

# Raising Your Dog with the Just Behaving Philosophy: A Comprehensive Family Guide

## Where We Are Today (Common Behavior Issues and Traditional Approaches)

Welcoming a new puppy into the family is joyful – but it often comes with a host of common behavior challenges. Studies confirm that behavior problems are extremely widespread in pet dogs: one large survey found 85% of dogs exhibit at least one problematic behavior, with *jumping up, barking, and ignoring commands* among the most frequent complaints. Typical issues families face include chewing up shoes or furniture, nipping and rough play biting, frequent indoor potty accidents, jumping on people, pulling on the leash, excessive barking, and general hyperactivity. These behaviors can strain even the most patient owners.

Traditionally, many of these problems are addressed *after* they appear – families enroll in obedience classes to teach “sit” or “off,” buy no-chew sprays for furniture, use baby gates, or resort to scolding and punishing misbehavior. A common cycle emerges: puppy is allowed to roam freely and inevitably “gets into trouble,” then owners react with corrections (like yelling “No!” or leash yanking) in an attempt to fix the behavior. Unfortunately, this reactive approach is the norm, which is why so many families struggle and why these issues are so prevalent. As one trainer notes, giving a young dog “*unfettered access*” to everything without guidance often *hinders* the goal of a well-behaved family pet. In many households, a puppy is given lots of freedom early on – only for the owners to clamp down with rules later after problems develop, creating confusion and conflict for the dog. For example, a puppy allowed to jump on visitors as a baby may be punished for it when bigger, not understanding why yesterday’s fun greeting is today’s bad behavior.

**The Just Behaving philosophy takes a radically different stance:** it aims to prevent most of these issues from ever arising in the first place. Rather than waiting for bad habits to form and then trying to train them away, Just Behaving families never invite those unwanted behaviors into the dog’s learning. If raised from day one with the right guidance, a puppy doesn’t learn that chewing the rug is fun or that pulling on leash gets to the park faster – so there’s nothing to “undo” later. This preventive approach might sound idealistic, but it’s very achievable with consistency and foresight. In fact, professional trainers routinely use prevention: when a new pup comes into their home, they often limit freedom initially and supervise closely so the dog *never has the chance* to rehearse bad behaviors. If the puppy is always directed to appropriate chew toys, for instance, “*the dog simply never got the opportunity nor built the habit of chewing on [forbidden] items*”. By shaping the puppy’s experiences from the start, Just Behaving households find that many of the “usual” problems simply *don’t appear*. The energy that would have gone into correcting misbehavior can instead go into enjoying life with a well-mannered, secure dog.

## Introducing *Just Behaving* (A Way of Life for All Families)

So, what exactly is *Just Behaving*? In a nutshell, it’s a philosophy of raising dogs that emphasizes natural behavior development, trust, and mentorship over formal training drills. Unlike rigid training regimens or one-size-fits-all methods, Just Behaving is a *way of life* – a mindset that can adapt to any family: retirees with a leisurely routine, young couples with their first “fur-baby,” busy families with kids, or a single owner in an apartment. It’s about integrating your dog into your life smoothly by guiding them to “just behave” as a polite member of the

household, almost as if they naturally came pre-trained. Structured companionship explicitly includes enjoyable, natural activities like running, playing fetch, exploring trails, and visiting dog parks when appropriate. The key difference is the thoughtful, purposeful way families integrate these joyful experiences, teaching their dog how to naturally shift between playful engagement and calm togetherness.

**Concrete Scenario:** Imagine taking your Just Behaving dog to a lively gathering or picnic. After actively playing fetch and exploring freely, your dog naturally settles at your feet when you sit down to eat—no constant commands or corrections needed. They smoothly transition from energetic play to calm companionship because structured companionship has taught them context and emotional regulation.

**Concrete Example of Transition:** Imagine you're spending a pleasant evening playing fetch or calmly engaging in a game with your puppy, activities they clearly enjoy. After about 10 – 15 minutes, you quietly signal the end of the game by calmly sitting nearby and gently stroking your puppy, using a soft, reassuring tone. Guided by structured companionship, your puppy naturally settles beside you without demanding continued play. This explicit, intentional shift from playful engagement to peaceful companionship clearly demonstrates how Just Behaving integrates joy and calmness seamlessly, ensuring your dog can smoothly navigate between different emotional states.

At its core, Just Behaving believes in teaching through everyday life rather than scheduled obedience sessions. That means every interaction – feeding, play, relaxation, walks – is an opportunity for the dog to learn good manners and for you to build a trusting relationship. This approach emphasizes *communication over command*: instead of relying on a list of cue words or constant instructions, owners focus on understanding their dog's needs and signals while showing the dog how to make good choices. For example, rather than simply ordering a dog to "sit" every time she greets someone (a command-based approach), a Just Behaving owner will consistently reward calm greetings and prevent jumping from ever being rewarding, so the dog learns on her own that *four paws on the ground* is the way to say hello. This philosophy echoes the way dogs learn from one another – through consistent cues, body language, and gentle corrections – which is why it feels so natural to them.

Importantly, Just Behaving is *not* an anything-goes, "let dogs be dogs" lack of structure. It actually involves clear structure and boundaries, but applied in a peaceful, *guidance-oriented* manner rather than a forceful one. Think of it as being a compassionate mentor to your puppy, not a drill sergeant. You'll be setting rules, but also setting your pup up for success so you rarely have to enforce those rules in a harsh way. Over time, this approach creates what we affectionately call "free dogs." A *free dog* isn't a dog that runs wild with no rules – it's the opposite. It's a dog who has earned real freedom because you trust them completely. These dogs can be given loose leash or off-leash privileges, more freedom around the house, and inclusion in all sorts of family activities because they have proven themselves reliable through the strong relationship you've built. As one canine expert put it, "*well-trained dogs are allowed greater freedom*" – if a dog *comes when called*, he gets to enjoy off-leash play; if he doesn't steal food from the table, he can linger near you at dinner. In Just Behaving, we achieve that reliability not through dozens of obedience tricks, but through a bond of trust and understanding. The dog learns *self-control and respect* as a way of life, and the reward is a wider world of freedom.

Anyone can embrace the Just Behaving lifestyle. Whether you're raising a gentle giant in a country home or a tiny pup in a city apartment, the principles remain the same. It's *flexible* and humane, focusing on the long-term well-being of both dog and owner. You'll find that by adopting this mindset, you start seeing the world through your dog's eyes: you'll anticipate challenges (like that toddler's dropped cookie that might tempt a sniff), you'll proactively shape experiences (maybe meeting new guests calmly one at a time), and you'll revel in the small victories (like a peaceful evening with your relaxed dog snoozing at your feet). Just Behaving is ultimately about forging a trustworthy relationship in which your dog feels free and happy and so do you. It's a journey of mutual understanding – one that begins the moment you bring your puppy home.

### **Shifting from “Training” to “Raising” (Mentorship Over Commands)**

One of the biggest shifts in mindset with Just Behaving is moving away from the conventional “training” mentality and toward a “raising” mentality. What's the difference? Traditional training often centers on control: teaching obedience commands (“sit,” “stay,” “down”) and using repetition, treats, or corrections to get the dog to perform specific actions on cue. It tends to be task-focused and often *reactive* – you identify a behavior you want to change and then implement a training technique to address it. In contrast, *raising* a dog the Just Behaving way is more about holistic development and prevention – it's *proactive*, emphasizing shaping the pup's character and habits from the get-go so that good behavior emerges naturally and undesirable behaviors fade away from lack of practice.

Think of it like raising a child versus teaching a student. In training mode, you might dedicate 15 minutes a day to practicing commands or tricks. In raising mode, *every waking moment* is part of your puppy's education. It doesn't mean you need to hover over your dog with hawk eyes 24/7; it means you are always aware that your dog is learning from *everything* they do and everything you do. You become a mentor figure – much like an older dog in a pack would be to a youngster – guiding by example, setting boundaries, and stepping in with gentle corrections at teachable moments. If a traditional trainer might focus on “How do I get my dog to follow this command?”, a Just Behaving raiser asks, “How do I set up my dog's world so they choose to do the right thing on their own?”

In practical terms, raising vs. training can look like this: Imagine you don't want your puppy on the furniture. A training approach waits until pup jumps on the couch, then says “Off!” and maybe lures them down with a treat, repeating this so the dog learns the off command. A raising approach, on the other hand, would manage the environment from day one – perhaps keeping the puppy off the couch with a barrier or leash, providing a comfy dog bed as an alternative, and reinforcing the pup for using the bed. The puppy grows up simply accepting that couches are not for him (no habit of couch-surfing ever forms), and therefore no formal “off” command is ever really needed. You've *prevented* the problem behavior rather than *trained* it away. This doesn't mean you'll never teach obedience skills – you certainly can and should teach basics like *sit* or *come* as useful tools – but the emphasis is on raising a polite dog overall, not just drilling obedience for its own sake.

Another key difference is the role of intrinsic behavior development. In training, we often use external rewards (treats, clickers, etc.) or punishments to motivate behavior. Just Behaving leans more on developing the dog's *intrinsic understanding* of how to behave. For example, instead of always having to command "stay" at the door, you raise a dog who naturally hesitates at doorways because they've learned that rushing out is never rewarded and calmness is how the door opens. The dog isn't just behaving because you're there ready to enforce a rule; he behaves because it's become *his own habit*. This creates a more consistent behavior, even when you're not watching. As one expert notes, prevention is always easier than fixing an existing issue – it's less work to guide a puppy correctly from the start than to "untrain" bad habits later. If you focus on raising your puppy right, you won't find yourself constantly battling entrenched problems down the road. You avoid the exhausting scenario of trying to teach good behaviors *while* also undoing a laundry list of bad ones; instead, you can put your energy into positive growth. In short, raising a dog means investing upfront in mentorship, structure, and consistency so that formal "training" as we know it becomes almost seamless. The result is a more *harmonious, natural relationship* – your dog behaves well because that's just how things are in your family, not because he's a robot following commands.

### **Building a Relationship from Day One (Mentorship and Calmness)**

*Bringing home a new puppy is the start of a beautiful friendship – and the beginning of your mentorship journey.* From the moment you welcome your puppy home, you are teaching them what life in your family is going to be like. Puppies are incredibly impressionable in their first weeks and months, so building a strong bond and foundation right away is crucial. Everything you do – how you greet them, how you react to accidents, how you introduce them to their new world – is sending a message. As one trainer wisely put it, *"everything you do with your puppy teaches him something."*

Knowing this, the Just Behaving approach is to be intentional from day one: guide your puppy with warmth and clarity, and start establishing the patterns of behavior you want to see for life.

