantic and then try to reel them in; we aim to keep their baseline arousal low so they rarely, if ever, reach a state of frenzy.

Practically, cultivating calmness starts with the environment and routine. Just Behaving puppies are raised in serene settings: no blaring TVs, no constant roughhousing or chaotic stimulation. This doesn't mean a silent, joyless life – it means a life with gentle exposure to normal household sounds, a gradual introduction of play, and plenty of scheduled quiet time. For example, instead of revving a puppy up with squeaky toys and vigorous tug-of-war whenever it's awake, a Just Behaving approach includes lots of low-key activities: chewing on toys in a cozy spot, exploratory sniffing games in the yard, being nearby during household chores to observe rather than always being the center of attention. This teaches the young dog that being calm is both safe and rewarding. Unfortunately, in many typical households, puppies learn the opposite: they learn that being hyper or demanding gets them interaction (people laugh, play, or even scold – but attention is attention), whereas when they settle down, they might be left alone. We flip that script: *calm behavior gets affection and inclusion*, while wild behavior makes humans disengage.

One concept Just Behaving introduces is "**structured companionship**". This is an alternative model of bonding with your dog that doesn't rely on high excitement. Structured companionship means engaging with your dog in activities that promote calm engagement rather than frantic excitement. For instance:

- Instead of wild fetch sessions that leave the dog panting and manic, we might go on a leisurely walk where the dog is encouraged to sniff and explore at a moderate pace, with the owner occasionally pausing to just stand and quietly share the moment.
- Instead of riling the dog up with a laser pointer or chase games indoors, we invite the dog to lie by our feet as we read or work, perhaps giving a long-lasting chew to occupy them. The companionship is in the physical closeness and the mutual relaxation.
- Play is not banished – a friendly tug or a game of hide-and-seek is fine – but we keep it measured and interspersed with pauses. If the dog starts getting too excited, we pause the game, perhaps ask for a simple sit or just wait for the dog to settle, then resume calmly or end the session on a gentle note. The idea is to teach the dog how to come down from excitement quickly and smoothly when needed.

Calmness is also heavily reinforced through how we give our attention. A key guideline is: *only give attention or affection when the dog is in a calm state*. That means if the dog is jumping, barking, or demanding play, the owner momentarily withdraws engagement (not as a dramatic punishment, just as a clear signal). The instant the dog collects itself – even slightly – the owner can acknowledge it with a gentle pet or a “good boy/girl.” Over time, the dog learns that being calm is the way to get what it wants (attention, play, freedom). This is essentially the opposite of what many of us instinctively do; lots of owners inadvertently reward excitement by trying to soothe an excited dog or by engaging with a wiggling, jumping pup (because it’s cute or hard to ignore). The Just Behaving approach requires self-discipline from humans to break that cycle and consistently reward calm states instead.

One might wonder: does this focus on calmness make a dog’s life boring or suppress their natural joy? Experience shows the opposite. By eliminating the rollercoaster of highs and lows – the overstimulation followed by inevitable crash or scolding – the dog ends up enjoying *more* steady, pleasant involvement in daily life. A calm dog gets to be around the family more because it’s not causing trouble. It can be taken more places because it’s not going to be a whirlwind of chaos. Paradoxically, prioritizing calmness results in a dog that has *more fun* overall, because that fun is integrated naturally and doesn’t cause problems that lead to isolation. For example, a calm dog can be allowed off-leash in more situations since it’s likely to stay near the owner and not bolt or jump on strangers. A calm dog can hang out when guests come over – perhaps getting petted or just snoozing at someone’s feet – whereas an excitable dog might have to be leashed or put away because it can’t control itself around visitors. In short, calmness opens the door to greater freedom and inclusion for the dog.

We can draw an analogy to a well-behaved child: a child who is taught to be calm in restaurants and stores gets to go on family outings and have rich experiences. A child who throws tantrums or runs wild ends up left with a sitter at home – they lose out. Dogs are similar. By teaching calmness, we open up the dog’s world. Many Just Behaving practitioners note that their dogs go almost everywhere with them – to friends’ houses, on vacations, to outdoor cafés – because their dogs know how to just “hang out” politely. This level of inclusion is far more enriching for the dog than being left behind or crated because it’s too hyper to handle.

Another benefit of calmness is what it does for the human side of the partnership. When you commit to fostering calmness in your dog, you inevitably must foster it in yourself. Dogs are emotional sponges and often mirror our energy. If we are anxious, loud, or highly agitated, the dog is likely to reflect that. So Just Behaving asks us to *lead by calm example*. (This dovetails with the Mentorship and Structured Leadership pillars.) Calmness is contagious: by practicing a quiet, measured approach with our dogs, we not only help them, but often find ourselves becoming more serene. Many owners discover that raising their dog in this style makes them more patient in general, more relaxed in daily routines, and better at managing their own stress. The dog–human relationship becomes a sort of mindfulness practice – you cannot succeed in teaching calm without *embodying* calm, at least in those moments of interacting with your dog. Over time, that habit of calm can extend into the rest of our lives as well.

In practical application, the Calmness pillar might play out like this: Suppose your adolescent dog gets excited and starts barking when the doorbell rings. A mainstream training approach might have taught the dog a “quiet” command or to go to a mat when the bell rings, with mixed

success. In Just Behaving's calmness approach, you would have worked proactively on this scenario by *never* reacting with excitement or alarm to the doorbell yourself. You might even stage practice sessions: have a friend ring the bell, and you intentionally remain unhurried – perhaps even ignore the first ring or two – while your dog observes you. If the dog barks, you calmly say “enough” or redirect its focus without yelling. Over numerous calm repetitions, the dog starts to see that a ringing bell is not cause for frenzy – because its mentor (you) isn't frantic, and because barking never achieved anything. Instead, once the dog is quiet, you praise and then open the door. You instruct guests to also greet the dog calmly (no high-pitched squealing or excited roughhousing). Eventually, the doorbell becomes a cue for the dog to trot to the door and maybe sit or stand quietly, because that has been the consistently reinforced pattern. The difference here is that you achieved this not merely by issuing commands like “sit” and “stay” (though you might use those as tools initially), but by *repeatedly setting a tone of calmness* during door greetings. The dog's internal state in response to the doorbell changed, not just its outward behavior on command.

Calmness also extends to how dogs play and exercise under Just Behaving. We absolutely ensure dogs get sufficient physical activity and fun – we're not advocating a monastic life for Fido. But even play and exercise are kept in the context of rules and rhythm. For example, a game of fetch might include making the dog sit and wait calmly before each throw, preventing it from working itself into a frenzy. A romp with other dogs might be supervised and periodically interrupted for short “breathers,” where all dogs are called over and settled for a minute before being allowed to play again. These strategies prevent over-arousal and teach dogs to self-regulate. A well-known problem at dog parks is that play can escalate until it tips into a fight or someone gets hurt. With a calmness-trained dog, you have instilled the habit that even in play, checking in and calming down when called is normal. This makes play sessions safer and more enjoyable in the long run.

