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Before he comes home

The conversation that works better before the adoption than after

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SYSTEM FIRST. PUPPY SECOND. FAMILY ALWAYS.

Before the adoption, not after

By the time most families are filling in a form, they have decided. What they usually have not done is work out who in the house is actually going to do this — and that, far more than the dog, is what decides whether a placement holds.

This is that conversation, on paper, so it can happen at a kitchen table instead of in a corridor.

It asks for honesty rather than enthusiasm. There is no score to pass and nobody is watching. The only thing that matters is that the people who will carry the work have said so out loud, to each other, before the dog arrives.

IN HERE

what the first week costs, in hours ◆ who owns which job, with a name against it ◆ the tradeoffs nobody mentions ◆ the house before he arrives ◆ the first forty-eight hours ◆ the first night ◆ the day you have nothing left

In my house it was Mum. In yours it could be anyone. Read it that way.

What the first week costs, in hours

This chapter is the reality check. A puppy is not only love, loyalty, photos, and dreams. He is daily work.

That work includes potty trips, cleaning accidents, feeding, water checks, sleep protection, biting management, chewing control, training, socialization, outdoor time, mental games, grooming, shedding cleanup, health watch, emergency readiness, Mum's comfort, and supervision of the children.

If the family wants the dog, the family must accept the workload. Not in theory. In real daily time.

The Workload Changes by Stage

The puppy is hardest at the beginning. The work should reduce over time, but it does not disappear.

Stage	Family Load	What Makes It Hard
First Week	Around 4 hrs/day	Potty, night, accidents, biting, supervision
First Month	Around 3 hrs/day	Rhythm, potty, chewing, sleep, children's consistency
First 3 Months	Around 2.5 hrs/day	Socialization, leash, grooming, freedom control
First Year	Around 2 hrs/day	Adolescence, exercise, training maintenance
After First Year	Around 1 hr 15 min/day	Walks, grooming, cleaning, ongoing routine

These are planning baselines, not promises. Some days will be easier. Some days will be worse. But the dog always has a daily cost.

The Daily Split

Dad should not do everything. But Dad owns risk. A practical split can look like this.

Phase	Total Family Load	Dad	Kid 1	Kid 2
First Week	4 hrs/day	1 hr 30 min	1 hr 15 min	1 hr 15 min
First Month	3 hrs/day	1 hr	1 hr	1 hr
First 3 Months	2.5 hrs/day	50 min	50 min	50 min
First Year	2 hrs/day	40 min	40 min	40 min
After First Year	1 hr 15 min/day	25 min	25 min	25 min

This does not mean the children handle risk. It means they carry routine.

Dad still controls gates, roads, unknown dogs, visitors, strong pulling, guarding, unsafe items, vet and trainer decisions, emergencies, and Mum's discomfort.

Who owns which job, with a name against it

Dad owns safety decisions, freedom levels, outdoor risk, reset decisions, vet and trainer decisions, Mum's SAFE, emergency response, and final responsibility. Dad does not need to do everything. But Dad cannot disappear.

The children can own routine jobs when approved.

Job	Adult Check?
Water check	Yes
Potty tracker	Yes
PLACE practice	Yes
Brushing help	Yes
Daily handoff	Yes
Short mental game	Yes
Calm play	Yes
Outdoor route watching	Yes
Toy cleanup	Sometimes

They do not own risky jobs. They help. They report. They stop early. They call Dad.

Mum's job is not to carry the dog. Mum's role is comfort feedback, cleanliness concerns, puppy-free space boundaries, red-line signals, and BOX NOW.

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First Week Responsibility Matrix

Time / Event	Task	Avg. Duration	Main Owner	Backup Owner
Wake-up	POTTY immediately	10 min	____	____
After potty	Food	10 min	____	____
After food	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Mid-morning	Water check	2 min	____	____
Mid-morning	Short play / calm game	10–15 min	____	____
After play	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Late morning	Rest in BOX / PLACE	5 min setup	____	____
Lunch / midday	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Afternoon	Food if puppy schedule requires	10 min	____	____
After food	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Afternoon	Brushing touch / handling practice	3–5 min	____	____
Evening	Controlled play	15 min	____	____
After play	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Dinner	Food	10 min	____	____
After dinner	POTTY	10 min	____	____
Night	Calm chew / settle	10–20 min	____	____
Before sleep	Last POTTY	10 min	____	____
Accident happens	Clean immediately	10–15 min	____	____
Visitors / delivery	Control puppy first	5–10 min	____	____
Mum needs space	SAFE / BOX NOW	2–5 min	____	____

Total for this stage: _____ hrs/day

Divided by: _____ people

Per person: _____ per day

Is that time available in a normal week — not your best week?