Mentorship begins on day one. Think of yourself not just as an owner or "parent," but as your puppy's first mentor in the human world. In a litter, puppies learn a ton from their mother and littermates – they learn how to play, how to control their bite, how to read social cues. When you bring a pup into your home, you and your family step into that role. You will gently show your puppy what is expected in a home environment, much like a calm older dog would show a youngster the ropes. This means teaching by example and gentle intervention. For instance, if your puppy starts mouthing your hand too hard, you might mimic what a mother dog would do: let out a short "ouch" yelp and withdraw attention briefly, to communicate that hurt and play stops when biting is too rough. If the puppy is getting overexcited and nipping kids' ankles, you calmly scoop him up or distract him with a toy to interrupt the behavior and help him settle. You're not angry or harsh – you're simply showing, *"That's not how we do things; try this instead."* Your puppy is always learning, so you seize those teachable moments early on.

Staying calm is key in these early days (and beyond). Puppies are emotional sponges – they will feed off our energy. If you introduce them to a chaotic, loud environment full of excitement and inconsistency, they are likely to become chaotic, overexcited, and anxious themselves. By contrast, if you maintain a *peaceful, reassuring tone*, your puppy will find it easier to relax and learn. This is why Just Behaving families prioritize calmness from day one. Of course it's hard not to squeal with delight when a fluffy pup waddles in – but try to moderate that impulse around

the puppy at first. Speak in soft, happy tones instead of high-pitched excitement. When visitors come to meet the new arrival, have everyone sit down and let the puppy approach at his own pace rather than overwhelming him. When the puppy has had enough play and lies down, resist the urge to jostle him awake – let him nap and reward the calm. In a Just Behaving home, *calm is the norm*. Puppies thrive on routine and security, so a calm household with predictable routines (regular mealtimes, potty breaks, play sessions, and quiet times) helps the puppy feel safe. A puppy that feels safe is *more attentive to guidance* and less likely to act out from fear or overstimulation.

It's also important to realize that everything you do in these early days counts toward shaping future behavior. If you allow the puppy to climb all over you on the couch now because he's tiny and cute, he won't magically know not to do it later when he's bigger – you're effectively telling him "this is okay." If you sometimes let him nip your fingers in play but other times scold him for it, he'll only be confused about that boundary. Consistency in the message is vital. This doesn't mean you have to be a stern taskmaster – it just means be mindful. For example, if you want a dog that doesn't beg at the dinner table, *never feed table scraps from your plate*, no matter how adorable those pleading eyes are. If you want a dog that is gentle with kids, always encourage gentle interactions and never allow rough play to go unchecked. These little decisions in the first days and weeks snowball into big habits. Your puppy is a product of what you encourage and what you prevent. By encouraging the behaviors you love (with praise, petting, treats, play) and preventing the ones you don't (through management or redirection), you are **raising** your pup in the Just Behaving way from the very start.

Lastly, make sure to bond with your puppy through positive experiences. Mentorship isn't just about rules; it's about forming a loving connection. Spend lots of time with your pup – cuddle them when they're sleepy, hand-feed a few kibbles so they know your hand is a source of good, play fun games at their level. The goal is for your puppy to see you as their trusted center of the world. If they trust you and feel safe with you, they will *naturally follow your lead*. That trust is what allows you to guide them effectively as they grow. Every day, you're banking trust and understanding with your dog. By the time they're adolescents testing limits, that account will be rich, and your dog will respond to a gentle word or glance because you've had that relationship from day one. In summary: start as you mean to go on. With calm guidance, consistent teaching, and lots of love from the very first day, you lay the cornerstone for a lifetime of harmony with your dog.

## **Communication Evolution During Development**

How you communicate with your puppy significantly impacts their behavior, emotional well-being, and your relationship quality. Just Behaving recognizes that effective communication evolves as your puppy matures:

**8-12 weeks (Early Communication):** During this critical early period, your puppy doesn't yet understand verbal cues or subtle signals. Communication should be clear, explicit, and often physical. Focus on:

- Using consistent environmental management to guide behavior
- Employing calm body language and gentle redirection
- Establishing predictable routines that create security

- Maintaining steady emotional states, avoiding both high excitement and frustration

**3-6 months (Developing Communication):** As your puppy's capacity for learning and pattern recognition expands, gradually introduce more verbal communication:

- Attach consistent verbal cues to already-established behaviors
- Use quiet verbal markers and subtle body language
- Keep repetition minimal to avoid confusion
- Remember that timing is crucial - feedback must occur within 1-3 seconds of the behavior for clear understanding

**6-12 months (Refining Communication):** As your puppy matures and internalizes expectations, communication should become increasingly subtle:

- Transition from explicit instruction toward gentle guidance
- Use fewer commands, replacing them with calm gestures and minimal verbal cues
- Incorporate mindful silence, allowing your dog to process and choose appropriate behaviors
- Reinforce emotional stability and self-regulation through calm interactions

**1-2 years (Mature Communication):** With a mature dog, communication becomes largely intuitive:

- Rely on minimal verbal cues, subtle body language, or simply your calm presence
- Reserve verbal communication for important instructions or urgent situations
- Trust the established patterns and mutual understanding you've developed
- Appreciate how your dog now anticipates your expectations with minimal guidance

Throughout all stages, focus on being mindful of your tone, volume, and emotional state. Your puppy is highly attuned to these elements and will absorb calmness, anxiety, excitement, or tension from you. By maintaining emotional steadiness - especially when facing confusion or mistakes - you significantly influence your dog's emotional development and self-regulation abilities.

### **Understanding Freedom: How Structure Yields True Freedom**

One of the most liberating concepts in the Just Behaving philosophy is “structured freedom.” At first, that might sound like a contradiction – how can freedom be structured? – but in practice it means that by giving your dog clear structure and guidance early on, you empower them to earn *more freedom* in the long run than a conventionally trained dog might ever enjoy. The sad truth is many dogs live fairly restricted lives (always leashed, crated when guests come, not allowed off the yard) because their owners don’t fully trust them to behave. Just Behaving turns that around: invest in structure and boundaries upfront, and you’ll develop a dog you can trust to have freedom.

It's helpful to contrast this with the common approach. Many new puppy owners think they should give their puppy as much freedom as possible to play and explore from day one – after all, a big yard or free run of the house makes a pup happy, right? The problem is, *too much freedom too soon* often leads to trouble. A young puppy with no boundaries will likely pee in a corner, chew a shoe, dash out an open door, bark at the window – not out of “badness” but simply because he doesn't know better and has access to do so. Each time he practices those behaviors, they become a little more ingrained. Owners then respond by tightening control (after accidents, they start crating; after chewed shoes, they tether the pup; after havoc, they realize the pup had “too much freedom”). In effect, the puppy's freedom shrinks over time as trust is broken. In the worst cases, a dog given total freedom as a puppy grows into a terror and ends up with *less* freedom as an adult than he started with – always on a leash, kept away from certain situations, etc., because he learned poor habits during that anarchic puppyhood.

Now imagine the structured freedom approach. In Just Behaving, we actually start puppies with *limited, safe freedom* and gradually expand it as they show they can handle it. For example, you might begin by allowing your new puppy to roam only a puppy-proofed room or wear a light leash indoors so you can supervise. This isn't cruel – it's protective. You're preventing mistakes while teaching house rules. The puppy, rather than feeling constrained, actually feels secure knowing exactly what area is “theirs” and what's expected there. You provide plenty of play, fun, and exercise, but within boundaries that ensure the pup can't get into serious mischief. As weeks go by and the puppy proves, for instance, that he consistently chews only his toys and not the furniture (because you set him up for success), you grant a bit more freedom – maybe access to another room or more loose time. If he handles that well, freedom expands again. It's a step-by-step earning of trust. And trust is the currency of freedom: when you know your dog will come when called, you feel confident unclipping that leash at the park; when you know your dog isn't going to potty indoors, you eventually let them roam the house unsupervised for longer periods. The dog's world gets bigger and bigger as they mature, rather than smaller.

The beauty of this process is that the dog never perceives a loss of freedom – only gains. They don't experience a scenario of “I used to be allowed to do X, but now I'm not.” Instead, they only know that as they follow your guidance, life keeps getting richer. They get to enjoy privileges that other dogs might never get. Even if your dog isn't perfect (and no dog is 100% perfect), by operating within the Just Behaving framework, even their mistakes are minor and manageable, so they don't lose your trust. For example, perhaps you gave a bit more freedom and your pup had one potty accident – you respond by slightly adjusting the freedom and routine (structure) to help them succeed next time, rather than concluding “you blew it, now you're crated all day.” The emphasis is always on *earning and re-earning trust*, not one strike and you're out. Dogs, much like people, thrive when they know what the rules are and see that keeping within them leads to good things. Freedom is a privilege, and they learn to value it.

It's worth noting that a dog raised this way often ends up *far more free* and happy than a dog who was trained only through strict command-based methods. Why? Because a Just Behaving dog isn't constantly waiting for the next order or physically restrained out of fear of what they might do. They move through life with you as a partner. They can be “off-leash” in spirit even if leash laws require a tether – meaning they stick by you and heed your subtle cues rather than lunging or running off. They can be given freedom in the home – allowed in any room, not locked away – because they've proven they won't destroy things. They can interact freely with guests, kids, and other dogs because they've learned how to be polite and gentle, not because

you have them on a tight choke collar. In sum, structured beginnings lead to an expansively free adulthood.

To illustrate, consider how guide dogs or therapy dogs live: these dogs are so well-mannered they go nearly everywhere with their owners, enjoying public spaces that most pet dogs wouldn't handle. That level of freedom comes from extensive early guidance and socialization. You might not need your dog to be *that* impeccably behaved, but the principle is the same. By doing the hard work upfront – supervising, setting boundaries, teaching patiently – you pave the way for your dog to accompany you on many adventures safely. Even an “imperfect” dog can thrive under this philosophy, because we focus on their strengths and reliability, not on punishing their flaws. If your dog isn't great with one particular thing, you manage that one thing and still grant freedom in other areas they *are* good at, continuing to build their confidence and trust. Over time, even those weak areas often improve because the dog feels free, not anxious or micromanaged.