In summary, Calmness as a core principle is about establishing a baseline of tranquility from which all good behavior can grow. A calm dog is not only easier to live with, but actually *happier* and more secure. By rewarding calm behavior, structuring our interactions to minimize chaos, and leading with calm energy ourselves, we create an environment where a dog's nervous system can relax. In that relaxed state, the dog's true personality shines without being distorted by stress or overstimulation. We see the gentle affection, the curiosity, the steady loyalty that might be masked in a hyper or anxious dog. Calmness is, in a way, the soil that allows the seeds of all other training to take root. Without it, commands and corrections are like seeds on pavement – they might sprout briefly, but they won't flourish. With calmness, the dog's mind is fertile ground for learning and bonding.

### **Structured Leadership: Guiding with Clarity and Consistency**

If mentorship and calmness lay the groundwork for *how* we interact with a dog, the principle of Structured Leadership defines *our role* in the dog's life. In Just Behaving, the human is encouraged to embrace the role of a leader and guide, rather than a permissive playmate or a stern taskmaster. A phrase often used is “being a parent, not a playmate”. This doesn't mean we can't ever romp on the floor with our dogs or that we must be aloof authority figures; rather, it means that ultimately, for a dog to thrive, it needs a trustworthy leader who provides structure, makes decisions, and sets boundaries in a benevolent way.

The need for leadership in dog raising is sometimes misunderstood. In the old dominance-based training, “leadership” was synonymous with exerting dominance – eating before your dog, not letting the dog on furniture, forcing the dog into submissive postures, etc. That is *not* what Structured Leadership in Just Behaving means. In fact, we consciously avoid the trappings of the outdated dominance paradigm. Structured Leadership is not about dominating; it’s about providing a predictable, fair structure in which a dog can feel secure and learn right from wrong with minimal conflict. It’s leadership in the sense of a good parent or a good teacher, not a dictator.

Why is leadership necessary at all? Dogs, being social animals, actually crave guidance and clarity in their social group. This doesn’t mean they want to be “dominated,” but they find comfort when someone is clearly in charge and the household rules make sense. Many behavior problems stem from dogs lacking clear leadership. If an owner acts primarily as a playmate or a servant to their dog – constantly catering to the dog’s demands, playing without rules, or simply not setting any limits – the dog may begin to make its own rules or become anxious because it senses no one else is in charge. Some dogs will become overprotective (feeling they must assume the leader role themselves), others will become bratty or unruly (pushing boundaries incessantly because none seem to exist). Just like children, dogs test limits; if they never find those limits, it’s disorienting and can lead to behavioral issues.

Structured Leadership in practice has several components:

- **Consistency in Rules and Routines:** A leader provides a consistent world for the dog. This means if getting on the couch is not allowed, it’s *never* allowed (not allowed one day and allowed the next out of pity or whim). If jumping up on people is discouraged, then *everyone* in the household enforces that rule in the same way. Consistency might sound strict, but dogs truly blossom under it because it removes ambiguity. The dog doesn’t have to guess what might be okay today versus yesterday; it knows the rule and thus can relax within those boundaries. Routines are also part of this consistency – set times for meals, walks, and rest create predictability. Dogs often thrive on routine because it makes their environment more understandable. A predictable environment under a reliable leader means the dog doesn’t feel the need to control things itself, which is a big relief for the canine psyche.
- **Setting and Enforcing Boundaries:** A structured leader sets fair boundaries – where the dog is allowed to go, how it is allowed to greet people, how it interacts with family members, and so on. Enforcing boundaries in Just Behaving is done mostly through the mentorship and correction methods we’ve discussed: calm, immediate guidance. For example, a boundary might be “no going into the kitchen during dinner time.” To enforce that, initially you may use a baby gate or your own body to block the puppy from wandering in. As it grows and understands, a simple pointed finger or a stand in the doorway reminds it. The dog learns, “I’m not allowed there right now.” There’s no yelling or harsh punishment if it tests the boundary – just calm, firm guidance back to where it should be. Over time, the dog respects that invisible line as if it were physical. The key is that a leader enforces boundaries consistently but not angrily. In contrast, many owners enforce boundaries only when frustrated (e.g., they let the dog barge through the door 9 times, then on the 10th time when their hands are full, they yell or smack the dog). That inconsistency confuses the dog and undermines trust. We avoid it by calmly holding the line *every time*, so the dog clearly understands the rule.

- Decision-Making for the Dog's Benefit:** A subtle part of leadership is making decisions on behalf of the dog that the dog cannot or should not make for itself. For instance, deciding how much and what kind of play is appropriate, when it's time to rest, who the dog meets and how those meetings go. Dogs often get anxious or make poor choices when we put them in positions to decide things beyond their understanding. A structured leader takes on the burden of those decisions. Imagine you're on a walk and encounter another dog. An unsure owner might freeze or let the dogs greet chaotically, possibly causing the dog to feel it must handle the situation (which can lead to reactivity). A structured leader, however, will decide: *Are we greeting this other dog or not?* If yes, you orchestrate a polite, calm greeting. If not, you gently lead your dog away, communicating "I've got this; we're not saying hi." The dog, sensing that clarity, is relieved and more likely not to react. In essence, leadership often means telling the dog "you don't need to worry about this decision; I'll handle it," which reduces the dog's stress and inappropriate behaviors. True leadership is thus closely tied with the Calmness pillar – a leader projects, "All is under control, you can relax."
- Balancing Affection with Authority:** Structured leadership doesn't mean withholding love and affection. In fact, Just Behaving dogs often receive more affection than dogs in chaotic households, because their good behavior earns them trust and access. But a leader is mindful of *when* and *how* to give affection. We don't fawn over the dog when it's misbehaving, nor do we use affection to placate a tantrum (which would inadvertently reward the bad behavior). Instead, we give affection generously when the dog is in a good state (calm, respectful, following the household rules). The leader sets the tone that affection is often on *their* terms, not always in response to the dog's demands. For example, if a dog is pawing and whining for attention, the leader might calmly ask the dog to settle or wait until it stops, then invite it over for petting. It's a subtle but important dynamic: the dog learns that the human initiates attention more than the dog does. This actually increases the dog's respect and patience without reducing its sense of being loved. (And of course, plenty of spontaneous affection happens too – leadership doesn't mean being cold, it just means being mindful about not reinforcing pushy behaviors with attention.)

A real-world example of structured leadership can be seen in the daily walk. Consider two scenarios: In one, the owner is basically dragged out the door by an excited dog; the dog decides the direction, zig-zags to every tree, and pulls toward any distraction while the owner just holds on or intermittently yells "heel." In the other scenario (the Just Behaving way), before the door opens, the owner (leader) has the dog sit or wait briefly. The door only opens when the dog isn't trying to barrel through. They step out together. If the dog tries to surge ahead, the leader calmly stops and perhaps steps in front, resetting the dog's position. The walk continues with the owner setting a reasonable pace. When the dog looks back to check in, the owner gives a small nod or a quiet "good." If the dog starts to pull toward something interesting, the leader might change direction or gently call the dog's name, communicating "we're going this way now." Over time, the dog learns that the walk has a structure and a leader – no need to yank the human around. The dog gets to sniff and explore, but under the human's guidance (for example, the owner might have a routine spot where the dog is allowed to sniff freely for a while). The dog, not forced into an artificial "heel" at all times but guided within a loose structure, stops pulling because it learns that staying near the owner and not pulling actually leads to a

more pleasant walk. The human in this scenario doesn't have their arm nearly pulled out of the socket; the dog trots with a loose leash out of habit and respect for the boundary of the leash.

