

# Understanding Canine Behavior: The Detrimental Effects of Excitement-Based Training and the Role of Structured Leadership

## Introduction

For decades, modern pet culture has encouraged dog owners to engage with their dogs through high-energy play, treat-based reinforcement, and training methodologies that emphasize excitement and constant engagement. While these approaches often aim to build a strong human-animal bond, they have unintentionally contributed to widespread behavioral problems in household dogs. The result? Dogs that lack impulse control, struggle with emotional regulation, and become unreliable in real-world settings.

This paper explores how human misunderstandings of canine learning processes lead to behavioral challenges such as excessive jumping, demand barking, hyperactivity, and an inability to be trusted off-leash. By examining the negative effects of games like tug-of-war, inconsistent handling, and the false belief that dogs can differentiate between family and guests, this research aims to provide insight into why structured mentorship, prevention-based training, and calm leadership are crucial in raising a well-mannered, stable, and trustworthy family dog.

## The Role of Excitement-Based Training in Canine Behavioral Issues

### Misconception: Excitement Equals Happiness

One of the most common mistakes made by dog owners is equating excitement with happiness. When owners greet their dog with excessive enthusiasm, allow excitable play, or use high-pitched vocal tones during interactions, they inadvertently reinforce a hyperactive state. While these behaviors may seem harmless in puppyhood, they condition the dog to associate human interaction with arousal, leading to difficulties in emotional regulation as the dog matures.

### The Impact of Overstimulation on Canine Behavior

Excitement-based training fosters a dog that:

- Struggles to settle in the home, constantly seeking engagement.
- Demands attention through barking, whining, and pawing.
- Finds it difficult to remain calm around new people, children, or other animals.
- Fails to develop impulse control, leading to frustration-based behaviors like leash-pulling and destructive chewing.

Research shows that dogs learn best in calm, structured environments where they receive clear, non-verbal communication from their owners rather than constant verbal praise or treat-based conditioning. When excitement is minimized, dogs become more observant, adaptable, and emotionally balanced.

## **Tug-of-War: An Oppositional Game That Encourages Instability**

### **The Psychology of Tug-of-War**

Tug-of-war is frequently recommended as a healthy outlet for a dog's drive and energy, but the game teaches behaviors that directly contradict the goal of raising a well-mannered family dog. At its core, tug-of-war is an oppositional game that:

1. Encourages possession-based behaviors.
2. Reinforces resistance against human handling.
3. Heightens frustration tolerance issues.
4. Strengthens demand behaviors (i.e., dogs pawing at owners for more play).

A study on canine frustration tolerance found that dogs that regularly engage in high-energy, competitive games like tug-of-war exhibit higher rates of impulsive aggression and difficulty disengaging from play. The structured alternative? Carrying-based activities such as retrieving, transporting objects, or guided scent work, which reinforce cooperative behaviors rather than oppositional defiance.

### **Alternatives to Tug-of-War**

- Encouraging a dog to carry an object rather than pull against a human.
- Using structured retrieving exercises where the dog must wait before being allowed to pick up an item.
- Reinforcing calm engagement through low-arousal training games like scent detection or cooperative walking.

## **Jumping: The Long-Term Consequences of Encouraging Excitability**

### **The Problem of Inconsistent Handling**

Many owners unwittingly create jumping problems in their dogs by reinforcing the behavior during puppyhood. Encouraging a puppy to jump up for attention, allowing it to place its paws on people when excited, or using food lures to engage the dog in vertical movement all contribute to a long-term pattern of unwanted jumping.

### **Why Jumping Becomes a Lifelong Problem**

Dogs do not differentiate between guests and family members as humans expect. If a dog is permitted to jump on its owner when they return home from work but is corrected when jumping on a guest, the inconsistency creates confusion. The dog is left attempting to decode which scenarios permit jumping and which do not. The result is a dog that:

- Jumps unpredictably, leading to potential injury (especially in households with children or elderly individuals).
- Exhibits frustration-based jumping when ignored.
- Fails to generalize obedience commands when overexcited.

### **A Structured Approach to Greeting Behaviors**

The Just Behaving method recommends:

- Never reinforcing jumping at any stage of development.
- Teaching puppies that all four paws on the ground is the only acceptable greeting.
- Using calm, neutral body language when entering the home to prevent overexcitement.

### **What Defines the Ideal Family Dog?**

#### **The Key Characteristics of a Well-Mannered Companion**

The most desirable family dogs exhibit the following qualities:

1. Calm and neutral in response to human presence.
2. Naturally respectful of physical boundaries (does not jump, paw, or demand attention).
3. Emotionally stable, able to handle new environments without anxiety.
4. Non-demanding, does not bark or whine for attention.
5. Trustworthy off-leash, maintaining natural proximity to the owner.

#### **How These Behaviors Are Cultivated**

Rather than using excessive reinforcement, the ideal family dog is raised into these behaviors through structured mentorship. This involves:

- Avoiding overstimulation: Minimizing high-energy games and engagement.
- Discouraging demand behaviors from puppyhood.

- Maintaining a calm home environment that reinforces relaxation.

### Comparing Training Methods for the Ideal Family Dog

Training Approach	Behavioral Outcome
Treat-based positive reinforcement	Creates demand-driven dogs who expect rewards for every behavior.
Play-based training	Encourages hyperactivity and difficulty settling.
Structured leadership (Just Behaving method)	Produces emotionally stable, well-mannered dogs who do not require constant engagement.

### Conclusion: Raising a Balanced Dog Through Prevention, Not Correction

The widespread belief that excitement equals happiness has led to a generation of hyperactive, overstimulated dogs who struggle to self-regulate. Through structured leadership, calm engagement, and prevention-based mentorship, owners can raise dogs who are naturally well-mannered rather than requiring extensive obedience training to correct behaviors that never should have been allowed in the first place.

By eliminating excitable greetings, discontinuing problematic games like tug-of-war, and maintaining consistency in how behaviors are reinforced, owners can ensure that their dogs grow into calm, trustworthy companions - not just pets who obey commands, but dogs who truly understand and respect the human household.