In conclusion, freedom in Just Behaving is something earned and given with love, and it results in a dog who is genuinely *free* to be a dog – enjoying life within the safe, understood parameters you've set. There are few joys greater than seeing your once-clumsy pup mature into a trustworthy companion who can romp in a field or relax by the campfire with you, no leash needed, because you know you have that understanding. Structured freedom truly *sets dogs free* in the end.

*A dog enjoying off-leash freedom.* Dogs raised with *Just Behaving* earn the privilege of freedom through trust. Early structure and guidance mean that as they mature, they can safely enjoy more and more of life untethered and unrestricted, confidently exploring the world alongside you.

## **Applying *Just Behaving* in Daily Life: Practical Guidance**

Philosophy is important, but how do you actually *do* Just Behaving on a day-to-day basis with a rambunctious puppy nipping at your shoelaces? In this section, we'll break down real-world practices for implementing Just Behaving at home. Consider this your playbook for raising your puppy from the early weeks onward, the *natural way*. We'll cover everything from surviving those first few sleepless nights to preventing bad habits, teaching good manners, and creating a stable routine. Remember, the goal isn't to create a regimented “boot camp” for your pup – it's to gently guide them to be the kind of dog who just fits in beautifully with your family. Here's how to make it happen:

### **The Early Puppy Weeks: Safe, Structured Start**

The first weeks with a new puppy are both adorable and challenging. This is when management and prevention are your best friends. Start by puppy-proofing your home thoroughly. Just as you would baby-proof for a toddler, remove or secure anything you don't want chewed, soiled, or broken. Common targets like shoes, remote controls, trash cans, and electrical cords should be out of reach. Set up a “safe zone” for your puppy – for example, a puppy playpen in the living room or a gated area of one room – where they can have some freedom without constant supervision and without finding trouble. This safe zone should include their crate (open and accessible), a comfy bed or blanket, water, and a few chew-safe toys. By confining the pup to a



safe area when you're not actively watching, you *prevent* accidents and destruction before they occur. As one puppy expert notes, a young puppy needs to be supervised and prevented from getting into trouble, much like a toddler; puppy-proofing and using a crate or pen is the easiest way to avoid mishaps.

Establish a routine from day one. Puppies do best on a consistent schedule for feeding, potty breaks, play, and sleep. For example, you might feed your pup three times a day at set times, and take them outside for potty immediately after each meal, as well as first thing in the morning, after naps, and before bed. A predictable routine helps your puppy understand what to expect and when. It also greatly aids house-training because you're timing opportunities for success. In the first weeks, expect to take your puppy out *very* frequently (every 1–2 hours during the day) to their designated potty spot. When they go in the right place, praise them warmly and maybe offer a tiny treat – you want to clearly reinforce that *pottying outside = awesome!* If there's an accident inside, don't punish the pup (they're still learning bladder control and punishment can cause anxiety). Instead, calmly clean it with an enzyme cleaner and note that you may have given the pup too much freedom or waited too long; resolve to watch for the signs or stick to the schedule more closely. Using a crate for short periods (especially at night) can immensely help with house-training, since dogs naturally avoid soiling their sleeping area. Make the crate cozy and positive – feed meals in it, toss toys in, and never use it as a jail. Early on, your puppy's life will be a cycle of eat, play, potty, sleep. By shaping that cycle deliberately (e.g. an energetic play session, then a potty break, then into the crate for a nap), you teach the puppy to settle down and prevent them from getting overtired and cranky.

During these early weeks, focus on setting simple boundaries that will matter later. For example, if you decide “no dogs on the furniture” is a rule in your home, enforce that from the start – lift the puppy off and place them in an approved spot *every single time*, so they aren't learning a mixed message. If you prefer the dog not jump on people, then as hard as it is, try not to pick the puppy up or pet them *while they're jumping on you*. Instead, crouch down to their level for greetings or pet them when all four paws are on the floor. The idea is to not accidentally reward the very behaviors you'll dislike in an adult dog. Consistency is critical here: every family member should know the basic do's and don'ts (e.g., “We ignore puppy when he's whining for attention, but reward him when he's sitting calmly”). It might help to write a little list of “house rules for puppy” and stick it on the fridge so everyone (including kids and visitors) is on the same page.

Lastly, socialize gradually in these early weeks, but carefully. Your puppy is in a key developmental window (typically up to ~16 weeks old) where positive exposures to new things can help them become a confident adult. However, positive is the operative word. Don't throw your pup into overwhelming situations thinking it will “get them used to it.” Instead, introduce new experiences one at a time, in a controlled way. Invite a couple of calm friends over to meet the puppy rather than taking the puppy to a noisy festival. Let the puppy walk on different surfaces (grass, hardwood, carpet) and hear common noises (vacuum, doorbell) paired with tasty treats, so they form happy associations. If you have children, involve them in gentle play and care (with supervision), so puppy learns kids are friends, not something to nip at. Avoid dog parks or chaotic puppy playgroups at this stage – exposure to other dogs is important, but it should be with healthy, vaccinated, well-mannered dogs you know, not a free-for-all that could scare or injure your pup. (We'll talk more about dog-dog interactions in a later section.) For now, think of yourself as your puppy's guide to the wide world: you want their early adventures to be

safe and confidence-building. A well-socialized, well-managed puppy will grow into a relaxed, friendly dog.

## Preventing Problems Before They Start

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure – this saying could be the motto of Just Behaving. By anticipating and preventing common behavioral problems *before* they start, you save your family and your dog a lot of stress. A critical element of the Just Behaving prevention philosophy is that we never intentionally request or encourage behaviors that we ultimately don't want. This means explicitly avoiding common habits—such as encouraging a puppy to jump up, mouth hands, or engage in tug-of-war—even temporarily or playfully. While these behaviors might initially seem harmless or fun, every encouraged repetition ingrains the behavior deeper. Our goal is to never allow the puppy to experience these undesirable behaviors as rewarding or acceptable. If the puppy does spontaneously attempt these behaviors, these isolated moments become key opportunities to teach clear, gentle corrections, define boundaries, and build the language of your relationship. This approach proactively eliminates confusion, creating lasting good manners from the beginning rather than attempting to undo reinforced habits later. Here are some practical prevention tips for the most typical puppy misbehaviors:

- **Chewing and Destructive Behavior:** Puppies explore the world with their mouths, and teething (around 3–6 months old) will amplify the urge to chew. Rather than constantly yelling “No!” when pup grabs the wrong item, puppy-proof as mentioned and give them plenty of appropriate chew toys. Encourage your pup to chew the right things by praising them when they do. Rotate toy selection to keep it interesting. If you catch your puppy gnawing the coffee table leg, stay calm – startle them gently if needed (clap or make an “ah-ah” sound) and immediately offer a toy instead. When they take the toy, praise them. This way, you’re redirecting the behavior to an acceptable outlet. Supervision is critical: if you can’t watch the pup for a moment, use the crate or pen to prevent unsupervised chewing. By consistently redirecting to chew toys, the pup learns *“I only chew my toys, not shoes or furniture,”* which means they never develop a habit of destructive chewing. Remember to puppy-proof as they grow too – what was out of reach at 8 weeks might be reachable at 5 months! Remember that teething is a temporary phase – by around 6 to 7 months of age, all the adult teeth are in and the intense urge to chew will taper off. Because you’ve consistently guided your pup to chew only appropriate items during this period, they won’t develop any love for chewing forbidden objects even when that urge was at its strongest. In essence, you’re not only surviving the teething months – you’re using them to cement a lifelong habit: your dog learns that chewing only happens on toys and chews you provide. This way, once teething passes, you have a youngster who never acquired destructive tastes at all.
- **Nipping and Biting:** All puppies nip during play; it’s how they interacted with littermates. But those needle-sharp teeth can hurt, and we don’t want a mouthy adult dog. Preventing nipping from becoming an issue means not rewarding it and teaching bite inhibition early. Whenever the puppy’s teeth make contact with human skin or clothes with any pressure, immediately withdraw attention. Say “Ouch!” in a gentle yelp (to mimic how a sibling pup would), then turn away or put the puppy down and ignore them for a few seconds. This is exactly how other puppies taught them – a nip ends the fun. Then resume gentle play. Additionally, do plenty of swap games: if pup is fixated on biting your hand, redirect with a tug toy or a soft chew and let them bite that instead.

Ensure the puppy has ample opportunities to chew appropriate items (frozen teething rings, etc.) to soothe their gums. Consistency is key – everyone in the family must react the same way to nipping (no one should encourage rough play with hands). Over a few weeks, the pup learns that human skin is off-limits for teeth. It's also helpful to avoid getting the puppy overly riled up to the point where they *can't help* but nip – keep play sessions short and end them on a good note before puppy gets too overstimulated.

- **Jumping on People:** It's cute when a tiny pup jumps up, but it's not when they're a 70-pound adult. The simplest prevention is to never reward jumping. When your puppy jumps up for attention, do not engage – don't talk, don't push them down (pushing can seem like play), and don't pet. Instead, stand up or turn away. The instant all four paws are on the ground, *now* you bend and pet or greet the pup. You can even teach an alternate greeting like "sit" for pets – encourage visitors to ask the pup to sit (or wait for a sit) before petting. Make sure even well-meaning friends aren't unknowingly encouraging jumping (have them follow the same ignore-when-jumping rule). By being consistent from day one, your puppy will grow up greeting people politely because jumping *never paid off*. It's much easier than trying to correct a habitual jumper later on. Consistency among all family and guests is crucial – one person saying "oh I don't mind" can set you back, so politely insist on this rule for your puppy's sake.
- **Excessive Barking:** Puppies bark for various reasons – excitement, attention, boredom, fear. To prevent barking from becoming a nuisance habit, address the *cause* early. If your puppy barks at noises outside, don't yell (they might think you're barking along). Instead, calmly acknowledge it ("I hear it, good boy, quiet now") and redirect their focus, or use those moments to practice a quiet cue by rewarding silence. For attention-seeking barking (puppy yaps at you for play), do not inadvertently reward it – for example, if barking makes you throw the ball or give cuddles, the pup learns to bark more. Wait for a lull or a moment of quiet, then reward that calm. Make sure the puppy's needs are met (exercise, potty, play) so they're not barking out of unmet needs or excess energy. Often, teaching a puppy early that *calm voice gets rewards, loud voice gets ignored* will steer them into more polite ways to ask for things.
- **Leash Pulling and Walks:** When your pup is ready to go out on leash (after vaccines and some leash practice at home), start instilling good leash manners from the very first walk. Prevent pulling by using the stop-and-go or red-light/green-light technique: the moment the pup starts to pull forward, you stop walking. Stand still and wait – the pup will likely turn or slacken the leash wondering why you stopped. The instant the leash is slack, *proceed forward*. This teaches that pulling literally goes nowhere, while a loose leash allows the walk to continue. It requires patience, but puppies catch on quickly that *staying near you* is how they get to move. You can also change directions frequently so the puppy learns to follow your lead. Using treats to reward the pup for checking in with you or staying by your side helps reinforce the desired position. The key is not to allow pulling to become a self-rewarding habit (because if pulling occasionally gets them to sniff that tree faster, they'll keep trying it). Prevent the pattern early, and you won't need a prong collar or constant corrections later.