One might ask: how is Structured Leadership different from the old "alpha" concept? The difference lies in the *means and mindset*. Dominance-based methods often used intimidation and physical force – pinning the dog down, harsh leash corrections, etc. Structured Leadership in Just Behaving uses *intelligence and empathy* rather than brute force. We set clear rules and enforce them in calm, non-intimidating ways. We never seek to gain respect by instilling fear. Instead, we earn respect by being consistent, fair, and confident. Dogs naturally follow leaders who exhibit those qualities. Think of a workplace: you respect a boss who is competent and fair, not one who yells arbitrarily. Dogs are similar – they may comply with a tyrant out of fear, but they won't truly trust or respect that person, and their compliance might vanish when the threat is removed. On the other hand, dogs will go to great lengths to obey a trusted leader who has never harmed them but has always guided them reliably. That is genuine respect.

Another key difference is that a Just Behaving leader always asks, "Is this rule or decision in the best interest of the dog (and our relationship)?" True leadership is benevolent. We set boundaries not to satisfy our ego or need for control, but because those boundaries ultimately benefit the dog or the household. For example, we may decide the dog should not sleep on our bed – not because "alpha dogs don't allow that" – but perhaps because the dog sleeps more soundly in its own bed, or because we don't want it to develop separation anxiety by being glued to us 24/7. Every rule has a reason that serves the dog's well-being or the harmony of the family. If a rule is arbitrary or needless, a Just Behaving leader isn't afraid to adjust it. This is where pragmatism comes in – we do what works best for the dog and the family, not rigidly adhere to some theory.

It's often said that structure allows freedom. Structured freedom is indeed what the dog gains from structured leadership. Within the structure set by the human, the dog enjoys *more* freedom than an untrained dog would. Once a dog knows and respects boundaries, it can be allowed off-leash in safe areas because it will check in and not run off. It can have free roam of the house unsupervised because it won't wreck things or potty indoors. In contrast, a dog without leadership often ends up on a tight leash literally and figuratively – always being restrained or confined because it can't be trusted. Thus, structured leadership is deeply tied to giving a dog the maximum safe freedom to be a dog. We often say: structure creates safety, and safety allows freedom. The dog ends up with a richer life – more adventures, more inclusion in activities – because it has a solid framework of understanding that keeps it and others safe.

For instance, recall the earlier example of a Just Behaving Golden seeing a squirrel on a walk. The dog alerted to the squirrel, the owner acknowledged with a calm "I see it too," and continued walking. The dog, understanding its owner's leadership, checked back in and moved on without pulling or chasing. That's structured leadership at work: the dog deferred to the human's decision (don't chase) because it trusted that the human leads wisely. No harsh correction or shouting "leave it" was needed – the dog made the *decision* to follow, shaped by the structured relationship they had. This example shows how, under structured leadership, a dog can exercise self-control and judgment that might seem advanced, but in reality it's the fruit of a consistent structure that the dog respects.



In summary, Structured Leadership is the principle that binds the others into an actionable lifestyle. It is the human's commitment to being the steady anchor in the dog's world – providing guidance, consistency, and protection. Through leadership, mentorship finds direction (we mentor toward specific expectations), calmness is maintained (the leader doesn't allow chaos to reign), corrections can be minimal and gentle (because the dog already respects the leader's cues), and prevention becomes second-nature (the leader anticipates and mitigates issues). A well-led dog is a happier, more relaxed dog, because it doesn't have to fend for itself or be confused about its role. The structure we provide is not oppressive; it's a scaffold that supports the dog's growth into a confident, well-behaved individual. And as that dog proves its trustworthiness, the leader grants more and more freedom – always overseeing, but rarely having to intervene. That balance of guidance and trust is what Just Behaving aims for: a dog that follows the owner's lead out of trust and habit, not fear or constant bribery; and an owner who can genuinely enjoy their dog because they've put in place the structure that makes misbehavior unlikely.

### **Indirect Correction: Gentle Guidance, Not Punishment**

Even with the best mentorship, a calm environment, and strong leadership, dogs will be dogs – meaning mistakes and misbehavior can still happen, especially during learning. Puppies test limits; adolescents get impulsive; even well-mannered adult dogs might slip up occasionally. How we respond in those moments is crucial. The principle of Indirect Correction in Just Behaving addresses this aspect. It's about correcting the dog in ways that are non-confrontational, subtle, and instructive, rather than harsh or intimidating. Our goal is to guide the dog back on track without breaking its trust or causing fear, and also without ignoring the behavior and letting it become a habit. This is a balanced middle ground that again mirrors how well-adjusted dogs naturally correct each other.

The term “indirect” is used because, ideally, the dog doesn't even realize it's being “corrected” in a punitive sense; it just experiences a consequence or cue that gently discourages the unwanted action and steers it toward a better one. Think of it like nudging the dog's behavior rather than delivering a blow. Indirect corrections are often so subtle that an observer might not notice a deliberate training technique – it often looks like just natural interaction.

Some examples of indirect correction techniques include:

- **Body Blocking or Spatial Pressure:** This means using your body position to influence the dog's movement. Let's say a dog is about to dash through an open door. Instead of yelling “No!” (which might be too slow or ineffective), you quickly step in front of the dog – your body simply blocking the path. The dog's forward motion is halted by your presence and it pauses. No one is hurt, nothing scary happened, but the message was effectively delivered: “not this way right now.” Dogs use spatial pressure with each other frequently – for instance, an adult dog might stand in a puppy's way to block it from something dangerous. It's intuitive to them and doesn't involve any force beyond being in the way.
- **Leash Guidance (as opposed to leash jerks):** The leash can be used to guide without yanking. If a dog is jumping up on someone, a person practicing indirect correction might simply hold the leash in such a way that the dog cannot actually reach the person's chest – essentially preventing the jump from succeeding. As soon as the dog's front paws return to the ground, pressure on the leash is relaxed and the dog might be calmly

praised for having “four on the floor.” The correction here was indirect: the dog attempted to jump, found it couldn’t reach the person (mild self-correction via the leash), and then immediately got feedback for being on the ground. Contrast this with a direct correction approach, where someone might sharply jerk the leash and shout “No jump!” In the indirect method, the dog experiences a gentle consequence (can’t reach, slight tension) but no fright or pain, and it is quickly shown the right behavior (standing calmly) that earns praise.