YES / NO

If first-week coverage is unclear, the family is not ready for pickup.

The full test is in the first book.

The tradeoffs nobody mentions

When families fail with a dog, they usually blame the wrong thing. They decide they did not love the dog enough, or were not strict enough, or chose the wrong breed. In my experience the real deal-breaker is none of those. It is the tradeoffs: the early mornings, the interrupted work, the cleaning, the noise, the shedding, the lost spontaneity, and the comfort of the person who never really wanted the dog in the first place.

So this book puts those tradeoffs in front of you on purpose, before you commit, while walking away is still easy. The Family Readiness Test™ at the end is not there to confirm that your family wants a dog — because wanting one was never the problem. It is there to show you plainly whether your family can carry what the dog will actually cost.

The test has three honest outcomes, and all three are respected here. *Let's get the puppy*, if the family is ready. *Maybe later*, if the will is there but the season of life is wrong — the answer that worked in my own home. Or *Not for us*, if the honest truth is that the cost is simply not worth it for your family. "Not for us" is not a defeat. It is a responsible, loving answer, and a dog who never enters the wrong home is a dog spared.

Now the family has seen the workload.

The next question is not:

Can we do this once?

The question is:

What are we willing to sacrifice when the dog needs us at the wrong time?

The tradeoff is the moment of truth.

Anyone can say: *"I'll feed him." "I'll walk him." "I'll play with him."*

But if the person accepts the task and rejects the tradeoff, that person has not accepted the task.

Three decisions in order — ready, breed, puppy

Choosing a dog is really three decisions, and most families collapse them into one excited moment. Taken in order, they protect you.

The first decision is the one this whole book is about: is our family ready for a dog at all? Not do we want one — since you are reading this, you almost certainly do, and wanting was never the problem. Ready. That question runs through every chapter and ends at the Family Readiness Test™.

The second decision comes only after the first: which breed fits our family? This matters far more than most people realize. Every breed carries its own characteristics, needs, energy,

temperament, and personality, and these are not small differences. They shape daily life for ten years or more. Some breeds are athletic and need real, daily work or they unravel. Some are content to be still. Some are highly trainable; some are independent and stubborn. Some shed heavily, some bark, and some suffer real separation anxiety when left alone. Choosing a breed is its own serious piece of research, and it deserves to be done properly, against your family's energy, your home, and your schedule, before you ever fall for a face. This book does not cover breed selection in the depth it deserves, because it is a family-readiness book, not a breed guide. Do that homework from proper breed-specific sources. This book does not choose the breed for you; it teaches you to become honest enough to choose one responsibly. It is one of the most important decisions you will make, and it is not made here.

The third decision comes last: which individual puppy? Even within the right breed, puppies differ. A beautiful puppy can still be the wrong puppy. The wrong puppy does not become easy because the family loves him. Look for temperament that fits your home: a puppy who is curious but not frantic, who recovers after a small surprise, who can settle. Not the one with the most dramatic looks, and not the one the children cried over. Fit, not fantasy.

Person	Job
Dad	Final decision. Records, fit, risk, vet check, and whether to walk away.
Kids	Observe calmly. Do not choose by cuteness. Do not pressure Dad.
Mum	Gives comfort feedback. Her discomfort is a real decision input.
Seller / breeder	Answers normal questions, shows records, allows normal observation.

The house before he arrives

Before he comes home, the important answers should already be settled in calm: where he sleeps and rests, where he toilets, where he eats, which spaces stay off-limits to him, which words everyone in the family will use, who controls the doors, what the children may and may not do, and what happens when the household is overwhelmed. Decide those things in advance and you are building a system. Decide them in the middle of the storm and the puppy ends up building his own — one with no respect for clean floors, work calls, school mornings, the furniture, or anyone's peace of mind. The next chapter is devoted entirely to this: how to map the house, room by room, before he ever crosses the threshold.

Supplies are not the same as a system. A crate in the corner does not create rest on its own, a mat does not create calm, a leash does not create control, and a pile of toys does not create responsibility. The equipment is easy to buy. The system is what makes the equipment mean anything, and it is the thing worth preparing first. Prepare the routine before you prepare the photo. If the house is not ready, the puppy is not ready to enter.

The House Zone Map

The puppy needs a map before he needs freedom. Use clear zones from Day 0.