In all these cases, the preventive theme is clear: don't let undesirable behaviors become fun or successful for the puppy. Instead, make sure good behaviors are the ones that bring all the fun and rewards. This proactive approach requires consistency and sometimes a bit of creativity to

redirect the puppy's natural impulses into acceptable channels. But the payoff is huge – you sidestep the power struggles and stress that come when a bad habit is deeply ingrained. By the time your puppy is reaching adolescence, you'll have a well-mannered youngster who doesn't even know that chewing shoes or barking at the door is something dogs *could* do. You'll be enjoying the fruits of your preventive efforts while other owners are scrambling to fix issues. Stay one step ahead of your pup, and guide them before they stray off course – that is the Just Behaving way.

## **Mentorship and Learning by Example**

A cornerstone of Just Behaving is the idea of mentorship – that dogs learn a great deal by watching and imitating, not just from direct training. In a perfect scenario, a puppy would have a calm older dog mentor to learn from (more on that in the next section), but even if yours doesn't, *you become that mentor*. Dogs are highly observant of human body language and routines. Your puppy is constantly watching what you do and how you respond to the world. You can use this to your advantage by modeling the behaviors and reactions you want from your dog.

Start with something as simple as everyday manners. If you want your dog to be polite around food, for example, incorporate them into your mealtime routine in a controlled way. Put their puppy kibble or a stuffed chew toy on their mat while the family sits at the table, so they learn to settle during dinner. If they wander and beg, calmly lead them back to their spot – over time, they observe that during meals, *everyone has their place* and there's no point begging. You're essentially showing the puppy, *"This is how we do dinner."* Similarly, if the doorbell rings, instead of immediately unleashing chaos by opening the door on a hyper pup, take a moment. Leash your pup or have them by your side, and answer the door calmly. Greet the visitor in a normal tone (showing the pup there's no reason to go nuts). If you consistently stay relaxed and maybe give the pup a treat for sitting while people enter, the puppy starts copying that calm behavior. In contrast, if every time the doorbell rang you jumped up yelling "Quiet!" or rushed anxiously, the pup would feed off that excitement or tension.

Teach by doing: Want your dog to enjoy car rides quietly? Then when you first introduce the car, go for short, pleasant drives to fun places (like a park) and remain upbeat but not overly excited. The puppy sees that car rides are no big deal and often lead to good things. Want your dog to not be fearful of thunderstorms? Then during their first thunderstorm with you, act normal – maybe even engage in a fun play or chew session – so the puppy learns from your example that loud noises aren't scary. They look to you for cues on how to react. Being a mentor means exuding the demeanor you hope your dog will adopt. If you are calm, confident, and positive, your puppy will mirror that more and more.

Mentorship also involves teaching impulse control by example and gentle enforcement. Dogs are not born with patience – it's something we instill. Use daily moments as lessons: at doorways, don't let the puppy bolt out ahead. Instead, teach them to wait – you can block with your body or use a leash, and only step through when they pause. Soon they figure out that *waiting politely makes the door open*. Before feeding, ask the pup to sit or at least not jump on you – hold the bowl and wait until they're not pawing at you, *then* put it down. This "ask for permission" structure doesn't require harsh corrections, just consistency. The puppy learns self-control because that's the only way they get what they want. Dogs are keen on routines, so if every single time they need to sit to have the leash put on, they'll start sitting automatically at

the door. It becomes their habit, learned from the structured way you do things. In essence, *you're training without formally "training"* – you're weaving learning into life.

Another aspect of learning by example is exposing your puppy to role models whenever possible. If you have friends with stable adult dogs, orchestrate meet-ups where your puppy can observe and interact under supervision. A well-socialized adult dog can correct your puppy's rudeness in a way only a dog can – a quick growl or paw on the back to say "mind your manners" – and your pup can learn boundaries that way. Puppies often learn *faster* from another dog's feedback than from a human's because it's the language they instinctively understand. For instance, a pup that's jumping and annoying an older dog may get ignored or gently pushed away, and he learns that his approach was too much; next time he may be calmer. Even on walks, if your puppy sees another calm dog walking nicely, it can influence them to also focus and walk nicely (dogs do mirror each other's energy). In puppy classes that follow a similar philosophy, sometimes trainers pair a rambunctious puppy with a calm, slightly older puppy for exercises – the calmer pup's behavior rubs off. Use these opportunities to let your puppy see what good behavior looks like. Of course, always ensure the role model dog is friendly and the interactions are safe.

If you don't have access to any other dogs, don't worry – you can still successfully mentor your pup solo. It just means you play multiple roles: caretaker, playmate, teacher, and friend. As a mentor, be fair and consistent. Just like a good boss or coach, set clear expectations and stick to them. Don't allow the puppy to do something one day and disallow it the next (they don't understand inconsistencies and it will make them anxious or test more). And when puppy does well, reward enthusiastically! Mentorship isn't just correction; it's largely encouragement. Praise your puppy when they get it right – when they potty outside, when they sit instead of jump, when they calmly accept petting without mouthing. Your approval is hugely meaningful to them. Over time, your puppy develops an intrinsic desire to do right by you because they trust and adore you. They aren't performing out of fear or just for a treat – they are behaving because it feels natural and it pleases both of you. That's the power of raising your dog through mentorship. You're not just teaching commands; you're shaping character. And as your puppy matures, you'll notice you hardly need to "train" anything in the traditional sense – they've learned how to live harmoniously by following your lead.

### **Setting Boundaries Through Calm Leadership**

Dogs, like children, actually feel more secure when they know the rules. Boundaries are healthy and necessary – they teach a dog how to navigate our human world without constant conflict. In the Just Behaving approach, we set boundaries firmly but kindly, using *calm leadership*. There's no need for intimidation or dominance displays; instead, you establish yourself as a gentle leader whom the dog can trust to guide them. Here's how to set and enforce boundaries in a peaceful, effective way:

Stay calm and assertive when enforcing a rule. If your puppy tests a boundary (and they will, especially in adolescence), the worst thing to do is lose your temper or start yelling. Yelling or harsh reactions often *backfire* – some dogs get frightened and lose trust, others get more excited or even think you're joining their frenzy. Instead, channel a composed, matter-of-fact energy. For example, suppose you've decided the puppy is not allowed to jump on the couch. One evening the pup puts his paws up on it. Rather than shouting or shoving, simply and calmly remove him – say "Off" in a neutral tone, guide him down or pick him up and place him on the

floor. You might then direct him to his own dog bed and praise him once he's there. You may have to do this 10 times in a row – patience is crucial. If you're consistent, the puppy will learn that *couch climbing never gets him anywhere* (he gets removed every time), but staying on his bed gets a pet or treat. By not getting emotionally charged about it, you make it a clear cause-and-effect lesson, not a dramatic fight.

Consistency is a big part of calm leadership. Dogs will only respect rules that are always in effect. If “no biting people” is a rule, then it's a rule whether you're playing in the yard or sitting in the living room, and it applies with every family member. Make sure everyone reinforces the same boundaries. Mixed signals will confuse the dog and encourage more boundary testing. It helps to adopt a few simple *non-verbal signals* as well – dogs read body language better than words. For instance, many owners use a hand out “stop” gesture or a finger wag along with a verbal cue like “no” or “eh-eh” when a boundary is crossed. The exact signal doesn't matter as long as it's consistent, brief, and not emotional. Over time your dog will recognize, “Ah, when mom makes that face or that sound, it means this action is not allowed.”

Use consequences that are proportional and humane. In Just Behaving, punishment in the harsh sense is avoided, but that doesn't mean there are no consequences for breaking rules. The consequences are usually *loss of privilege or a gentle interruption*. For example, if puppy is playing too roughly (biting hands or jumping crazily), the consequence is the play session *ends* and you walk away for a minute – a form of time-out. If the puppy tries to bolt out the door, the door simply *closes* and they don't go out until calm. If they nip during petting, the petting stops. These are natural, fair consequences that teach the dog “When I do X, the fun/something I want stops. When I comply or behave, good things continue.” It's very much how dogs correct each other: a mother dog will get up and leave if a pup bites too hard during nursing, which sends a clear message. In our human way, we replicate that. We *do not* hit, scream at, or intimidate the pup – those actions do not teach, they only create fear or aggression. Calm leadership might sometimes mean *physically guiding* the dog (like leading them out of the room if they can't settle, or gently holding their collar to prevent a dash), but never in a way that hurts or scares. Think guidance, not punishment.

Encourage and reinforce the behavior you *do* want. Setting boundaries isn't just about saying “no” – it's equally about saying “yes, that's right.” If your pup stops at the door and looks to you instead of barging, praise that choice lavishly and perhaps allow them to go through as a reward. If they drop the shoe they picked up when you say “leave it,” give them a treat and a happy “good dog!” The more they feel that *following the rules leads to positives*, the more eagerly they will follow. Dogs actually love to have a job and do it well – if not, we wouldn't have service dogs and working dogs. Even a family pet's “job” can be something like greeting people politely or walking next to the stroller. When they do it right and we acknowledge them, it builds their confidence and desire to repeat the good behavior.

A powerful tool in calm leadership is withholding attention at the right times. Dogs crave our attention, even more than food sometimes. So, if your dog is doing something unacceptable to get your attention (barking, pawing, jumping), one of the strongest messages is to *temporarily ignore* them. This doesn't mean ignore dangerous behavior, but for those attention-seeking antics, not giving in is key. For instance, your pup is whining loudly because you're not playing – if you look at him or yell “Quiet!”, you've actually given him attention (which rewards the whining). If instead you act like he's invisible for a moment – you quietly wait until there's a break in the whining, then *immediately* reward the quiet with your attention (“Hey there, pup,

much better!”) – you’ve shown him that quiet works, whining doesn’t. Dogs repeat behaviors that work for them. Staying calm and not getting sucked into their excited state is often the quickest way to defuse unwanted behavior. By being the cool-headed leader, you show the dog that you will engage on *your terms*, not theirs, and only when they meet the expected behavior. This isn’t about ego or “showing who’s boss” – it’s about communicating clearly in a way the dog understands.