- **Timeout from Attention:** Dogs crave social attention. Often, a very effective correction for unwanted behaviors like nipping, jumping, or demand barking is to briefly remove the attention the dog seeks. For example, if a puppy is nipping your hands during play, you might immediately give a calm “Ouch, too bad,” then stand up and turn away for 20 seconds (basically ending the play interaction). This mimics what puppies do with each other – if one bites too hard, the other might yelp and disengage momentarily. The nippy pup learns that biting too hard makes playmates go away. Similarly, a dog that jumps up to greet and instead gets zero attention (even the person turning their back) will learn that jumping gets it ignored, whereas if it keeps four paws on the ground, the person eventually turns around and pets it. Importantly, this is done without anger or drama – it’s a quiet cause-and-effect that the dog can understand. (And “timeout” here doesn’t necessarily mean a formal isolation in another room – often just withdrawal of eye contact and interaction is enough for 10–30 seconds.)
- **Tone and Simple Interruption Markers:** Sometimes a gentle verbal marker like “uh-uh” or “oops” can serve as an indirect correction. The tone is not yelling, just a mild disapproval sound that tells the dog “not that.” We often pair this with a redirection to what the dog *should* do. For example, if a dog starts to chew the coffee table, you might calmly say “uh-uh” (which interrupts the behavior), then immediately offer a chew toy and praise when the dog takes it. Over time, the dog associates that “uh-uh” means whatever it’s doing isn’t desired, and because it’s always given a better alternative, it quickly learns to make the right choice on its own when it hears that sound. The key is that the tone remains calm and neutral – we’re not infusing it with anger, just information.
- **Physical Interruptions (Non-Painful):** There are moments when a brief physical intervention can redirect a dog without being harsh. For instance, some trainers might mimic a mother dog’s nip by giving a quick two-finger poke to a pup’s side or a brief grasp of the scruff (not lifting the pup, just a momentary hold). This can startle a puppy just enough to interrupt the bad behavior (say, biting a shoe or climbing on something), and then you immediately guide the pup to a correct activity. Done correctly, these aren’t painful – they are more like a tap on the shoulder or a “hey, pay attention” pinch akin to a quick nip another dog might give. The point is to interrupt the behavior *immediately* and with as little force as possible, then show the dog what to do instead. For example, if a pup is about to chew an electrical cord, you might give a quick “bap” on the rump or a poke paired with “eh-eh,” just enough that the pup stops and looks around, then you cheerfully redirect it to a toy. The puppy learns that going for the cord yields an unpleasant little surprise and no fun, whereas chewing its toy yields praise and play.

The guiding principles in all these indirect corrections are timing, proportionality, and emotional neutrality. The feedback is given *immediately* when the misstep occurs (the dog can connect it to the action), it’s *proportional* (just enough to discourage the behavior, not excessive), and it’s

*calm* (we're not angry or out of control, so the dog doesn't become fearful). This approach is very much how well-socialized dogs correct each other – a quick, to-the-point message, and then it's over with no grudges.

Why not just use strong punishment and “get it over with”? It's a fair question some might ask. Yes, a heavy-handed punishment might stop a behavior in the moment, but it often comes at a great cost. Studies have shown that punishment-based training (like yelling, alpha-rolling, or shock collars) is associated with increased aggression and anxiety in dogs. Such methods can damage the dog's trust in the handler and create fear that manifests in other ways (the dog might become fearful of the owner, or of performing any behavior for fear of reprisal). Indirect corrections avoid these pitfalls by keeping the dog's emotional security intact. The dog isn't learning “if I do that, my beloved owner becomes scary or hurts me” – it's learning “if I do that, it just doesn't work or isn't pleasant, but no big drama happens.” Therefore, the dog can take the correction on board without shutting down or becoming afraid of *us*.

Another upside of indirect corrections is that they often naturally include showing the dog an alternative. We rarely just correct and then leave a void. Typically, we either simultaneously or immediately after show the dog what to do instead. If we body-block the dog from dashing out the door, we then perhaps ask for a sit and then invite the dog through calmly – teaching “don't bolt; wait and we'll go together.” If we interrupt a puppy from jumping by stepping back, the moment it sits or stands normally we pet it – teaching “you get attention when you don't jump.” If we say “uh-uh” when a dog starts to mouth our hand and then we hand it a chew toy, we're conveying “not my hand – chew this.” This way, corrections aren't just “no”; they are “not that, do this instead.” That is both more humane (the dog learns how to succeed, not just what to avoid) and more effective (because the dog has a clear path to getting what it wants in an acceptable manner).

It can be helpful to contrast Indirect Correction with conventional methods. In traditional dominance-based training, corrections are direct and often intimidating – e.g., a leash yank or a loud “BAD DOG!” aimed at suppressing behavior. In purely positive training, corrections are often nonexistent – the approach might be to ignore unwanted behavior and only reinforce good behavior, which sometimes allows bad habits to form because not everything can be ignored (some behaviors are self-rewarding or too dangerous). The Just Behaving approach sits in the middle: we do provide feedback when the dog goes wrong, but it's delivered in a *gentle, natural* way that the dog can understand without fear. It's the kind of correction an older dog gives a younger one – a quick, firm, but not injurious message, then back to normal relations. This keeps the dog's spirits up and its confidence intact, while still drawing clear lines.

This concept has a scientific and philosophical basis. Scientifically, immediate and mild corrections that closely follow the behavior are known to be more effective in helping an animal make the connection, and they carry fewer side effects than delayed or intense punishments. Philosophically, it respects the dog as a partner – we're not inflicting suffering to make a point; we're communicating in as humane a way as possible. Dogs live very much in the moment, and they correct each other in the moment. By intervening exactly when something happens (or ideally preventing it, per the Prevention pillar), and doing so unemotionally, we help the dog understand cause and effect without fear.

It's worth noting that indirect corrections often go hand-in-hand with Prevention and the structure we provide. If we have good structure and manage the environment well, the need for correction is minimized. Many "corrections" in Just Behaving are really just reinforcing a boundary we've set. If the rule is "no jumping," the correction might simply be that we never reward the jumping and always require calm greetings – the dog is indirectly corrected by the absence of reward and by gentle blocking, and eventually it just stops trying. If an unwanted behavior does occur, we correct it in the moment and then consider how to prevent that scenario next time. For instance, if a dog manages to snatch food off the counter (and we respond with a startled "hey!" and guide it away, an indirect correction), we also realize "Ah, we should prevent this by not leaving food so close to the edge or by supervising more closely." So correction and prevention are two sides of the coin – fix it now, and adjust to avoid it in the future.

Some worry that if corrections are always mild, the dog might not "take them seriously." In practice, dogs do take them seriously when delivered with consistency and clarity. A gentle but consistent approach builds an attentive, trusting dog. Over time, often just a mild "ahem" or the presence of the owner is enough to deter a behavior. The dog learns from a series of these subtle interventions. In fact, many Just Behaving dogs seem *eager* to avoid missteps not out of fear, but because they have a clear understanding of the rules and genuinely want to please their leader or continue the fun without interruption. We see dogs self-correct once they've learned the system: for example, a dog might start to jump up, catch itself when it sees you turn away slightly, and instead sit – effectively correcting its own impulse because it knows jumping never works. That kind of self-regulation is exactly what we want, and it comes from consistent, calm corrections paired with plenty of positive reinforcement for the right behaviors.

