

Just Behaving's Guiding Principles for Golden Retriever Health and Temperament

Just Behaving is a Golden Retriever breeding program founded on a commitment to healthy longevity and exceptional temperament. It blends rigorous, science-based practices with compassionate dog-rearing philosophy to produce Golden Retrievers that are not only long-lived and healthy but also calm, balanced, and well-adjusted family companions. Families, veterinarians, and researchers alike will recognize in Just Behaving's approach a consistent ethos of responsible breeding, proactive health monitoring, and ethical puppy upbringing. Below, we outline the core principles and recurring themes that define this program's unique approach to Golden Retriever breeding, health data management, and temperament development.

Responsible and Ethical Breeding Practices

Health Screening and Genetic Stewardship: Just Behaving's breeding program is meticulously structured to prioritize health and genetic integrity. All breeding dogs undergo extensive health screenings - including orthopedic evaluations of hips and elbows, annual eye exams for hereditary ocular diseases, and advanced cardiac testing by veterinary cardiologists - often exceeding breed club recommendations. In addition, the program employs DNA testing for inheritable conditions (such as ichthyosis and neuronal ceroid lipofuscinosis) to avoid producing puppies affected by these disorders while conscientiously maintaining genetic diversity. This high standard of preventative screening helps ensure that each litter has the best possible start in life, free of known congenital issues.

Cancer Awareness and Reduction Efforts: A driving concern in Golden Retriever breeding is the breed's predisposition to cancer, which is the leading cause of death for Goldens. Just Behaving acknowledges this reality - in fact, studies have shown that in North America a significant majority of Golden Retrievers (often estimated around 60% or more) ultimately succumb to some form of cancer. Common cancers in the breed include hemangiosarcoma, lymphoma, mast cell tumors, and osteosarcoma. Rather than accepting this as inevitable, the program actively works to mitigate cancer risks through informed breeding decisions. They stay current with cutting-edge research (for example, findings from large ongoing studies like the Golden Retriever Lifetime Study) to guide how dogs are paired and which genetic lines are continued. By carefully selecting breeding pairs with healthier lineage records and avoiding known risk factors, Just Behaving aims to reduce the incidence of cancer and increase the odds of longer lifespans in their puppies.

Temperament as a Priority: An ethical breeding program does not focus on health alone. Just Behaving places equal importance on temperament and behavioral

soundness when selecting breeding dogs. Only adults with stable, friendly, and confident dispositions become part of the breeding program. This temperament focus ensures that puppies inherit a genetic propensity for being gentle, well-adjusted companions. In practice, this means no dog is bred solely for appearance or pedigree prestige - they must demonstrate the kind of calm, trustworthy demeanor suitable for a family home. By not compromising on temperament, the program upholds an ethical standard: puppies should be set up to succeed as loving family members, not just physically robust dogs. This balance of health and character in breeding decisions reflects Just Behaving's broader stewardship of the Golden Retriever breed.

Ethical Stewardship and Puppy Placement: Underlying all breeding practices is a philosophy of ethical stewardship. Just Behaving views each breeding as a serious responsibility to improve or at least maintain the breed's well-being. Breeding decisions are made with long-term outcomes in mind, rather than short-term convenience. For instance, the program is mindful of preserving genetic diversity to avoid the pitfalls of inbreeding, and it continually re-evaluates breeding stock based on health updates or new information. Additionally, puppies are placed thoughtfully into homes that are prepared to meet the breed's needs. This careful placement process ensures that each puppy's temperament and energy will suit their family, and that owners understand the lifelong commitment involved. By selecting excellent homes and providing guidance to new owners, the program further safeguards the dogs' futures. This real-world diligence – from health testing to selective placement - exemplifies how Just Behaving translates ethical principles into everyday breeding operations.