Zone	Purpose	Setup Standard
BOX zone	Sleep, rest, safe containment.	Safe, quiet, clean, easy to access, away from teasing and heavy traffic.
POTTY zone	Same toilet place and routine.	One consistent corner. Easy to reach and clean. Not the main play zone.
Food / water zone	Eating and drinking.	Stable bowls, easy cleaning, no guest feeding, no kids teasing.
PLACE zone	Calm spot near family.	Mat, bed, towel, or raised bed near people but not in chaos.
Supervised family area	Limited safe area for controlled time.	Only when watched. Barriers ready. Unsafe items removed.
Puppy-free spaces	Rooms or areas protected for Mum and family.	Doors, gates, or clear rules. No "quick visits."

Do not give the puppy the whole house. A young puppy with too much space will make his own rules.

Hazard Removal Checklist

If the puppy chewed it, he had access to it. Fix the setup before blaming behaviour.

Free to copy and share, as it is.

Remove / Block	Done
Shoes, socks, laundry, towels on floor	_____
Children toys, balls, small plastic pieces	_____
Wires, chargers, plugs, loose cables	_____
Plants, soil, garden tools, fertilizers	_____
Food wrappers, trash bags, table leftovers	_____
Cleaning products, chemicals, medicine	_____
Sharp objects, nails, screws, tools	_____
Unsafe furniture corners or chewing access	_____
Slippery sprinting surfaces blocked for play	_____
Fence gaps, gate gaps, escape points checked	_____

Prevention beats training when the puppy has not learned the house yet.

The first forty-eight hours

Boring Is the Goal, Not the Failure

The first forty-eight hours should feel smaller and quieter than the family wants, and that is not a mistake to apologize for. A good arrival is not a party; it is a calm landing. In these two days the puppy only needs to learn a handful of things — where the toilet is, where the water is, where he rests, what his resting place feels like, what the family words mean, what calm children sound like, that Mum is given space, who controls the routine, and that this house has a gentle, predictable rhythm.

He does not need the run of the house, a parade of guests, a long garden adventure, or the whole extended family passing him hand to hand on day one. If the first two days feel almost too boring, they are probably exactly right, because excitement leads straight to over-tiredness, and an over-tired puppy bites more, barks more, forgets the toilet faster, and cannot settle. Boring first, fun later. Calm days are what build a calm dog.

Toilet First, Before the Front Door

The puppy should not walk into the house first. The very first stop is the toilet spot — not the living room, not a tour of the bedrooms, not the children's play area. Go straight there, keep him on a leash or closely controlled, and let him sniff quietly for a couple of minutes while you say the toilet word, POTTY, calmly. If he goes, mark it warmly with GOOD BOY and reward him quietly — no shouting, no crowd, no party. The message is small and clear: this is the place, that was right, good things happen here. If he does not go, do not stand there for twenty dramatic minutes; bring him into his prepared area and try again shortly. The first toilet trip is not about success. It is about starting the pattern on the right foot.

No House Tour

After that first attempt, the puppy goes only into the prepared space — one safe room, a pen, or a controlled area with his resting place nearby. He does not wander room to room. A house tour feels sweet to people, but to a puppy it is a flood of information: more smells, more corners, more things to chew, more chances to learn the wrong pattern. For these first hours, his whole world is just a few simple modes — with an adult on a leash or close by, resting in his BOX, a brief calm moment on his PLACE, a trip to the toilet, or sleep. That is genuinely enough. A puppy who begins with the whole house does not learn freedom. He learns confusion.

Keep Freedom Very Low

The puppy starts with very little freedom — his resting place, a pen, one safe area, a leash with an adult, and close supervision. No run of the house, no free garden, no wandering into bedrooms or the kitchen or the spaces meant to stay clear, no visitor greetings, no stairs, no uncontrolled play with the children. Freedom is earned later; it is not a welcome gift. A young puppy handed too much space will make mistakes, and then the family blames the puppy for what was really a setup problem. Do not build the mistake and then punish him for it. Make his world smaller instead.

The first night

The first night may well be hard. The puppy may whine because he is lonely, over-tired, confused, or needs the toilet — none of which means he hates his new family. He is a baby in a strange place. The rule for the night is narrow on purpose: toilet only, no play, no party. If he whines briefly, wait 30–60 seconds. If it might be the toilet, an adult handles a quiet trip — out, a chance to go, a calm GOOD BOY if he does, and back to BOX. No long talk, no lights and excitement if it can be helped, no children joining in, no cuddle session. If the night becomes entertainment, night problems grow; what he should learn is that night is quiet, the toilet is boring, BOX means sleep, and an adult handles it.