### **Prevention: Setting Up for Success from the Start**

The final pillar, Prevention, is perhaps the most proactive and in many ways the most powerful element of the Just Behaving philosophy. Prevention means addressing potential behavior issues before they ever take root. It's about being one step ahead of a dog's learning curve – structuring their early experiences and environment so that the dog has minimal opportunity to make serious mistakes or develop bad habits in the first place. In essence, if mentorship, calmness, leadership, and gentle corrections are how we actively teach the dog, prevention is how we *reduce the need* for teaching or correcting by not letting big problems arise in the first place.

In traditional training models, much of the work is reactionary: wait for the dog to do something wrong (chew the couch, jump on a guest, growl at another dog) and then correct it or train an alternate behavior. With Prevention, we flip that script. We think of what could go wrong and manage the situation so the dog either never experiences a payoff for the bad behavior or never finds itself unguided in a tempting scenario. It's the difference between childproofing a house versus constantly reprimanding a toddler for grabbing dangerous objects – better to remove the knives from reach *before* the child explores the drawer. Similarly for dogs: behaviors that never get learned in the first place never have to be "unlearned." It's far easier to guide a clean slate than to erase and redraw on one that's been scribbled on.

Prevention starts from day one of a dog's life with us and is closely tied to management and smart socialization. Key aspects include:

- **Supervision and Confinement:** A prevention-minded owner does not give a young puppy free roam of the house unsupervised, only to come back to chewed shoes and potty accidents and then scold the puppy after the fact (which doesn't really work because the puppy can't connect it). Instead, tools like crates, playpens, or baby gates are used to *manage the puppy's space* when direct supervision isn't possible. This prevents the puppy from developing bad habits in your absence. For example, a properly crate-trained puppy won't eliminate in the crate (dogs naturally avoid soiling their sleeping area), which helps instill the habit of holding it until taken outside. A puppy confined to a safe area with appropriate toys won't be able to chew electrical cords or furniture, so it doesn't learn how fun those can be. As the dog proves trustworthy, we gradually expand its freedom. But at no point do we set the dog up to fail by giving it too much freedom too soon. This common-sense approach often gets overlooked – many behavioral issues (from destructiveness to house-soiling) get rehearsed repeatedly when puppies are left alone in too large a space or with too many temptations. Prevention solves that by *managing the environment* so the pup only forms good habits initially.
- **Purposeful Socialization (Quality over Quantity):** As touched on earlier, Just Behaving takes a thoughtful approach to socialization. We prevent the formation of fear or over-excitement by controlling the nature of new exposures. For example, rather than taking a puppy to a chaotic dog park where it could learn rough play or be frightened, we arrange one-on-one playdates with a calm adult dog or a well-matched puppy. Rather than letting every stranger pet the puppy in a stimulating way, we orchestrate initial meetings where the puppy is held or on leash and the stranger greets quietly. We shield puppies from interactions that would *teach unwanted patterns* (like people encouraging jumping or dogs bullying them). This way, we prevent the need to “untrain” those patterns later. The puppy still gets lots of exposure – but it's *guided exposure*. For instance, a Just Behaving puppy might meet dozens of people in its critical socialization period, but each meeting is managed so the puppy remains relatively calm and sits for petting. Thus it never learns that lunging excitedly is how to greet. Early experiences aren't neutral; they *program* the dog's future behavior. By preventing negative programming (whether that's trauma or simply bad habits), we spare the dog and owner a lot of trouble down the road.
- **Anticipating and Redirecting:** A prevention-savvy person learns to anticipate triggers and redirect the dog *before* a bad behavior occurs. If you know your puppy gets the zoomies every evening at 7pm, you plan a structured play or training session at 6:45 to take the edge off and then perhaps a chew toy to occupy it through that period – heading off the crazy behavior before it starts. If you have a young dog that tends to jump on guests, you don't wait for a visitor to be at the door and then struggle; you might put a leash on the dog before opening the door, or better yet practice with family members ringing the bell so you can reward the dog for sitting when the door opens. If you know a certain corner of your yard has loose dirt the dog loves to dig, you either supervise and redirect when out there or temporarily block access to that corner until the dog is older and less prone to digging. Essentially, you think ahead: *What might my dog be tempted to do in this situation, and how can I prevent or channel that?*

Prevention also extends to the way we behave so we don't accidentally encourage what we don't want. We prevent mixed signals by being consistent. For example, if you never give your

dog food from the table, you prevent begging behavior from developing. If you always meet the puppy's biting attempts with withdrawal of attention (rather than sometimes playing back, which some people do until it hurts), you prevent persistent mouthing. If you crate the puppy for naps so it learns to settle alone, you prevent separation anxiety that could arise from constant attachment. Many problem behaviors are inadvertently taught by owners; Just Behaving tries to make owners aware of this so they can prevent reinforcing the wrong things.

The major advantage of prevention is that it keeps the relationship positive and stress-free. When few things ever go wrong, few corrections are needed, and there's little frustration on either side. The dog isn't constantly hearing "No!" and the owner isn't constantly exasperated or having to repair damage. Instead, the dog mostly experiences *success* and praise. This builds the dog's confidence and trust. It also builds the owner's appreciation for the dog. Rather than seeing the pup as a "little terror" that one must constantly manage, the owner gets to enjoy a well-behaved pup and thus reinforces their own commitment to the approach. It's a virtuous cycle: prevention leads to success, success leads to a happier owner and dog, which leads to even more proactive behavior from the owner.

Critics of a prevention-first approach might argue that you can't prevent everything and eventually the dog will face temptations – so why not let them learn to deal with them early? The answer is that timing and maturity matter greatly in learning. Just as with children, we don't expose puppies to every difficulty or expect adult self-control from them. We protect and guide them until they have the understanding and impulse control to handle challenges appropriately. A 12-week-old puppy left unattended in a house full of chewable items and potty opportunities is almost guaranteed to do "wrong" because it doesn't know better and can't restrain itself. That's not a learning experience; that's just allowing bad habits to form. Instead, we prevent those misdeeds until the puppy has been taught what's right. As the dog matures, we systematically increase freedom and test them with more situations, always prepared to guide them. By then, because we've prevented serious missteps early, the dog faces new challenges with a history of good behavior and trust in us, which dramatically increases the chance of success. Essentially, we "inoculate" the dog against behavior problems by giving small, controlled exposures under guidance, rather than full-blown exposures that could backfire.

If an issue does start to appear, prevention thinking means we tackle it early and adjust management to stop it from becoming ingrained. For instance, if a 6-month-old dog suddenly discovers the fun of counter-surfing (putting paws up to steal food), we immediately cease leaving food within reach (so the behavior is never rewarded again) and perhaps go back to supervising in the kitchen, while also teaching a solid "leave it." We don't allow the dog to rehearse the bad habit. If a dog begins to bark at passersby through the window, a prevention approach would be to limit the dog's access to that window (close curtains or use baby gates during peak times) and simultaneously work on a positive alternative (like calling the dog to you for a treat when someone passes, teaching it to do something else). The idea is to cut off the fuel to the unwanted behavior *quickly* before it becomes the dog's default. It's much easier to change a behavior that the dog has only done a few times than one it's practiced for months.

