

# Don't Up Your Dog Guide

OPPORTUNITY BARKS



IN WE BELIEVE  
THE CONNECTION

Have an older puppy or did you recently adopt a dog?  
Let's hit the reset and give you a solid starting point and  
help ya understand what matters and where to get rollin'.

## Advocate for your dog

If you just got your dog, please take the next several weeks easy, and take your time getting to know each other. When you have a dog that is an adolescent or adult, adjusting to a new environment, much of your job, while getting to know them, is advocating for them while you start to figure each other out.

That means guiding them often and establishing clarity in communication, especially creating healthy expectations with people and dogs that may be well-meaning but looming for interaction (aka anyone that says, "Dogs love me" um, just be ready with a one-liner, we'll help you practice). Helping your dog co-regulate and be less tense regardless if they were rehomed from a stressful shelter or if you have had your dog for a while, is still going to be a theme for all.

# Clarity in communication

If you haven't already, you can begin to do a little training by hand-feeding meals and pairing this with "marker words".

## HAND FEEDING IF YOUR DOG'S A FOODIE

Ok, stick with me, "marker words" are words that will be used to give your dog a thumbs up or thumbs down in their choices. So it's relevant, um foreveerrrrrrrr (echo voice) with your dog. You can begin to help build communication by feeding 1-2 meals a day by hand, just "good" and pop food in your dog's mouth or toss food for them to forage for and call them back to you "come" and "good" when they return to you and feed. If your dog is not a foodie, you can build drive to tug or play and use that as your reward system instead. If your dog "knows some stuff" but you haven't spent any time on re-establishing this in a while, consider hand-feeding one meal a day.

I secretly hear your brain going, great treats and "good", what else? I'm so glad you asked. We love a feedback system that is a thumbs up AND a thumbs down. Apologies to anyone who clearly was a product of the "everyone gets a trophy" era. The clarity in communication means you basically have clues to teach your dog "hot" and "cold" to help them increase and decrease behaviors. Dogs LOVE clarity and this helps them tremendously in understanding what we expect of them in a more clear way.

## STARTER IMPULSE CONTROL

You can also try this other exercise, and it's super simple. Your dog can be standing, sitting, or laying down. Approach them with food close in hand, and if they go to jump/push, move your hand away, bring it back, and as long as they are not jumping up or trying to take the food from hand, deliver it to them. It's a game of hot and cold for your dog and it teaches impulse control. Not jumping? I'll say, "good" + deliver this to you. Jumping up, I say a simple "nope" and remove the treat.

## Natural movement + play

Dogs need authentic opportunities to be dogs. Yep, they need to be able to do unabashedly dog things. Tug on a toy to their heart's content, shred a stick to pieces, fetch, sniff, roll in gross stuff, dig, you name it. So find nature, come to love it and if you are like, "ewww not nature, noooo", get over it, your dog needs you to at least *like* nature. Seeking out green spaces where dogs can "dog" is important.

Where a lot of people get off track is that they want to play, but play is that it is activating, it turns a dog on. So when you play with your dog, they may get more physical, move into your space, and possibly even play bite you. And, that's also normal, especially if you haven't established any pauses or routines with play.

When I say play I mean anything that involves you getting goofy and getting your dog whipped up and also play that involves tugging and intense toy play.



## Finding the off switch

To encourage your dog to dial up and dial down, invite them to play with a word that means “game on”, we often use, “break” to dial a dog into an activity. So they play, play, play, then go quiet with your body, and use another word that is asking the dog to hit the pause button, we use “off”, wait a few seconds, and then boom, invite the pup back in to play.


You can play around with that pause to stretch your dog’s self-control. Basically, this teaches patience and teaches a dog to dial up/dial down. This is a great way to begin to establish relaxation breaks in play so your dog can rev up and rev down, and you have a way to help the dog find the off switch. Win-Win we think!

## Chews for lyfe

If your dog had a lip tattoo this would be it. Make sure your dog has 24-7 access to hard, long-lasting chews. We recommend **natural or sterile bones** and **Nylabones**, all available in **our store**, or frozen raw beef bones if you have a dog that has a steady gut. This can be great to help a dog in transition or to help alleviate stress if things get a little wonky.

If you want an edible chew, stuff and freeze a Kong toy, give your dog a bully stick (in a holder, **like this**, to make it last way longer).

Also....there are play toys and long-lasting chews. They are NOT the same. So the 3-inch rope toy and the rubber bone are not long-lasting chews. The squeaky toy or tug toy is not a long-lasting chew. Your old shoe is debatable. When you want to play **fetch, tug**, etc. this is an activity that happens with you—so create meaningful interactions by tossing, and tugging, then wrap up sessions and remove the toy, so that it’s like a special toy treat that can turn on and turn off.



**Help your dog  
build an off switch  
by dialing up and  
down through play**

## Remove -or- leash on and guide?

In situations where your training is under construction (like um, now), the real question is what can you *currently* implement to provide information to your pup, today?

**You have choice!**

**Behind door number one = removal.**

Removal = crate, chill behind a gate or in a room with a closed door, step off a trail or sidewalk and body block.

**Behind door number two = leash on**

Leash on = Your dog is with you, on a leash and you are actively guiding their movement.

### Situations that may spur this choice?

- Guests at your home
- People approaching you and your pup on a leash
- Passing by people on a walk or trail
- Those “can I pet your dog?” moments
- Being in a public place and people are tempted to your dog

These two options are go-tos, especially if you are struggling with people coming into your home, greeting people, passing by dogs/people or just generally not feeling solid in higher pressure situations. It’s cool! Don’t stress, just remove or guide in the short term.

## Socialization, should I care? Yes, and no lol.

Socialization is often a hot topic with dog owners, let’s take a hot minute to demystify this. Don’t put pressure on yourself to be a master socializer. Socialization is exposure to novelty at a pace that suits your and your dog. Basically, it’s like this, your dog is processing the world around them and you are the tour guide. The big nugget here- and I’m going to write this in annoying CAPS. Ready?

**YOUR DOG DOES NOT HAVE TO PHYSICALLY INTERACT WITH PEOPLE OR DOGS IN THE NAME OF “SOCIALIZATION”.**

Socialization can also be just neutrally observing and being led in an environment, until you get the skills for more freedom or until you know your dog a bit better over time. If your dog has been making some not “great” decisions when off leash, or greeting people or dogs on leash, feel free to avoid those situations for a hot minute. Remember, observation and neutral interaction are the whole points of said “socialization”- aim for that for starters. The target is neutrality and your dog being like, “oh hey yep there’s a dog, no big deal”. Are you picking up what we’re putting down?

So, my friend, you are well on your way to not 🦆ing it up or getting it back on track. I hope you found this helpful and some good brain food to get things rolling. If you need some support at home, check out our starter kits for **training** or **enrichment**. If this kind of info felt good and expansive for you in the dog owner handbook part of your human brain, check out our drop-off training, boarding school, or classes/lessons to give things a good jujje in the dog training/human training department. Yes, we offer dog training **programs** where we do the heavy lifting and then hand over the reins. I know, I can't believe it either. Pinch us. 😊

Love you, mean it. Muah! Leigh



**OPPORTUNITY**  
BEHAVIOR **BARKS** TRAINING  
SINCE 2003