

# The Biological Positioning of Just Behaving

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Version 1.0 – Working Paper

### Purpose of This Document

Just Behaving began as a philosophy of how to live with dogs: calm mentorship, prevention, structured companionship, and a deep respect for the emotional life of the animal.

This document is a stepping stone.

It explains **why** Just Behaving is now framing that philosophy in biological and neuroscientific terms, and **how** that framing changes the way we talk about what we do.

It does not replace the core philosophy.

It sits beside it and gives it a nervous system.

### Why We Talk About Biology At All

The modern dog industry has been built mostly by **psychologists**, not **biologists**.

For decades, the dominant voice has been **behaviorism**, especially the work of B.F. Skinner and Operant Conditioning: change the consequence, change the behavior. Reward what you like, correct what you don't. Input treat → output sit.

That approach treats the dog like a calculator.

- Press the “sit” button with a cookie.
- Press the “stop” button with a correction.
- Look at the display: did we get the right answer?

There is value in that model. It gave us a language for reinforcement, punishment, timing, and learning history.

But it does not tell us what is happening in the **hardware**.

Just Behaving approaches the dog as a **biological organism** first:

- A brain that can spend the day in thoughtful, regulated states or in frantic, limbic ones.
- A nervous system that can be dominated by the gas pedal (sympathetic) or the brakes (parasympathetic).
- A body that is being shaped by hormones, myelination, gut health, sleep, and social safety.

Instead of asking only, “How do I make this dog obey?”, we ask:

- “What state is this nervous system in, most of the time?”
- “Which neural pathways are we reinforcing and myelinating?”
- “What chemicals is this dog learning to chase — dopamine highs or oxytocin safety?”
- “What baseline are we building for their gut, their sleep, and their immune system?”

The philosophy came first.

Biology is how we now explain what it has been quietly doing all along.

## The Difference Between Training and Wiring

Most dog training systems, no matter how they brand themselves, are built on **Operant Conditioning**:

- Change the consequences, and the dog's behavior will change.
- Increase reinforcement for what you want, decrease reinforcement for what you don't.

This perspective focuses on **outputs**: sit, down, stay, come, heel, place.

Just Behaving is more concerned with the **machine** that generates those outputs.

We work with:

- The balance between the prefrontal "thinking brain" and the limbic "reactive brain."
- The dog's baseline level of arousal.
- The way repeated behaviors become myelinated "superhighways" in the brain.
- The dog's dominant chemical patterns: dopamine-driven seeking vs oxytocin-based safety.
- The tug-of-war between sympathetic ("fight or flight") and parasympathetic ("rest and digest").
- The social regulation that comes from mentors, modeling, and emotional contagion.

In plain terms:

- We are not just teaching "sit."
- We are building a brain that is **capable of choosing** to sit calmly in the first place.

That is a different target.

## How the Biological Lens Changes Our Position

Looking at the dog as a biological system does three important things for Just Behaving.

### It Validates the "Hard Stuff"

Some of our rules can sound rigid at first glance:

- Don't use high-pitched, squealy voices with your puppy.
- Don't turn yourself into a 24/7 playmate.
- Don't rely on constant tug, wrestling, and treat hype as your primary interaction.
- Don't let the puppy rehearse behaviors you'll later try to forbid "once they're older."

Without context, this can sound like:

- "This breeder doesn't like fun."
- "These are just his personal preferences."

The biological frame reveals what's actually being protected.

For example:

- High-pitched voices and fast movements drive the dog's brain toward limbic arousal. As arousal climbs, the circuits that support impulse control, problem solving, and social judgment lose influence. The puppy is no longer practicing self-control; they're practicing reactivity.
- Repeated chaotic greetings, jumping, and frantic play are not just "bad manners." They are repetitions that **myelinate** specific neural pathways. The more we rehearse chaos, the more automatic and unconscious it becomes.
- Constant toy-and-treat hype builds **dopamine loops**. The dog becomes addicted to the state of

excitement itself and dependent on external stimuli to feel good. When the excitement stops, we often see the crash: restlessness, demand barking, pacing, or anxiety.

Seen this way, our rules are not aesthetic choices. They are **developmental protection**.