Some may confuse prevention with sheltering a dog or never letting it experience life. On the contrary, prevention in Just Behaving is about *optimizing* the dog's experiences so it learns the right lessons. We absolutely want the dog to experience the world – we just want those

experiences to be ones that foster the behavior we desire. We prevent *counterproductive* experiences. For example, we won't throw a puppy into a chaotic environment in the name of "socialization" because that could teach the wrong lessons or scare the puppy. Instead, we gradually expose the puppy to all sorts of environments in measured ways. The dog still experiences the full spectrum of life – just with our guidance and careful setup until it's ready to handle more on its own.

Philosophically, prevention aligns with the idea of setting the learner up for success rather than testing them to see if they fail. In education, a good teacher doesn't start by giving a student a final exam on material they haven't learned yet; they teach and scaffold so the student gains the knowledge first. With dogs, we similarly create situations where the dog is likely to do the right thing (because we managed the scenario) and then reward that. Over time, the dog has a long track record of doing right, which itself becomes reinforcing (the dog has never learned bad behaviors, so it's not drawn to them). It's much more efficient and kind to prevent a problem than to fix it later. An old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and dog training epitomizes that – early prevention of issues can save enormous effort later trying to fix a serious behavior problem.

To illustrate prevention in a simple scenario: *house-training*. A prevention-oriented approach is to assume the puppy *will* have accidents if given a chance (that's natural), so we limit chances. We take the puppy out frequently, reward every outdoor potty lavishly, and when inside the house we supervise constantly or keep the puppy in a safe space. The result is the puppy rarely, if ever, has the opportunity to soil indoors, and thus by 4-5 months it automatically goes to the door when it needs to go – because going outside is the only thing that's been reinforced. In contrast, a more *laissez-faire* approach might leave the puppy loose, result in many indoor accidents, and then try to scold or correct after the fact – which often fails and the puppy keeps peeing inside out of habit or confusion. That owner might still be struggling with accidents at 8 months, whereas the prevention owner had a reliably housetrained dog at 4 months with minimal mess. The difference wasn't the dogs; it was the strategy.

In summary, Prevention is about being proactive, not reactive. It requires forethought and a bit of extra effort up front, but it pays off tremendously in the long run. It minimizes the need for discipline or retraining later because the dog never learns many of the "wrong" behaviors to begin with. It keeps the dog's early life stress-free and full of success, which molds a confident, happy adult dog. And it makes the human's life easier and their bond with the dog stronger, since they don't go through as many battles. Prevention is arguably the most important pillar because it complements and enhances all the others: it's easier to mentor a pup who hasn't practiced bad habits, easier to maintain calmness when the dog isn't constantly getting overstimulated or self-rewarded for excitability, and easier to lead a dog who isn't pulling toward mischief. By thinking ahead and guiding a dog's development from the start, Just Behaving ensures that good behavior isn't an afterthought – it's the default.

### **Philosophical and Scientific Foundations: Why Just Behaving Makes Sense**

The Just Behaving approach is not just a collection of training tips; it's grounded in deeper philosophical ideas and scientific understanding of behavior. Providing an accessible yet rigorous foundation was a goal, so we touch here on influences from behaviorism, virtue ethics,

pragmatism, and phenomenology, as well as relevant scientific insights, to see how they underlie and validate the Just Behaving philosophy.

### *Behaviorism and Learning Theory:*

Modern dog training owes much to behaviorism – the school of psychology focused on observable behavior and how it's influenced by the environment. Concepts from pioneers like Pavlov and Skinner underlie many training techniques. Just Behaving fully acknowledges these principles: dogs, like all animals, repeat behaviors that are rewarded and avoid behaviors that have no benefit or lead to unpleasant consequences. We use plenty of positive reinforcement (a core behaviorist strategy) to encourage desired behaviors – e.g. praising calmness, giving treats for good choices. We also use a form of negative punishment (in behaviorist terms) when we withdraw attention for bad behavior – the dog loses something it wants, which discourages that behavior. These align with operant conditioning principles discovered by scientists. Our emphasis on timing – immediate feedback – and consistency also stems from behaviorist research: a consequence (good or bad) is most effective when it comes right after the behavior.

However, Just Behaving isn't *only* about conditioning external responses; it goes beyond strict behaviorism by considering the dog's *internal state* and natural social learning abilities. Classic Skinnerian training might treat the dog as a black box – just modify inputs (rewards/punishments) to get outputs. Just Behaving is a bit more nuanced. For example, a pure behaviorist might be satisfied if the dog stays on a mat when told, even if the dog is internally anxious or hyper but just refraining due to a command. By contrast, Just Behaving cares that the dog learns to *actually relax* on its mat, not just stay put. That's why we emphasize Calmness and intrinsic understanding – we don't just want a dog that *obeys*, we want a dog that has learned a way of being. This brings in aspects of cognition and emotion that classical behaviorism didn't address.

We do leverage social learning, which traditional behaviorism didn't fully incorporate. Puppies learning by observing others (as in mentorship) involves cognitive processes like attention and imitation beyond simple reinforcement loops. Modern learning theory in animals has expanded to acknowledge these capabilities – and indeed, dogs have been shown in studies to learn by watching other dogs or humans. Just Behaving taps into that by providing canine role models, which can accelerate learning in ways conditioning alone might not.

Another way we build on behaviorism is by trying to make desired behaviors become the dog's *own idea* or default. We heavily reinforce good behavior early on, but over time we fade extrinsic rewards to encourage intrinsic stability. For example, we might treat a puppy every time it lies quietly at our feet, but by adulthood, we no longer do – the dog isn't lying quietly hoping for a treat, it's doing so because that's just its habit and it finds being calm to be a pleasant state (intrinsically, likely because it's less stressful). Behaviorists like Skinner noted that once a behavior is learned, intermittent reinforcement (rewarding it occasionally or just with life rewards like freedom) can actually make it more resistant to extinction than constant rewards. Just Behaving effectively uses that principle: early on we reinforce a lot; later, we expect the dog to continue the behavior with only occasional extrinsic rewards, relying on the momentum of habit and the general good outcomes that behavior brings. For instance, a dog that walks politely might not get a treat every block, but it gets the freedom to keep exploring – which is itself a reward.



So, while behaviorist principles are the skeleton of our approach (we manipulate consequences to shape behavior), we flesh it out with an understanding of the dog's social nature and emotional needs. We're very much informed by what science tells us about canine behavior: dogs are not blank slates or simple stimulus-response machines; they have innate drives, social structures, and the ability to learn through relationships. Just Behaving tries to align with those realities.

### *Virtue Ethics and Character Building:*

Virtue ethics, originating with philosophers like Aristotle, is about cultivating good character traits (virtues) rather than just enforcing rules. In a sense, Just Behaving is like practicing virtue ethics with a dog. Instead of focusing solely on rules ("sit when told," "don't jump unless commanded off"), we focus on developing the *virtues* of a good family dog: calmness, self-control, friendliness, attentiveness, etc. We've spoken about how we instill habits of calm and respect – that's essentially cultivating virtues in the dog.