Over time, as your dog experiences your consistent, calm leadership, you’ll notice something wonderful: your dog will start policing themselves. They may automatically sit when they want something because they know jumping won’t work. They might look to you for permission when uncertain, rather than impulsively doing the wrong thing. They have learned the household etiquette and actually *prefer it*, because it’s gotten them nothing but good outcomes (praise, treats, freedom, inclusion). A calmly led dog is a relaxed dog – they don’t have to guess what’s okay, they know you’ll guide them. This sense of security deepens your bond. Your dog doesn’t follow the rules out of fear of what you’ll do, but out of respect and habit. That’s the goal of Just Behaving’s approach to boundaries: a dog that respects rules and a human that the dog respects, all achieved without ever raising a hand or voice, just through patience, clarity, and love.

### **Natural Impulse Control (Patience and Politeness Without Force)**

Impulse control is a fancy term for a simple concept: teaching your dog to wait and think before acting. Puppies are not born with this ability – they are little bundles of “see stimulus, react immediately.” But dogs *can* learn amazing self-control with gentle training, and the Just Behaving method integrates those lessons into everyday life rather than formal exercises alone. You don’t necessarily need special drills to teach a puppy patience; you just need to use real situations to practice it consistently. Here are ways to develop your dog’s impulse control naturally:

Use daily routines to practice “waiting.” For instance, each time you feed your pup, have them sit or at least keep four paws on the ground as you prepare the bowl. If they start jumping or grabbing, simply stand up and wait silently. The puppy will likely pause and look at you like “Why did you stop?” The moment they calm down, continue preparing and then set the bowl down. If they lunge for it, lift it back up – calmly, no scolding – and wait again. It may take a few tries the first few times, but puppies catch on quick: *being calm and patient makes the food appear*. Eventually, many puppies will automatically sit and even hold a sit-stay until you release them to eat, just because that’s become the routine. This didn’t require a formal “stay” command with a trainer; it was learned organically through consistency. Similarly, at doorways, your pup should learn that doors only open when they are not charging at them. Many owners implement a simple rule: *human goes through door first, puppy follows*. You can train this by doing exactly what was mentioned – door starts to open, pup pushes forward, door closes. Try again until pup hesitates, then *yes!* door opens and you both go out. A puppy who learns to pause at an open door for permission is a puppy with budding impulse control (and it could save their life one day by preventing bolting into traffic).

Incorporate small “waits” into play and fun. One great technique is the “two-toy game” for fetch-loving pups: have two identical balls. Throw one; when the pup grabs it and comes back (they may not bring it right to you at first, but encourage them), don’t chase them. Instead, show the second ball and wait. They will likely drop the first to get the second – impulse control! – then

you throw the second. They learn that to get the next throw, they have to drop the current toy. This avoids the classic tug-of-war over one ball and teaches *release*. Another example: if you're playing tug, teach a release by going still and saying "out" or "give." Initially, you might trade a treat for the toy to encourage release. Once they drop it, give it back and resume tug as a reward. They learn that releasing the toy when asked doesn't end the fun; in fact, it makes the fun continue (this is a form of impulse control – resisting the urge to keep clinging to the toy). If during play the puppy gets too revved up (maybe they start nipping or jumping wildly), stop the game for a moment. Say "settle" and wait for them to catch their breath or sit, then resume play more gently. By doing this, you're teaching the pup *how to turn their excitement levels down when needed*. They begin to self-regulate because an overly excited behavior simply caused a brief pause in play, whereas calmer play kept the game going.

Reward calm behavior in stimulating situations. A classic scenario is coming home or having guests over – puppies often go berserk with happiness. Plan ahead to channel that. One technique is to teach the puppy to go to a specific spot (like a mat or their crate) when someone arrives, using a command like "Place." You can practice by tossing a treat onto their mat and saying "Place" a bunch of times, so they associate the mat with good things. Then when you come home, before the pup goes bonkers, lure them to their "place" and reward them there, or have a family member help. This interrupts the impulse to jump all over you. Only give them affection when they're not jumping. In fact, make it a habit that calm behavior gets attention, excited behavior gets a gentle ignore. For example, if your puppy is bouncing and whining for you to pet them, take a breath, wait till they pause even for a second, *then* pet. You're essentially communicating, *"Patience will get you what you want."* Dogs do learn this pattern if you stick to it. An excited dog that is instantly showered with petting and high-pitched praise may become more and more excitable and less in control. In contrast, a dog who only gets affection when they've calmed down a notch will start offering calmness to get the reward. This doesn't mean you can't ever enthusiastically love on your dog – of course you can – but you are strategic about when.

Use short training games to build focus. While we emphasize real life learning, a few fun exercises can help with impulse control and also burn some mental energy. One game is "Leave It and Take It." Show a low-value treat in your hand, say "Leave it," and if the pup doesn't immediately dive for it, even for a split second, praise and give them a *different* higher-value treat from your other hand (or from a pouch). They learn that ignoring something when told will earn them a better reward. Gradually increase the challenge – the treat in your open palm, puppy must not touch until you say "Take it." Or a toy on the ground they must leave until given permission. Keep it light and success-oriented (don't set them up to fail too much). This game directly teaches self-restraint. Another classic is the "cookie wait on the forehead" – though more for older, trained dogs, it can be something to aspire to: you place a treat on the dog's paw or even balancing on their nose, and they hold still until you say they can have it. It's a cute trick but also the pinnacle of impulse control (and trust). Don't try that too early, but you can see how daily little waits and releases build up to that level.

Be patient and realistic. Building impulse control is a gradual process, especially for excitable breeds or young adolescents. There will be slip-ups. Sometimes your puppy will totally ignore your "wait" and just do the thing – that's okay, it just means you need to dial back and practice more, maybe with a lower distraction or shorter duration. Celebrate the small victories: the first time your pup sits by the door on their own, the first time they resist grabbing the treat until you



give the nod, the first time they stay laying down when you set their food bowl down. These are big deals! Over time, these practices create a dog who is polite, patient, and manageable in almost any situation – not because they’ve been punished into submission, but because they’ve been *taught* self-control. You’ll deeply appreciate this when you can pause to chat with a neighbor on a walk and your dog sits calmly by your side, or when you can open the car door without your dog leaping out until you say so. Those moments you think, “Wow, what a good dog,” are usually the result of accumulated impulse-control lessons. And the dog is happier too, because a dog with self-control gets more freedom (back to the previous section!) and experiences less frustration overall. They’ve learned to say please by sitting or waiting, and it reliably works for them. In a dog’s mind, that’s a pretty great deal.

## **Encouraging Good Socialization and Play**

A well-socialized dog is a joy to live with – they can handle new people, places, and other animals with confidence and appropriate behavior. Socialization in the Just Behaving philosophy is about quality and moderation. We want to expose the puppy to lots of experiences, but in a controlled way that *prevents bad habits or traumas*. Here’s how to apply Just Behaving to the crucial task of socializing your pup and managing play:

Focus on calm, positive interactions with other dogs. Rather than taking your puppy to free-for-all dog parks, seek out more controlled settings. Ideal scenarios are puppy classes run by trainers who supervise play to ensure it stays positive, or one-on-one playdates with a dog you know to be gentle and tolerant. It’s wonderful if you have a friend or neighbor with a calm adult dog who likes puppies – that dog can teach your pup appropriate play and manners. During dog interactions, *supervise actively*. If you see play getting too intense (one pup is getting overwhelmed or they’re getting too rough), intervene with a short time-out – gently separate the dogs, give them a minute to calm, then let them resume if all is well. This prevents the formation of bullying behavior or fear. Keep initial play sessions short and sweet so they end on a good note. You’re essentially teaching your puppy how to have good doggy etiquette: take turns in play, respect if the other is tired, etc. Many behavioral problems like dog-to-dog aggression stem from either lack of socialization or *bad experiences* during socialization. We never want your pup to be traumatized by a big dog bowling them over or a dog fight at a park. So curate their dog friends carefully. It’s better to have a few very friendly, balanced playmates than dozens of random encounters. If your puppy grows up having only had positive meetings, they will naturally assume other dogs are friends and approach politely. They won’t learn to either fear or bully because those behaviors were never part of their experience.

Teach your puppy how to interact with humans, especially kids, appropriately. Socialization isn’t just doggy play – it’s also learning to be around all kinds of people. This includes men with deep voices, people with hats, kids running and squealing, older folks with canes, etc. Again, the key is controlled exposure. If you have children in your household, involve them in training: show them how to pet the puppy gently (perhaps under the chin or on the chest, rather than patting the head which some pups dislike), and coach them to be calm around the puppy. Kids tend to excite puppies, which can lead to nipping or jumping, which then leads kids to shriek – a cycle that can escalate. Supervise all child-puppy interactions closely, and give the puppy breaks (a safe zone to retreat to) so they don’t get overstimulated. Encourage kids to participate in small tasks like tossing a treat on the ground when the puppy sits, so the puppy learns to follow their instructions too. If your puppy doesn’t have regular access to kids, try to arrange some meetings – perhaps a friend’s children or at a family gathering – where you closely watch and only allow

as much interaction as the puppy is comfortable with. Always prioritize the puppy's comfort: if they seem nervous (tail tucked, cowering) around a new person, don't force it. Give them space, maybe have the person toss treats from a distance until pup chooses to approach. We want these encounters to end with "oh, that stranger gave me yummy treats, I like strangers" in your pup's mind.

Prevent rough play from becoming the norm. Puppies will be puppies, and they love to romp, wrestle, and chase. That's fine, but we want to channel play so it stays within polite limits. One common mistake is encouraging a puppy to play tug or roughhouse with your hands in a very excitable way all the time – this can inadvertently teach them that humans are wrestling buddies to be mouthed. Instead, direct rough play toward toys ("Go get your tug rope!") and teach them games like fetch, hide-and-seek, or find-the-treat which are fun but structured. If you have multiple dogs (or playdates), periodically call your puppy out of play for a short "cool-down" – just a minute or so of rest or a simple command like sit for a treat – before letting them resume. This prevents hyperactivity from escalating. It also teaches the puppy they can switch off excitement when asked, a valuable skill. Encourage varied types of play: not just physical wrestling, but also chase games (puppy chases a ball or you), problem-solving games (like food puzzles or teaching a new trick), and exploratory walks where they sniff and learn. A variety of activities will make your pup well-rounded and less fixated on any one form of stimulation.