Comprehensive Health Monitoring and Data-Driven Decisions

Lifetime Tracking of Health Outcomes: One of the hallmarks of Just Behaving's approach is its emphasis on record-keeping and analysis of health data across the dogs in its program. Rather than treating each puppy in isolation, the breeder treats their entire population of dogs as a monitored cohort, tracking key health and longevity outcomes over time. This means that for every dog bred or raised in the program, important health events (such as development of any diseases, results of veterinary screenings, and age and cause of death if applicable) are documented and aggregated. By maintaining these detailed historical records within each family line, Just Behaving can identify patterns and emerging concerns. For example, if dogs from a particular lineage tend to develop a certain condition at mid-life, that information informs future breeding plans (perhaps steering away from that line or outcrossing to strengthen genetic resilience). Longevity tracking is a specific focus: the program monitors how long dogs live in each line and uses that information to strive for improvements in the next generation. This level of record-keeping is more akin to a research study than a typical breeding kennel, and it allows evidence-based decision making. In essence, Just

Behaving applies a scientific lens to its own breeding program, continually evaluating outcomes and adjusting strategies in response to real data.

Cohort-Based Health Analysis: By treating the group of dogs it breeds and raises as a cohort, Just Behaving can analyze health trends in a meaningful way that individual anecdotal reports might miss. This cohort-based monitoring is similar in spirit to large-scale canine health studies, but on a kennel scale. It provides a sample size over years of around dozens (eventually hundreds) of Golden Retrievers, all produced or guided under the same philosophy. Tracking this cohort allows for calculations of incidence rates of various health issues within the program and comparisons to breed-wide statistics. For instance, the program can determine what percentage of their dogs develop cancer by a certain age and see if that is lower than the national average; if so, it may validate their preventive efforts, and if not, it can trigger further adjustments. It also helps in assessing the effectiveness of interventions like later neutering or dietary changes on health outcomes across many dogs. This real-world evidence can be incredibly valuable – it turns anecdote into data. Families who get a puppy from Just Behaving benefit because the breeder isn't relying on guesswork or tradition alone; decisions are backed by a growing dataset drawn from the breeder's own experience combined with wider research. For veterinarians and researchers, this approach stands out as an example of how systematic data collection in a breeding program can contribute to better understanding of health in the breed.

Integration of Scientific Research: A recurring theme in Just Behaving's ethos is the integration of scientific and evidence-based insights into daily practice. The program keeps abreast of veterinary research, epidemiological studies, and genetic findings related to Golden Retrievers. For example, extensive research from the Morris Animal Foundation's Golden Retriever Lifetime Study (which follows 3,000+ Goldens over their lives) and other studies is continuously examined for lessons that can be applied. If the data show correlations between certain environmental factors and cancer, or reveal differences in longevity between bloodlines, Just Behaving takes note. The breeding strategy is then adjusted proactively - whether that means changing a recommended feeding practice, altering vaccination or spay/neuter timing guidance, or incorporating dogs from lines known to have greater longevity or lower cancer rates (such as some European-bred Goldens). This evidence-driven mentality ensures that the program's practices are not static; they evolve as new reliable information emerges. Additionally, Just Behaving contributes to knowledge-sharing by producing its own analyses and guides. The resources it publishes (covering topics like cancer etiology, lifespan factors, and health challenges in Goldens) are indicative of a breeder who doesn't shy away from data but rather embraces it. This transparency with data and willingness to discuss outcomes openly is relatively uncommon in dog breeding. It creates a culture of learning and continuous improvement. For families, this means they are kept in the loop and

educated about health considerations for their pet. For the breed at large, it means every Just Behaving litter is planned with the benefit of both hard data and heartfelt care, rather than tradition or trends alone.

Transparency and Ongoing Education: Part of managing health data ethically is how it's communicated. Just Behaving maintains an open line of communication with puppy owners regarding health and development. Instead of simply handing over raw numbers or obscure genetic details, the breeder interprets and explains what the data mean for each family's dog. This might involve, for example, discussing a particular puppy's lineage health history in an accessible way or providing context about why certain health tests were done. The goal is to foster informed decision-making and mutual trust. Owners are encouraged to ask questions and engage in discussion about their dog's health – effectively becoming partners in the long-term well-being of the dog. Moreover, Just Behaving often shares general findings and perspectives on Golden Retriever health via articles and guides on its website, aiming to educate not just its own puppy families but the broader community. This commitment to transparency and education ensures that health monitoring isn't kept behind closed doors. Instead, the data become a tool for collective learning. It reflects a framework where knowledge is used responsibly: to improve practices internally and to empower others externally. For veterinarians collaborating with Just Behaving families, this openness can be refreshing – they have a breeder who provides thorough background information and supports recommended care protocols. For researchers, the willingness of a breeder to gather and share longitudinal health data is an encouraging sign of bridging the gap between scientific research and practical breeding.