For example, rather than just enforcing a rule "don't be hyper in the house," we create an environment where the dog learns the virtue of temperance – moderating its own excitement level. We don't just stop the dog from jumping; we *teach patience and politeness*. Over time, the dog isn't refraining from jumping because it's afraid of a punishment – it refrains because it has learned a patient demeanor that it applies even without immediate oversight. This parallels raising a child to be honest because they value honesty, not just because they fear being caught in a lie.

Virtue ethics also emphasizes habituation – one becomes virtuous by practicing virtue regularly. In Just Behaving, we habituate puppies to behaving well. By preventing wild behavior and constantly reinforcing calm, we make calm, polite behavior the default – the habit. A dog habituated to waiting at doors or greeting calmly does so almost automatically. Aristotle might say we are shaping the dog's character through repeated actions, until doing the right thing is almost second nature.

One might think talking about "virtue" in dogs is anthropomorphizing, but consider: Dogs definitely have stable behavior tendencies (we might call it temperament or personality). These tendencies are shaped by genetics and experience. With Just Behaving, we are consciously molding the dog's tendencies/"personality" to be well-suited for human family life. A dog that has learned self-control, confidence without aggression, and desire to please is essentially a "good character" dog. In contrast, a dog that is never shown boundaries or that is always riled up is forming a character that might be labelled "spoiled" or "unruly." So while dogs don't have moral virtues in the human sense, they do have analogous qualities (like impulse control, sociability, attentiveness) that we can nurture.

Importantly, this approach is also forgiving of mistakes and focused on improvement rather than punishment – much like virtue ethics encourages guiding someone to do better rather than condemning them for a lapse. We're not interested in making a dog feel guilty for breaking a rule; we're interested in reinforcing the behaviors that make it a "good dog" in the long run. Each day of consistent guidance is like practice in being a well-behaved dog, just as a person might practice being kind or courageous. Over time, it becomes who the dog *is*, not just what the dog *does when commanded*.

## *Pragmatism: An Evolving, Results-Oriented Philosophy*

Pragmatism is a philosophy that evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application. The title of the book – “*Just Behaving: An Evolving Philosophy of Canine Companionship*” – nods to the idea that this approach is not static or dogmatic; it has evolved and will keep evolving based on what actually works best for dogs and owners. In pragmatic fashion, the Just Behaving method was developed through experience and observation, not just abstract ideals. The founders observed over time which approaches reliably produced stable, happy dogs and satisfied owners. They didn’t cling to traditions (dominance or purely positive) if those weren’t fully delivering; they mixed and matched techniques and devised new ones to achieve the goal.

This pragmatic attitude means the philosophy is flexible. It’s guided by core principles, yes, but within those, it adapts to different dogs and contexts. For instance, the mentorship pillar might look different in a home with an older dog mentor versus a single-dog household – and Just Behaving provides strategies for both, adjusting as needed. The principles remain the same, but their application is not one-size-fits-all. The focus is always on *outcomes*: a well-behaved dog and a strong human-dog bond. If a tweak is needed to achieve that outcome for a particular dog, the philosophy allows for it.

In the development of Just Behaving, whenever something didn’t quite work, the approach was refined – that’s pragmatism in action. It treats training techniques somewhat like hypotheses to test. If emphasizing calm mentorship from puppyhood yields dogs that don’t develop common behavior issues, that “experiment” is a success and becomes part of the method. If something was tried and didn’t yield the hoped results, it’s discarded or altered. In contrast to many training ideologies that can become almost religious (never use corrections, or always assert dominance), Just Behaving is relatively free of rigid dogma. It draws from both ends of the spectrum and everything in between, as long as the method is *humane and effective*.

The approach is also pragmatically oriented toward the average pet owner, not just professional trainers. It recognizes that methods that require extraordinary skill or endless time aren’t practical for everyone. So it favors strategies that integrate into everyday life (like mentoring during daily routine, or managing the environment to prevent issues rather than having to do special training drills for every single problem). That practicality makes it more likely owners will actually stick with it, which in turn yields better results for the dog. A beautifully theory-driven method means nothing if owners won’t or can’t do it. Just Behaving tries to ensure that the philosophy can be *lived*, not just written about.

Finally, pragmatism entails that the philosophy continues to evolve as we gather more knowledge. It doesn’t claim to have final answers etched in stone. As canine science advances or as new societal needs arise, Just Behaving can incorporate those. For example, if future studies show an even better way to teach impulse control, the approach can adapt. This openness is explicitly acknowledged by calling it “an evolving philosophy.” It’s built on foundational truths (dogs thrive with structure, social learning, etc.), but it’s not closed to new insights. This makes it intellectually honest and responsive – very much in the spirit of pragmatic philosophy, which sees ideas as always subject to revision based on their real-world consequences.

## ***Phenomenology: Seeing the World Through the Dog’s Eyes***

Phenomenology is about understanding experiences from the subjective perspective of the experiencer. In applying this to dogs, it encourages us to consider *the dog's perspective* – what the dog is perceiving, feeling, and trying to do – so that we can guide it more empathetically and effectively. Just Behaving implicitly takes the dog's point of view into account frequently.

For instance, consider how we handle socialization or prevention. We try to set things up so the dog isn't overwhelmed or inadvertently encouraged to do wrong. This requires thinking: *How is my dog experiencing this situation?* When we say don't let a bunch of strangers all squeal and crowd the puppy, it's because from the puppy's perspective that's confusing or overstimulating. When we suggest giving a puppy a safe chew toy and quiet space during dinner instead of having it right under the table, it's considering that the puppy's experience of smelling food and seeing movement might be too tempting, and it's unfair to then punish it for grabbing a morsel. Instead, we alter its experience to one it can handle (chewing its toy in a pen). That's a phenomenological sensitivity – appreciating what the situation is *like for the dog*.

The mentorship approach is also phenomenological: we communicate in ways natural to the dog (body language, tone, timing) and we observe the dog's cues. By watching the dog's signals, we might sense “Hmm, he's getting anxious with all these kids petting him at once” – a phenomenological insight – and then we intervene to keep his experience positive. We strive to understand the *meaning* of the dog's behavior from the dog's perspective. A dog that chews up shoes isn't being “bad” in moral terms; from the dog's perspective, it was bored and the shoe was interesting and had the owner's scent. Knowing that, we don't condemn the dog – we simply remove shoes from reach and give it something else to do. We meet the dog's needs (something to chew, alleviation of boredom) in a way acceptable to us. That way both subjective worlds – the dog's and ours – are respected.

Even the name “Just Behaving” and the idea of a dog who “just behaves” hints at a sort of *naturalness* to the dog's actions. We want good behavior to be integrated into the dog's *experience of being*. Rather than the dog behaving well only when commanded (an external imposition), it *just behaves* because that's how it is in our home environment. This requires making sure the dog's *life experience* in the home consistently shapes it that way. It's an acknowledgement that the dog is an experiencing subject who is learning all the time, not just during formal training sessions.