Monitor for early signs of problem behaviors and nip them in the bud. For example, if during play your puppy starts guarding toys or food from other dogs (growling or stiffening – a sign of resource guarding), intervene early. Gently work on trading games (trade the item for a treat, so they learn sharing is ok) and manage group play by removing high-value toys. If you see your puppy getting bullied by a larger puppy, step in and end that interaction – we don't want them developing fear or defensive aggression. If your puppy seems to get overly aroused (zoomies that turn into biting or barking crazily), that's a sign the play session was too long or intense; next time, shorten it and perhaps play in a calmer manner. Prevention again – guide play so it stays positive.

Socialization also includes environmental exposure: different sights and sounds. Take your pup on car rides, walk them on busy streets (once they're confident enough), let them experience parks with joggers, bikes, ducks, etc. Each time, pair new experiences with praise, treats, and your calm reassurance. For example, if a loud truck passes and your pup looks startled, you could crouch next to them, pat calmly and say "It's okay," maybe feed a treat after the truck passes. Soon your pup might barely flick an ear at traffic noise. If they see an umbrella or a person in a wheelchair for the first time, let them observe at a distance, use a happy voice, perhaps approach slowly if safe, and reward calm curiosity. The goal is a dog who finds the world interesting, not scary, and who can meet new friends politely and play nicely.

Remember, socialization is an ongoing process, not something that ends at 16 weeks. Keep providing your dog with social and environmental enrichment throughout adolescence. During the teenage phase (6–12 months), dogs can go through secondary fear periods or become a bit more pushy; continue to supervise play and reinforce their good manners. It can be helpful to occasionally refresh their skills in a group class or outings in new places. The work you put in early on – introducing them to all kinds of experiences in a controlled, positive way – will yield an adult dog who is adaptable and friendly. They'll be the dog you can bring to a family barbecue or on a camping trip without worry, because you know they can handle themselves

around other dogs, strange sights, and excited children. And more importantly, they'll enjoy it. A well-socialized dog is a confident, happy dog, and their life (and yours) is all the richer for it.

### **Creating a Stable, Fulfilling Home Environment**

Dogs thrive in an environment that is stable, predictable, and enriching. "Stable" doesn't mean nothing ever changes, but it means the dog can count on certain constants – that their needs will be met, that home is safe, that rules are consistent. A fulfilling environment also provides outlets for the dog's physical and mental energy in healthy ways.

Here's how to create that kind of home for your Just Behaving pup:

Stick to routines but allow for flexibility. We've talked about schedules for feeding and potty training, which are very useful especially for young dogs. As your puppy grows, keep some routine in their day – meals at roughly the same times, a morning walk, an evening play session, etc. Dogs are creatures of habit and knowing, for example, that every weekday around noon they get a potty break and some play, or that you always do a short training game after dinner, gives them something to anticipate and helps regulate their energy. However, it's also good to vary the *details* sometimes so your dog learns to handle minor changes (this prevents them from being too rigid or developing separation issues). For example, have them nap in different safe spots (crate one day, dog bed another), or let different family members handle feeding time on different days. If you normally have quiet evenings, occasionally invite a friend over so your dog learns evenings *can* include a guest – little things like that. The point is to avoid an environment so monotonous that any deviation (like you go out one evening) freaks the dog out. Balanced exposure and routine leads to a dog who is comfortable both in the everyday pattern and when something novel happens.

Provide ample physical exercise and mental stimulation – *in a calm, controlled manner*. A tired puppy is generally a good puppy, as the saying goes, but how you tire them out matters. Too much frenetic activity can actually amp a dog up rather than settle them (some dogs just get more and more excited with hours of play and then have trouble winding down). The Just Behaving approach to exercise is to make sure your dog gets to move their body and use their brain each day, but without turning it into a constant adrenaline rush. Nice long walks (with time to sniff and explore) are excellent – sniffing uses a lot of mental energy and is very satisfying for dogs. Short training sessions or puzzle toys are fantastic mental workouts; teaching your pup a new trick or giving them a food puzzle to solve will tire them in a good way. Play fetch or tug if they enjoy it, but do it in moderation and maybe towards the earlier part of the day, not right before bedtime when you want them calm. If you have a high-energy breed, consider channeling that into a sport or job (like agility training, scent work games, or even just a daily running partner) – something that provides an outlet under your guidance. Prevent the development of boredom behaviors (like excessive barking or digging) by making sure the dog's day has a healthy rhythm of activity and rest. A puppy left alone with no interaction for hours will make their own "fun" which might be destructive; similarly, a puppy entertained nonstop might struggle to entertain themselves ever. So find a balance: scheduled play/exercise times and also scheduled *quiet times* where the pup learns to relax (perhaps after exercise). Creating a habit of an afternoon nap, for instance, can be very useful for both of you!

Use the crate or a designated safe area even beyond puppyhood as your dog's personal den. When properly introduced (with positive reinforcement), dogs come to love their crate as a cozy retreat. It can be their goto spot to unwind, and you can continue to use it when you need the

dog securely out of the way (like when maintenance workers are over, or if the dog just needs a break from a lot of activity). Far from being cruel, a crate (or quiet room) can provide a dog a sense of security and a cue that it's time to chill. Many Just Behaving dogs end up not needing the crate door closed at all – they voluntarily go to their “place” when they want to relax because it's always been a safe haven. Ensuring your dog is comfortable being alone for periods of time is part of a stable environment too. You don't want a dog who panics if they're not attached to you 24/7. From puppyhood, continue the practice of short separations: have them nap in another room sometimes, or stay in their pen while you do house chores, etc. If you work outside the home, gradually build them up to the routine of you leaving (start with short trips out, keep departures and arrivals low-key). Dogs who know *“my owner always comes back and in the meantime I can relax”* are much less likely to develop separation anxiety. You want your dog to feel that even when alone, they are safe and the household is still stable. Providing a stuffed Kong or safe chew when you leave can create a positive association with your absence.

Include your dog in family life as much as possible so they truly feel they have a place. Dogs are social creatures and being with their “pack” is fulfilling for them. If you're watching TV, invite the puppy to lie at your feet or next to you (on their own bed if not allowed on couch). If you're gardening, let them sniff around and “help” (with supervision). Car rides to drop the kids at school, walking to the mailbox, hanging out while you work from home – these seemingly mundane activities actually enrich your dog's life. They learn how to be calm in various scenarios simply by doing it. It also prevents the common issue of a dog that only associates fun with very specific things (like they only get excited when at the dog park but are bored at home). A Just Behaving dog finds contentment in everyday companionship, not just peak moments of excitement. This goes back to breaking free from the high-stimulation mindset: your home should have a *pleasant, low-stress atmosphere* for your dog. Sure, sometimes it's rowdy (maybe you have kids playing or guests over), but overall the dog should feel that their home is a place of *peace and belonging*. They have their routines, their spots to rest, their toys, and their people.

Think about fulfilling basic needs too: regular mealtimes with quality nutrition, fresh water always available, a comfortable sleeping area, and appropriate veterinary care. A dog that is well-fed, healthy, and free of pain or illness will naturally behave better and be more receptive to training. Sometimes behavioral issues can stem from something as simple as the dog being overtired (just like toddlers) or not getting enough potty breaks, etc. So never overlook the simple stuff when creating a stable environment.

Finally, remember to have fun and show affection. Stability doesn't mean rigid or unemotional. On the contrary, a stable home is one where the dog feels *loved*. Play with your dog daily (on their terms too – find what games they really love). Cuddle with them if they enjoy cuddling. Speak to them – dogs might not understand all our words but they love hearing our voice directed at them. Celebrate their milestones (“Good girl, you did it!” when they learn something new or even on their birthday with a special treat). A dog that feels loved and part of a family is a dog that has less reason to act out. They're fulfilled. And because you've set up consistent rules and routines, that love doesn't translate into spoiling or chaos – it translates into a deep bond. In a stable, fulfilling environment, your dog knows what to expect and knows they are cherished. That balance produces a truly well-adjusted canine companion. When home life is good, training almost takes care of itself. You'll have a dog who is calm, attentive, and happy, because all their needs – physical, mental, social, and emotional – are being met in harmony.

## The Role of Dog-Dog Mentorship: Canine Guides and Alternatives

One unique advantage in raising a puppy is if you have an older dog to serve as a mentor. A well-behaved adult dog can teach a puppy lessons that humans can't quite replicate – essentially speaking the same language in real-time. In a multi-dog household, you might notice the older dog correcting the pup's antics or the pup copying the older dog's behavior. This is dog-dog mentorship in action, and it can tremendously accelerate the Just Behaving process. However, not everyone has another dog at home, and that's okay. We'll explore both scenarios: how to utilize a mentor dog if you have one, and how to provide equivalent guidance yourself if you don't.

When an older dog is present: If you're lucky enough to have a resident older dog who is social and stable, your puppy has essentially a built-in tutor. Dogs learn a great deal through observation and interaction. For example, many older dogs will naturally set boundaries with a puppy in appropriate ways. If the puppy is jumping all over the senior dog's head nonstop, eventually the older dog might issue a gentle growl or a snap in the air to say "Enough, kid." That is often far more effective and clearer to the puppy than anything we do! Puppies usually back off, a bit surprised, and learn to read the older dog's cues ("*Oh, when she growls, I should calm down*"). The older dog teaches the pup *social etiquette*: how to take no for an answer, how to respect personal space, how to play nicely. "Lucky are the dogs who are mentored by a wiser, more experienced dog," because they can learn and receive comfort from them. You'll find that a puppy often follows the older dog around and may mimic them. Use this to your advantage: if you want to show the puppy something (say, how to climb stairs or where to potty), have the older dog do it and the pup will likely try to do the same.

Older dogs also help with things like confidence and calmness. A nervous puppy out on a walk will feel braver with a calm older dog trotting alongside. If your older dog doesn't react to the mailman, the puppy will see that and think it's no big deal. Dogs take social cues from each other constantly. In training classes, you'll sometimes see a shy puppy come out of its shell by simply being around an outgoing puppy – that's the power of modeling. At home, your mentor dog can model everything from sitting for treats to lying quietly during family movie night. Many young dogs *learn faster by example*. One cute example: puppies have been known to start lifting their leg to pee *earlier* if they live with a leg-lifting male dog, simply because they watch and copy! (Sometimes they even try to squat *and* lift a leg at the same time because they're not sure which is right.) In your case, perhaps your older dog goes to the door and sits when they need to go out – your puppy may pick up that habit without you explicitly teaching it, just by seeing it.