Emphasis on Longevity and Preventive Care

Prioritizing Longer, Healthier Lives: Golden Retrievers are a breed with an average lifespan typically around 10 to 12 years, though some individuals reach 14–16 years. A core aim of Just Behaving is to push more dogs toward the upper end of that range by addressing the factors that often limit Golden Retriever longevity. The program recognizes that genetics set the stage - hence the careful selection and testing described above - but also that day-to-day care and lifestyle have profound impacts on how long and how well each dog lives. From the moment a puppy is born into the Just Behaving program, longevity is a consideration. This outlook is evident in everything from the feeding protocols to the timing of spay/neuter surgeries. The breeder provides new owners with detailed guidance on keeping their Golden Retriever healthy throughout each life stage. Rather than waiting for problems to arise, families are coached on preventive measures that can stave off common issues or catch them early when they are most treatable.

Key Preventive Health Strategies for Owners: Just Behaving educates its puppy owners on several evidence-based strategies to promote long-term health and vitality. These practices form a preventive framework that any family can follow to give their Golden the best chance at a long, disease-free life:

- **Weight Management:** Owners are taught the importance of maintaining an ideal body condition for their dog. Golden Retrievers can be prone to weight gain, and excess weight significantly increases the risk of orthopedic problems (like arthritis and dysplasia), diabetes, and even cardiovascular issues. By keeping their dogs lean and fit, families help reduce strain on joints and organs. The breeder provides nutritional counseling and growth monitoring tips, especially during the rapid growth phases of puppyhood, to ensure puppies do not grow too quickly or become overweight – both risk factors for skeletal problems.
- **Optimal Nutrition:** A balanced, high-quality diet appropriate to the dog's age and activity level is strongly emphasized. Just Behaving guides families in choosing nutritionally sound food and in understanding portion control. They discourage overfeeding (particularly in rapidly growing puppies) and excessive treats. Good nutrition is linked not only to healthy growth and weight, but also to a robust immune system and better outcomes in later life. The program may also introduce owners to concepts of gut health and the benefits of certain supplements or food formats, based on up-to-date canine nutritional research.
- **Regular Exercise:** Golden Retrievers are active, sporting dogs that thrive on daily activity. The program underscores the need for consistent, moderate exercise to keep dogs physically and mentally healthy. This includes structured walks, play sessions, and low-impact activities like swimming that Golden Retrievers often enjoy. Proper exercise helps maintain muscle tone, supports joint health, and prevents boredom-related behavior issues. Just Behaving advises owners to adjust exercise to the dog's life stage - for example, avoiding over-strenuous jumping or jogging with a very young puppy to protect developing joints, but encouraging ample activity once the dog is fully grown.
- **Thoughtful Spay/Neuter Timing:** Just Behaving takes a nuanced stance on spaying and neutering, informed by recent research. Early spay/neuter (before about 12 months of age) has been linked in some studies to higher rates of certain orthopedic problems and even some cancers in large breeds like Golden Retrievers. Therefore, the program often recommends delaying these surgeries until the dog is a bit older, when appropriate. They work with each family to make an individualized decision in consultation with veterinarians, weighing the health benefits (like reducing unwanted litters or certain cancer risks) against the

potential risks of altering a dog too early. This careful timing is another strategy aimed at giving the dog a healthier adulthood.