One can also see phenomenology in how Just Behaving handles misbehavior. Instead of assuming a dog is plotting naughtiness or “trying to be dominant,” we usually look at what the dog's natural motivation or perception is. A dog jumping on guests is usually trying to greet and get attention (from its perspective, jumping is the natural way to reach a human's face). Knowing that, we address the *need* (attention) in a different way – teaching it that sitting politely will still get it the affection it seeks. We don't attribute malice; we simply guide the dog to a more acceptable way to fulfill its intention. This empathetic view is critical for humane training – it stops us from punishing dogs out of anger or assuming the worst, and instead invites us to shape their experience so they succeed.

Additionally, Just Behaving values the dog's *emotional well-being* (which is part of the dog's lived experience). We emphasize calmness and confidence because we recognize a dog's subjective life is better when it's not stressed or confused. For example, a dog that “knows its place” in a positive sense (clear structure) often seems quite content – it can relax, as many owners note. That's an emotional phenomenology insight: dogs like knowing what to expect and

what's expected of them. Chaos or constant scolding with no clear rules is subjectively stressful to a dog. By providing structure, we improve the dog's lived experience. A philosophical way to put it: we treat the dog as an *end* (a creature whose quality of life matters), not merely a *means* to an obedient pet. The training approach is designed to make the dog's experience of living with us as positive as possible, which in turn makes our experience positive too. This mutual benefit is the hallmark of a good phenomenological approach to companionship – it's about an intersubjective relationship where both human and dog understand each other better.

### *Scientific Support:*

Underlying these philosophical approaches is a body of scientific knowledge about canine behavior and learning that supports the Just Behaving method:

- **Early Development and Socialization Science:** Research shows puppies have critical sensitive periods (around 3–16 weeks of age) during which socialization experiences strongly influence their adult behavior. Just Behaving's emphasis on quality socialization and prevention of negative experiences during this window is directly in line with veterinary and animal behaviorist guidelines. By carefully managing what a pup learns in this stage, we are essentially following what science tells us: early experiences form either the foundation of desirable adult behavior or of problems if done poorly.
- **Effects of Training Methods on Welfare:** Numerous studies have compared aversive (punishment-heavy) training to positive reinforcement-based training. The findings generally show that punishment-heavy methods correlate with signs of stress, fear, and even aggression in dogs, while positive methods produce dogs that are more relaxed and have better relationships with owners. The Just Behaving approach, by minimizing harsh corrections and focusing on positive guidance, aligns with these findings on welfare. It seeks the benefits of positive training (like better dog-owner trust) while addressing its limitations through structure and mild corrections.
- **Effectiveness of Reward-Based vs Aversive Methods:** Scientific literature (for example, studies published in recent years) tends to find that reward-based methods can be as effective or more effective than aversives for training tasks, and with fewer risks. One study suggested that dogs trained with positive reinforcement are actually *more* obedient in new situations than dogs trained with punishment (perhaps because they're not fearful and are more engaged). Our approach's success without heavy punishment reflects that evidence. Where we do use aversives (like a mild spray bottle or a firm sound), we do so in a very controlled, minimal way, much like some science-based trainers might use a quick interrupter. But we avoid the major aversives (shock, prong, yelling) due to their known side effects.
- **Observational Learning and Canine Cognition:** Studies have demonstrated that dogs can learn by watching other dogs or humans, a process sometimes called social learning or modeling. For example, research by Topál and others has shown dogs can follow a human's gaze or take cues from human actions. The concept of a "mentor dog" isn't just wishful thinking – many service dog programs now use older dogs to help train young ones, and it works. The fact that our puppies often learn faster by following adult dogs is backed by these observations (e.g., a puppy is quicker to be house-trained if it can follow an adult dog outside and imitate marking behavior). So science confirms that including a mentorship component leverages real canine abilities.

- **Self-Control and Enrichment:** Modern animal behavior science emphasizes enrichment and giving animals outlets for natural behaviors to prevent problem behaviors. Just Behaving’s prevention tactic of providing chew toys, appropriate play, and structured exercise fits with that – we prevent a lot of issues (like chewing furniture) simply by meeting the dog’s natural needs in acceptable ways. Moreover, research into “impulse control” in dogs (such as the famous “marshmallow test” equivalent done with dogs and treats) indicates dogs can develop better impulse control with training. Our exercises like waiting at doors or for food help build that skill, which is likely why Just Behaving dogs show less impulsive behavior. It’s essentially applied cognitive-behavioral training for dogs.

In combining all this, we see that Just Behaving stands on a solid foundation: it synthesizes what we know about *how* dogs learn (behaviorism and social learning) with a clear vision of *what* we want them to become (virtuous, well-adjusted companions) and *why* this matters (pragmatically, it makes life better for both species, and phenomenologically, it respects the dog’s needs). Few training approaches explicitly tie together theory and practice in this way – many either focus on one quadrant of operant conditioning or on an ideology of pack leadership without nuance. Just Behaving’s strength is in its integrative, evidence-aligned nature.

## Transition into the Next Document

We have now laid a comprehensive foundation for *Just Behaving* – exploring its historical context, critiquing mainstream techniques, arguing for a new paradigm, introducing the core principles, and connecting the approach to philosophical and scientific underpinnings. This should give experienced trainers, science-minded individuals, and academics a clear understanding of the philosophy’s origins and rationale. We’ve made the case that *Just Behaving* offers a humane, effective, and philosophically sound way to raise and train dogs, one that moves beyond seeing training as a series of commands and instead as a continuous, evolving way of life with our canine companions.

As we transition to the next document, “*Just Behaving: An Evolving Philosophy of Canine Companionship*,” we will delve deeper into how these principles play out in practice and how the philosophy continues to grow. In that text, expect to see more detailed case studies, advanced applications of the core ideas, and reflections on how the approach adapts to various scenarios and challenges. We will explore nuances such as applying these principles to older dogs or rescue dogs, handling uncommon behavioral issues within the Just Behaving framework, and the ongoing refinement of the methods as more is learned (hence the term “Evolving Philosophy”).

Where this introductory document established the *what* and *why*, the forthcoming document will take you further into the *how*. It will show *Just Behaving* in action and illustrate the transformative effects it can have on both dogs and owners. We’ll also examine the journey of developing this philosophy, acknowledging the lessons learned along the way – fitting for an approach rooted in pragmatism and continuous learning.

In closing this introduction, we now have a firm grounding to appreciate the deeper exploration to come. One can see that a dog raised with mentorship, calmness, structured leadership, gentle corrections, and proactive prevention is set up to “just behave” well – not because it’s constantly commanded or controlled, but because it has genuinely grown into a mannerly,

emotionally balanced companion. With this understanding, we can proceed to explore the finer details and evolving aspects of the philosophy with a clear context in mind.

The stage is set. In *“Just Behaving: An Evolving Philosophy of Canine Companionship,”* we will continue this journey, examining how applying these principles consistently can lead to even richer insights and adaptations. We will also see how this approach fosters not just good behavior, but a deep mutual understanding – fulfilling the ultimate goal of any philosophy of canine companionship: a life with dogs that is rewarding, respectful, and continually growing in harmony. Let’s step forward and dive into that next level of understanding, building upon the foundation we’ve established here.