Be mindful of the mentor's temperament. Not all adult dogs are patient with puppies, and that's okay. If your older dog is a bit grumpy or very senior, you'll have to referee to make sure the puppy isn't pestering them too much. Give your older dog puppy-free zones or breaks so they don't get overwhelmed. You want the interactions to stay positive overall. Also, don't assume the older dog will teach *everything* – you still have to do the human guidance. The mentor dog might inadvertently teach some bad habits too (if your older dog barks at the delivery truck, the puppy will learn to chime in). So, continue training the older dog to model good behavior, and manage situations where the older one's habits aren't ideal. Overall though, a friendly older dog is usually an *incredible asset* in raising a puppy. They can tire the puppy out in play better than any human, and they provide companionship that fulfills the pup's social needs in a way you alone cannot. Multiple dog households often find that their dogs "train each other." The pup learns

house manners from the resident dog, and sometimes, interestingly, the older dog might even seem to follow some of the puppy's training (for example, you teach the pup a new trick and the older dog starts doing it to get a treat too!).

If you don't have another dog at home: Fear not – you can still raise a wonderfully social and balanced dog. You'll just be taking on the full mentor role yourself and finding external opportunities for safe dog interaction. You, as the human, can mimic some of the mentor behaviors. For example, an older dog might give a physical correction like a nip to say “no” – you won't bite your puppy (please don't!), but you can use a firm voice or a momentary scruff hold (gently) to break through if the puppy is really unruly and not listening. The goal is not to scare, but to simulate a “hey, knock it off” that a mother dog would do. Often just a deep, stern voice marker (like “Enough”) and then disengaging is sufficient. You're essentially speaking *human-dog hybrid language* to your pup to set boundaries, and as long as you're consistent, they will get it.

Additionally, seek out other dog mentors outside the home. Maybe you have a friend with a calm dog who wouldn't mind weekly playdates. Or join a well-run puppy kindergarten class where a trainer might bring in an adult dog for a supervised session. Some training facilities even have “puppy socials” where vetted adult dogs help wrangle the puppies in a safe environment. If you don't have that, even meeting stable adult dogs on walks (with permission to sniff and say hi) can be beneficial. The idea is to give your puppy some time to learn “doggie manners” from actual dogs, even if you don't own one. Watching how other dogs respond to your puppy will also give you insights. For example, if every dog at the dog beach is reacting negatively to your pup's antics, it signals you might need to help your pup tone it down – maybe do more training on greetings, etc. Or if your pup is showing fear, you know to scaffold those interactions more gently.

Filling the void at home means you should actively teach the puppy how to handle alone time, as mentioned earlier, since no other dog is around to keep them company. It also means you become their primary playmate, so be prepared for that commitment of time and energy. Engage in varied play and training to meet their social needs. You might even consider doggy daycare a couple times a week when the pup is older *if* the daycare is well-supervised and aligns with your philosophy (some are too chaotic, but good ones group dogs by play style and have trainers on staff). That can provide mentor figures in the form of older playmates.

One more thing: the absence of another dog can actually have an upside – you have the puppy's full attention for training and bonding. Sometimes in multi-dog homes, puppies bond more with the dog than the human, which can lead to mild separation issues if separated from the other dog. A single-dog household pup has the chance to form a very strong bond with their people. You just have to double as their playmate and teacher in those early months.

In summary, dog-dog mentorship is a bonus, not a requirement. If you have it, leverage it – let your older dog show the pup the ropes, while you reinforce the good stuff. If you don't, be the best mentor you can be and strategically socialize your pup with well-mannered dogs out in the world. Many of us have raised wonderful dogs as “only children.” With you as a dedicated mentor and the occasional help of friendly canine teachers (even if they're just neighborhood dogs met on walks), your pup will learn to be dog-friendly and socially savvy. Just remember that mentorship, whether from dog or human, comes down to guidance, patience, and setting a

good example. One way or another, your puppy will get the mentorship they need – and you'll see them blossom into that free, confident dog we're aiming for.

### **Breaking Free from the Training Mindset (Embracing Peace Over Hype)**

In modern media and pop culture, dogs are often portrayed as either goofy, hyperactive sidekicks or as trick-performing superstars. We see commercials with dogs barreling through the house in bursts of energy or TV shows where dogs execute flashy obedience routines. It's entertaining, sure – but it can create a skewed perception of what living with a dog is truly like (and what it should be). Many new owners think they need to engage in constant excitement with their dog: endless games of fetch, always teaching the next cool trick for Instagram, or ramping the dog up because a tired dog is a good dog, right? While exercise and fun are important, the Just Behaving philosophy invites you to break free from this high-octane "training mindset." Instead of viewing your dog as an excitement machine or an obedience robot, view them as a partner in a journey toward mutual *peace and balance*.

Why emphasize peace and balance? Because a dog that is peaceful and balanced is, quite simply, a happier and healthier dog – and so is their family. Constant excitement and arousal (in the scientific sense, meaning heightened state) can actually lead to stress in dogs. When a dog is in a state of high excitement, their body releases stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. If this happens too often without enough recovery, it can keep them in an amped-up state that paradoxically makes them *more anxious and less able to relax*. You might have experienced this: a dog that's been playing wildly for an hour might come inside and still be panting, pacing, unable to settle. It can take a long time for those hormones to dissipate. Now, exercise is necessary to burn energy, but the key is balance – cycles of activity followed by calm, not relentless stimulation.

The training mindset often focuses on *outcomes*: how many commands does my dog know? Can they perform under distraction? While these are fine goals, they can overshadow the more important question: *Is my dog well-adjusted and content in everyday life?* A dog might ace an obedience class but still be restless and misbehaved at home because the underlying relationship and lifestyle aren't balanced. Just Behaving flips the priority. We care less about formal obedience (though your dog will naturally become very obedient in the ways that count) and more about the dog's *state of mind*. We want a dog who can be calm in the house, who isn't bouncing off the walls for attention, who can handle being alone calmly, who isn't desperate for constant entertainment, and who greets the world with a composed demeanor. This comes from the way you *live* with your dog, not from an hour of training drills.

It can be challenging at first for owners to resist the urge to always "do something" with the puppy. Society tells us a bored dog is a problem dog, which is true to an extent – dogs shouldn't be neglected. But there's a difference between a dog being *bored* (as in ignored for long periods) and a dog simply learning to *be content doing nothing* for a while. Teaching your pup that it's okay to just hang out is a gift to them. Life is full of downtime – not every moment is playtime – so a dog that can relax is much better off than one who expects constant action. We don't want to create an *excitement junkie*. Some dogs become essentially adrenaline addicts; they get keyed up at the slightest trigger because they've been inadvertently trained to live in a perpetual excited state. An example is a dog that goes absolutely nuts the second you pick up the leash because they've learned "leash = OMG crazy time!" In Just Behaving, we'd purposefully practice calm leash pickups (pick up leash, dog sits calmly, then you go, so they

learn leash means *compose yourself* first). We break the association that every little event is cause for frenzy.

Another aspect to breaking free from the conventional mindset is to stop thinking of your dog as a checklist of commands to be installed. Instead of aiming for a dog that responds like a computer to inputs, aim for a dog that *understands* and cooperates out of that understanding. This means sometimes you don't need a command at all – the dog just *does* the right thing because they've learned how. For example, rather than commanding “heel” throughout the walk, you've raised a dog who generally walks near you because it's a pleasant shared activity, and you only occasionally say “easy” if they get ahead, and they naturally slow. The communication is two-way and subtle. This feels more like companionship and less like remote-controlling a pet. It's a joy to experience.

By focusing on *guidance* and *relationship*, you also liberate yourself from feeling like you must be a drill sergeant or entertainer 24/7. You can actually enjoy the quiet moments with your dog without guilt. Sitting on the porch watching the sunset with your dog calmly lying beside you is as valuable (arguably more so) than a frenetic session of fetch. Both have their place, but don't underestimate the power of calm coexistence. Dogs are actually experts at “doing nothing and loving it” – adult dogs sleep or rest a large portion of the day. Puppies need a lot of sleep too (often 16–18 hours a day!). Embrace that natural calm rather than disrupting it. Sometimes the best “training” is to let your dog be, in a safe space, and learn to soothe themselves.

From a family perspective, shifting away from an excitement-based view of dogs also reduces stress on the household. If kids are taught that the puppy doesn't always need rough play, they learn to interact in calmer ways (which reduces nipping incidents). If the dog isn't wound up all evening, the family can have peaceful time instead of constantly managing a hyper pet. So it truly leads to happier families and more fulfilled dogs. A fulfilled dog isn't one who is endlessly stimulated; it's one who has their physical, mental, and emotional needs met in a balanced way. Peace and balance might not be as flashy as a dog doing an agility course on TV, but it sure is wonderful in real life.

One might worry, “Does a peaceful approach mean my dog will be boring or not get enough exercise?” Not at all. It just means you choose *quality* exercise and play, and you intersperse it with plenty of down time. Your dog will still love to play and run – in fact, they may enjoy it more because their life isn't an overstimulated blur. When it's playtime, you play. When it's relax time, they truly relax. Dogs, like people, do well with a bit of rhythm to the day – excitement follows calm and vice versa. Picture a service dog who can go from lying quietly under a table to performing a task in a split second then back to lying down – that's excellent self-regulation, and it comes from training that values calm focus. Your family pet can have a degree of that too.

In practice, breaking free from the training mindset means toning down the hype. If you find yourself revving the puppy up constantly, try doing activities in a calmer way. For example, instead of those crazy high-pitched voices and rapid movements to play, sometimes get on the floor and just gently interact, rewarding the puppy for gentle behavior. Instead of always using treats to lure and excite during training, sometimes train with just praise and slow, deliberate movements, so the puppy learns to follow even without a cookie dangled. If your dog is always expecting “What now, what now?!” you can dial it back by occasionally practicing something like the relaxation protocol (a series of steps where the dog learns to remain on a mat while various distractions happen, gradually building tolerance – a known exercise in dog training for



calmness). Even just massaging your puppy or playing soft music while they lie down can do wonders for teaching them to self-calm.