- **Proactive Veterinary Care:** Routine veterinary care is presented as a cornerstone of longevity. Families who get a Just Behaving puppy are counseled to schedule regular wellness exams, keep vaccinations up to date, maintain parasite prevention (for fleas, ticks, heartworm, and intestinal parasites), and attend to dental care. Early detection is key; if any health irregularity arises, catching it in an annual exam (or sooner) can vastly improve the outcome. The breeder emphasizes working closely with veterinarians, and even provides any relevant health history or context from the dog's lineage to the vet as needed. By approaching veterinary care proactively rather than reactively, owners can address small health issues before they become major, life-shortening problems.
- **Environmental Health Factors:** Just as in human health, a dog's environment plays a role in its well-being. Just Behaving encourages owners to minimize the dog's exposure to known toxins and carcinogens in the home and yard. This includes avoiding or carefully using lawn chemicals (pesticides, herbicides), choosing pet-safe cleaning products, and preventing secondhand smoke exposure. For a breed predisposed to cancer, reducing these environmental risk factors is a prudent step. The breeder may also provide guidance on safe exercise environments (to prevent accidental injury) and climate considerations (like not overexerting Golden Retrievers in extreme heat, since they can be prone to heat stress). Attention to these details helps create a lifestyle that supports the dog's health span matching its lifespan.

By following these preventive care guidelines, families become active participants in extending their dog's healthy years. Just Behaving's role doesn't end when a puppy goes home; the program continues to act as a resource and mentor on health matters. The shared commitment to lifelong health - a partnership between breeder and owner - is a defining characteristic. It recognizes that longevity is not achieved by genetics or luck alone, but through ongoing informed care. Many of Just Behaving's guiding practices here align with veterinarians' recommendations, which means the program reinforces and supports the advice that veterinary professionals give to these pet owners. For researchers observing from the outside, it's clear that Just Behaving treats longevity not as a passive outcome but as an active project, applying known science and then watching the results in its cohort of dogs.

Prioritizing Temperament and Emotional Well-Being

Calm, Balanced Companions: From its name to its training philosophy, Just Behaving puts a strong emphasis on raising dogs that are emotionally stable and well-behaved by nature. In the breeding context, this starts with parent selection for temperament as

noted, but it goes much further through how puppies are raised and socialized. The program's ethos could be described as "mentorship over training." Puppies are not simply taught commands; they are gently guided to understand life in a human family from the very beginning. This means that rather than relying on constant treats or strict enforcement to mold a puppy's behavior, Just Behaving practices a more natural form of learning: setting clear boundaries, providing consistent leadership, and modeling the desired calm behavior. The result is that puppies learn to internalize good manners and self-control as they mature, instead of needing continuous external reinforcement. This approach is particularly important for Golden Retrievers, who are intelligent and sensitive dogs that can become overly excitable or anxious if mishandled. By emphasizing calm interactions and discouraging overstimulation, the program helps each dog develop a resilient and relaxed disposition.

Mentorship-Based Rearing: A recurring framework in Just Behaving's materials is the idea of treating the human-dog relationship as akin to a parent-child relationship, especially during the puppy's formative months. In practical terms, this mentorship model involves constant, calm guidance. For example, if a puppy is prone to nipping or jumping (common puppy behaviors), the mentors (breeder and then the new owners) would address it with gentle interruption and redirection, rather than simply ignoring it or reacting with punishment. Puppies are provided with rich socialization experiences in a controlled manner: they get used to household noises, meet a variety of people, and interact with other stable dogs, all under supervision that ensures these experiences are positive and not overwhelming. By preventing bad habits before they start (one of the program's core pillars is prevention), Just Behaving manages behavior in a forward-thinking way. This approach also means that very few harsh corrections are ever needed; the puppies learn what to do and what not to do through guided experience and the gradual introduction of rules and expectations. It's an ethical approach because it prioritizes the puppy's emotional well-being - the aim is to build trust and confidence, not fear. Families are coached in this mentorship style of raising their puppy once they bring the dog home, so the continuity of this method extends throughout the dog's life.