We protect:

- The dog's ability to think while they are feeling.
- The brain pathways we want heavily myelinated.
- The chemical environment (oxytocin, parasympathetic tone) we want as the default.

We are not policing fun.

We are guarding the foundation of the dog your family says they want.

## It Creates a Different Category

Most dog professionals present some version of the same offer:

- **Traditional trainers:** "I will teach your dog to obey."
- **Positive-only trainers:** "I will make training fun with treats and games."

Both are focused on **behavioral outputs**.

Just Behaving lives in a different category:

"We will wire your dog's brain for emotional stability."

That means:

- A nervous system that expects calm, not chaos.
- A brain that can stay online instead of tipping into reactivity at every trigger.
- A dog whose default, unprompted choice is to settle near the family and observe, not demand constant entertainment.

We aim for:

- **Myelination** of calm, thoughtful, prosocial behaviors.
- Strong **parasympathetic regulation** — the capacity to rest, digest, and recover.
- Relationships built on **oxytocin** (safety, bonding, trust) rather than endless dopamine chasing.

In the sports or working-dog world, people sometimes talk this way.

In the family pet and breeder world, almost no one does.

We are not just another flavor of training.

We are optimizing a different **biological outcome**.

## It Takes the Fight Out of Opinion

In the age of social media, nearly every client arrives with a pocket full of conflicting advice:

- "This YouTube trainer says I should play tug to build drive."
- "This Instagram account says I should get my puppy super excited so they 'love training.'"
- "This blog says more play and more freedom will 'wear them out.'"

We do not need to win a debate on style.

We can simply say:

- “That trainer is prioritizing **dopamine and high arousal**. They are building a dog who can explode into action on cue and stay in a high drive state. That may be appropriate for certain sports, jobs, or personal tastes.”
- “We are prioritizing **oxytocin and parasympathetic tone**. We are building a dog whose nervous system expects life to be calm, safe, and predictable. That is appropriate for a family companion who will live with children, visitors, and everyday household life.”

Same species. Same basic learning mechanisms.

Completely different **biological targets**.

Once you see that, the question stops being:

- “Who is right?”

and becomes:

- “What kind of brain do you want to live with for the next 12–15 years?”

Just Behaving exists for families who want a steady dog, not a performance project.

## How This Document Fits Into the Just Behaving Library

This paper is not the full science.

- The detailed discussion of prefrontal vs limbic processing, dopamine vs oxytocin, myelination, autonomic balance, and social modeling lives in **The Biological Baseline: The Neuroscience of Just Behaving**.
- The ethical and philosophical argument for calm mentorship, prevention, and structured companionship lives in **Just Behaving: An Evolving Philosophy of Canine Companionship** and the supporting pillar documents.

This document sits between those

.

Its job is to:

- Explain **why** we care about biology at all.
- Clarify **how** the biological lens gives Just Behaving a distinct role in the dog world.
- Give families and professionals a clear way to understand our position without having to read every technical document first.

In practical terms:

- When a family thinks our rules are “too strict,” this is the piece that explains the developmental logic.
- When another professional wonders how Just Behaving is different from other “science-based” or “positive” approaches, this is the piece that answers the question.
- When we revise or expand our philosophy, this is the checkpoint that keeps us anchored in the biology we claim to respect.

## Closing: Philosophy With a Nervous System

Just Behaving did not start in a lab.

It started in barns, living rooms, grief, quiet observation, and a refusal to accept that constant chaos is what a “happy dog” looks like.

Only later did we discover that the way we naturally raised dogs mapped closely onto what

neuroscience and physiology are already telling us:

- Calm humans and mentor dogs keep the prefrontal “thinking” systems online.
- Thoughtful prevention shapes which behaviors get turned into fast, automatic “superhighways” in the brain.
- Oxytocin-rich relationships and parasympathetic baselines build healthy guts, resilient immune systems, and stable moods.
- Chronic hype, even when it looks like fun, often builds anxious, dopamine-chasing animals who can’t settle without external stimulation.

This document exists to name that alignment.

Just Behaving remains, at its core, a philosophy of companionship and mentorship.

The biology does not replace that philosophy.

It simply shows that underneath the stories, rituals, and habits, we have been working on the dog’s nervous system all along.