The bottom line: You don't need to prove your dog is the smartest or fastest or can do backflips on command. What you and your dog need is a solid understanding and a peaceful life together. When you shift your perspective from "I have to train this dog to do XYZ" to "I'm raising a companion to share my life with," a lot of pressure falls away. You start to relish the small moments and worry less about achieving some external standard. Ironically, by doing so, you often end up with a dog who is *better behaved* and more attuned to you than if you had focused only on obedience, because you've prioritized the relationship. So take a deep breath, slow down when you need to, and allow your dog to just *be* sometimes. In those moments, you'll find the true joy of having a dog: a quiet understanding between species, a contentment that needs no words or actions. That is the heart of Just Behaving – not a frenzy of training, but an evolving dance of companionship.

### **Integrating *Just Behaving* into Family Life (Tailoring to Your Family's Needs)**

Every family is unique, and one of the strengths of the Just Behaving philosophy is its adaptability. Whether you're a busy single professional living in a city, a retired couple in a quiet town, or a bustling family with kids in the suburbs, you can make this approach work for you. It's not a strict regimen but a way of thinking about your dog that fits into *your* lifestyle. Let's explore some practical solutions and tips for different family structures and situations, so you can see how to seamlessly integrate Just Behaving into your daily life.

- **Busy Professionals:** If you work long hours or have a hectic schedule, consistency and efficiency are key. You might worry, "How can I raise a puppy if I'm not home all day?" The good news is puppies can adapt well as long as you set up a routine. You may need to enlist help (a dog walker for midday breaks, or doggy daycare a couple times a week) – that's perfectly fine and doesn't conflict with Just Behaving as long as those helpers understand your low-excitement, consistent approach. When you are home, make the most of the time with calm, quality interactions. For example, establish a morning routine: a brisk walk or play session to burn energy, some training or supervision during your breakfast prep, then settle the pup with a puzzle toy when you leave for work. In the evening, another walk and play, then incorporate the pup into your unwinding time (maybe they chew a bone at your feet while you answer emails or watch TV). Because your time is limited, focus on prevention and management to avoid problems. Tired from work and don't want to chase a pup around the house? Use that playpen or tether to keep them near you, give them a stuffed Kong to occupy themselves, and you can relax together. On weekends or days off, try to spend extra time reinforcing their training and giving them new experiences (like a hike or a puppy class) – this will strengthen your bond and also tire them out in a healthy way. The structure you create will actually make the puppy easier to handle during your busy weekdays. And remember, it's okay if your puppy isn't getting 8 hours of intensive interaction a day – quality over quantity. A short, focused training/play session can do more good than hours of half-hearted supervision. Busy owners often excel with Just Behaving because they naturally integrate the pup into what they're already doing, rather than hovering over the pup constantly. Your pup learns to be *self-sufficient and calm* during downtime, which is a great life skill.

- Families with Kids:** Children and puppies can be a magical combo – they can also be a chaotic one without guidance. The Just Behaving philosophy can actually make life easier for families with kids because it emphasizes calm leadership and structure, which benefits both the kids and the dog. Involve the kids in the raising process. Teach them that the puppy is like a younger sibling who needs gentle teaching, not a toy. Set specific rules: for example, no rough play inside, only outside under supervision; when puppy is in crate or bed, that's their quiet time and kids should not disturb; have kids participate in training cues (with adult oversight) so the puppy learns to listen to everyone. You can make it a fun project – maybe create a sticker chart where kids mark off when they helped with feeding or when they remembered to ignore the puppy's jumping until it sat. This gets them on board with consistency. A big challenge is excitement – kids naturally squeal and run, which can wind a puppy up. Work with your kids to practice calm greetings and interactions. For instance, when coming home from school, they should wait until pup is sitting to say hello (maybe they can even be the ones to give the puppy a treat for sitting). Encourage games that don't lead to nipping, like hide-and-seek (child hides, puppy finds) or fetch rather than wrestling. Also, ensure the puppy has a safe zone away from child play when needed. Families are often busy, so incorporate the pup into daily activities: if you're cooking and the kids are doing homework, have puppy on a leash with you in the kitchen, practicing lying down quietly (maybe with a chew) amid the family bustle. The puppy learns to be part of family time without always being the center of attention, which is important. Another tip: rotate responsibilities if kids are old enough – one child can help with the evening walk, another with grooming, etc. This not only lightens your load but helps the puppy generalize good behavior with all humans, not just one primary adult. Above all, teach empathy and observation – encourage your kids to notice when puppy is getting overstimulated or tired. Maybe create a code word like "Puppy needs a break," which anyone can say if play is getting too wild, and then everyone pauses and helps settle the puppy (and themselves). This way the *whole family* is working as a pack to raise the puppy, rather than puppy being a separate "project" of the parents.
- Young Couples or First-Time Dog Owners:** If you're a couple with your first puppy, it's a wonderful bonding experience – it can also test your teamwork! Communicate with your partner to ensure you're both using the same approaches. It's common for one person to be a little more lenient and the other more strict; try to meet in the middle in line with Just Behaving principles. For example, if one person likes to let the pup snuggle on the couch and the other doesn't, come to an agreement and stick to it so the pup isn't confused. Use the philosophy's flexibility to your advantage: you can decide together what the house rules are (they don't have to copy someone else's rules) as long as you apply them consistently. Perhaps you live in an apartment – focus on making outings count (elevator manners, street noise exposure) and providing indoor enrichment (training games, scent games) to make up for less space. As a couple, you might have social life or travel considerations – plan ahead for the puppy. Just Behaving dogs can adapt well to new environments because of their solid foundation. If you take weekend trips, bring the pup early on and practice the same routines on the road (bring the crate, maintain feeding schedule), so the pup is not stressed. For date night when the dog must stay home alone, practice leaving the pup alone calmly for gradually longer stretches so it's no big deal when you go out for a few hours. First-time owners

sometimes get overwhelmed with advice from all sides; stick to the core ideas of *structure, prevention, calm guidance* and you'll do great. And don't forget to give each other breaks – tag-team puppy care so neither of you gets burned out. One can watch the pup while the other goes to the gym, then switch. A well-raised puppy will soon be easy enough that you can also enjoy time together with the pup just chilling nearby.

- **Retirees or Stay-at-Home Individuals:** You may have ample time to spend with your dog, which is fantastic – just be careful not to overindulge or helicopter the puppy. It's easy when you're always home to attend to the pup constantly, but as mentioned, dogs benefit from learning independence too. Make sure to give the puppy some alone-time training even if you rarely have to leave – otherwise the first time you do need to go to the doctor or grocery, the pup may panic. If you're a retiree, you might also be more set in a peaceful routine, which is great for a dog. Dogs thrive on routine and you likely have a consistent one. Just insert the puppy's needs into it: a morning walk during your normal stroll time, a play session when you tend the garden, etc. Perhaps you have grandkids visiting occasionally; use your puppy's new skills to ensure those visits go well (maybe the pup stays on leash at first introduction, or is in a calm-down area during peak excitement). As someone with a calmer lifestyle, you can emphasize the calm. Your household is naturally less chaotic, which suits the philosophy perfectly. Just be sure the pup still gets enough exposure to the world (take them places, car rides, meet friends' dogs) so they don't become too insulated. Many retirees thoroughly enjoy doing training and enrichment activities – go for it! Teach that trick, play that puzzle, join the dog club if you want. You have time and patience, which are the best tools. One common pitfall for those with lots of time is *spoiling* the dog in ways that backfire (like sharing lots of table food leading to begging, or never crating the pup and then they develop separation anxiety). Maintain those healthy boundaries we discussed. It's fine to pamper your pup with love, just keep it within the structure you know is best for them long-term.
- **Single Owners:** If it's just you and your dog, you essentially become each other's world. The bond can be very strong, and Just Behaving will help ensure that bond is healthy, not codependent. Involve your dog in as much of your life as possible – take them on errands if dogs are allowed, bring them to friend gatherings if appropriate, or join dog-oriented social activities (like a local dog walking group). This provides socialization for your dog and support for you. On days you have long work hours or commitments, plan ahead for your pup's care (maybe a neighbor lets them out, or you use a day-play service occasionally). Being sole caretaker, you might feel pressure, but also you have the advantage of consistency since only one person is doing the training. You can really get in sync with your dog. Use that to your advantage by being very attuned to their needs and signals. Some single owners worry about leaving the dog alone; gradually work up to it and give the dog lots to do in your absence (a stuffed Kong can last 30 minutes, a treat-dispensing toy another 20, then they nap, etc.). When you come home, practice not making it a huge frenzy – keep arrivals low-key, which fits our calm approach and prevents an overly attached, anxious mindset in the dog. Also, don't hesitate to reach out for help or hire help if you need – it doesn't mean you're failing, it means you're making smart choices for your dog's well-being and your own.

In all these scenarios, a common theme emerges: adapt the principles to your life, don't try to force your life to match some ideal training scenario. If you're busy, use structure to your

advantage; if you're relaxed, incorporate the dog gently into it; if you have kids, make them part of the solution; if you're alone, build a community. The Just Behaving way is achievable for everyone because it doesn't require special tools or intensive classes – it requires mindfulness in how you raise your dog day by day.

By integrating your puppy into the fabric of your life using these methods, you'll find that you don't have to put your life on hold to "train the dog." Instead, the dog grows up right alongside you. They learn to fit in with your routine, your family dynamics, and your activities because that's how they've been raised. This adaptability is what makes Just Behaving so practical. Over time, you'll hardly remember how you got there – you'll just notice one day that your dog feels like an effortless part of the family. They'll know, almost intuitively, how to behave in your household, and you'll know how to communicate with them. That is the ultimate goal: a dog who is *just behaving* well as a beloved member of your unique family.

As you implement this guide and watch your puppy grow, remember that raising a dog is a journey, not a destination. You are sure to learn and adapt along the way, just as your puppy is learning from you. In fact, the Just Behaving philosophy itself will continue to evolve with each experience and each dog, including yours. By embracing this way of life, you're not just teaching your dog – you're also enriching your own understanding of canine companionship. It's a path of mutual discovery and trust that deepens over time.

With patience, consistency, and love, you'll raise a dog that truly embodies what it means to be a "free dog" – one who is trustworthy, happy, and an integrated part of your family's world. And as your puppy matures into that wonderful companion, you'll likely find that Just Behaving has quietly matured into your default approach, a natural philosophy you carry with you. For now, take pride in the progress you and your puppy have made. You're on your way to a lifetime of harmony with your canine friend – a journey well begun, with so much more to explore as you both continue *just behaving* together.