Frameworks and Pillars: Underlying the temperament strategy are several key concepts that Just Behaving consistently highlights. They often refer to their "Five Pillars" - mentorship, calmness, indirect correction, structured leadership, and prevention – as the foundation for producing a well-mannered, happy dog. In essence, these pillars encourage owners to be leaders and teachers for their dogs (much as an experienced older dog or parent would be in a pack), to prioritize a calm environment (since a calm dog can think and learn better than one in a frenzied state), to use indirect corrections (meaning, for instance, guiding a dog toward the right behavior instead of intimidating them for the wrong one), to provide structure and routine, and to head off problems before they escalate. While these are training and rearing principles, they tie

directly into the ethical temperament practices of the breeding program. By adhering to these frameworks, the program ensures that each puppy's emotional needs are met in an ethical way. Puppies are not kept solely in kennels or left to figure things out; they are engaged with and nurtured. Their developmental milestones are tracked (much like their health metrics) to ensure they are progressing into confident, relaxed adolescents. If any behavioral red flags appear, they are addressed early with compassionate strategies.

Outcomes for Families: The ultimate measure of success in temperament-focused breeding is seen in the kind of companions that join families. Just Behaving strives to produce Golden Retrievers that “fit right in” to the family lifestyle - dogs that are gentle with children, sociable with other pets, and adaptable to everyday scenarios. Because of the emphasis on trust and clear communication in raising them, these dogs typically require less intensive management than some others; they are not reliant on continuous commands or bribes to behave appropriately. Families often find that their Just Behaving dog naturally knows how to settle calmly in the house, meet visitors politely, and respond to the household's rhythms. From an ethical standpoint, this is a win-win: the dog experiences less stress and confusion, and the family enjoys a harmonious relationship rather than a constant struggle. For veterinarians, a well-socialized, well-adjusted Golden Retriever is easier to handle during exams and less likely to develop behavior-related health issues (such as anxiety-related gastrointestinal problems or injuries from panic). For researchers interested in canine behavior, the program's results support the idea that genetics and early environment both play crucial roles in adult temperament – Just Behaving addresses both, by selecting for good-natured genetics and providing a supportive upbringing. The recurring theme here is that temperament is not left to chance or solely to the new owner's efforts; it is deliberately cultivated from the whelping box onward in an ethical, dog-centric manner.

A Unified Philosophy: Health and Temperament Hand in Hand

What clearly emerges from the Just Behaving philosophy is that physical health and mental well-being are treated as equally vital components of a Golden Retriever's quality of life. The program does not prioritize one at the expense of the other, but instead recognizes how interwoven they are. A dog with excellent genetics and robust health will still struggle if poorly socialized or anxious; conversely, a friendly, well-trained dog can have their life cut short or limited by preventable health issues. Just Behaving's answer to this is a comprehensive approach that covers all bases: breed for sound bodies and sound minds, raise puppies with love and structure, and support owners with knowledge and resources for the dog's entire lifetime.

Several recurring themes tie the program's strategies together. One is prevention - whether it's preventing hereditary illness through genetic screening, preventing disease

through lifestyle and vet care, or preventing behavior problems through early mentorship, the focus is on being proactive rather than reactive. Another theme is evidence-based action - from health testing protocols to training methods, the practices are grounded in research and real-world data. This gives families and collaborating veterinarians confidence that recommendations aren't just fads or personal anecdotes, but have demonstrable merit. There is also a theme of transparency and collaboration - the breeder works in partnership with families, sharing information openly and rallying everyone around the common goal of a thriving, happy dog.

In managing health data specifically, Just Behaving uses a framework that any researcher would applaud: collect data systematically, analyze it objectively, and apply the findings to improve outcomes. In managing temperament, they use a humane framework any dog lover would appreciate: treat the puppy as a learning, feeling being and guide it with patience and clarity. The convergence of these frameworks is what defines Just Behaving's ethos.

In summary, Just Behaving's approach to Golden Retriever breeding is distinguished by its holistic and principled nature. It is a program where a Golden Retriever's pedigree is backed by health clearances and longevity data, where each puppy's upbringing is a careful blend of science and heart, and where the commitment to the dog extends far beyond the adoption day. For families, this means receiving a puppy that comes from lines of healthy, long-lived dogs and already has a solid foundation of good behavior. For veterinarians, it means working with owners and a breeder who have been diligent about preventive care and who value expert input. For researchers, it offers a practical model of how data and ethical breeding can intersect to benefit a breed. Ultimately, Just Behaving envisions a future for Golden Retrievers where these dogs consistently enjoy longer, healthier lives and enriching, stable family relationships - and it actively works every day to make that vision a reality.