Night 1 may include protest. The mission is to teach that whining does not open entertainment.

If This Happens	Response
Brief whining	Wait 30–60 seconds. Do not rush in.
Still whining and likely POTTY timing	Silent POTTY trip. 2–3 minutes max.
Puppy toilets	GOOD BOY calmly. Back to BOX.
No POTTY	Back to BOX. No play. No talking.
Kids wake up	No talking, no petting, no lights-on party. Call Dad if unsure.
Wants attention	Keep night boring. Calm earns freedom later.

Night rule: POTTY only. No play. No party.

The day you have nothing left

Some days will be bad. A busy day, a sick child, work pressure, travel, exams, family stress. On those days, do not aim for perfect. Do the minimum: food and fresh water; toilet trips on time; a little safe movement; accidents cleaned calmly, with no blame; protected, genuine rest in the resting place and the calm place; one small useful activity, no more; Mum's space protected, with no forced contact; and the truth told to Dad, so tomorrow starts clean.

A small useful activity can be a treat scatter, the name game, a PLACE reward, a calm chew, short sniffing, or two minutes of quiet attention.

Bad day is allowed. Bad week is not. If the family has a bad week, reset the system.

Why this exists

I am not a dog trainer. I am not a vet, not a breeder, not a professional from the dog industry.

That may be exactly why this helps. None of it was written from theory or from a training room. It came out of real family failure and real household pressure.

I raised dogs before I had a family. I loved them, and I believed I knew what I was doing. Then, a few months after I married, my dog died, and I grieved him more than anyone who has never loved a dog would understand.

Years later I brought a dog into my family, and it failed. My wife had a real fear of dogs. My children loved the puppy and kept breaking the rules without meaning to. He learned one thing from me, another from the children, and something else again from the house. I rehomed him.

A few years later I thought the problem had been timing. The children were older. We were ready. We were not. Same failure — taller children, a different name, the same pattern.

A few years after that, it happened again.

Three dogs. Koudy, Milo and Snoopy. All three went on to families who could give them what mine could not. My children still see them.

Love was there. Experience was there. It failed anyway.

So I stopped asking why the dog had failed and started asking better questions. What repeated across all three? Where did it break? Who carried the risk, and who carried the daily routine? Who was being pushed into discomfort? What did the puppy learn from us without our noticing?

The answer was simple and uncomfortable. Love was present. A system was not.

Sometimes the dog was trained, but the house was not.

So I built one — on paper, for my own children, before the fourth dog arrived.

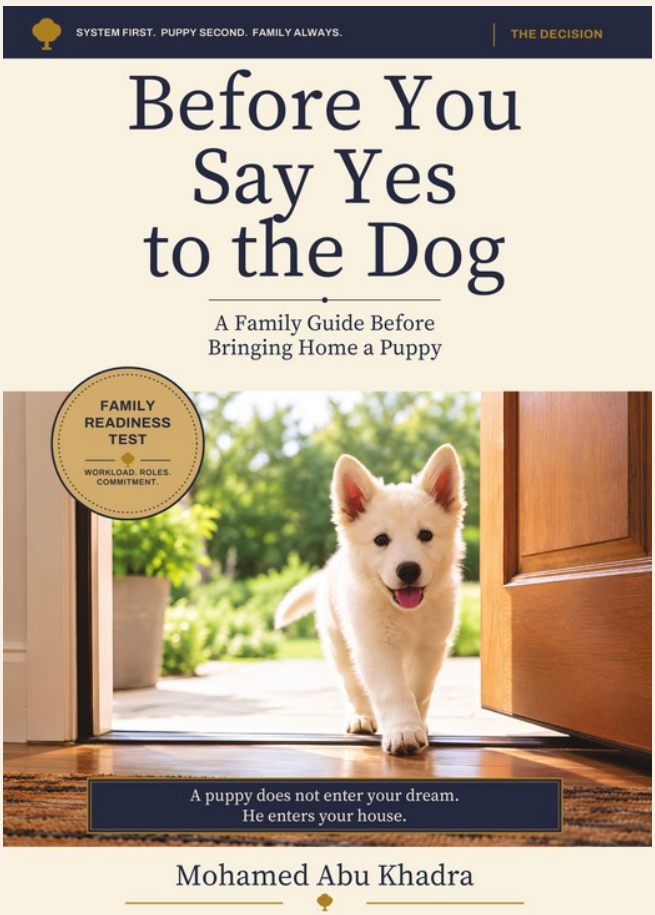
He stayed. His name is Oden.

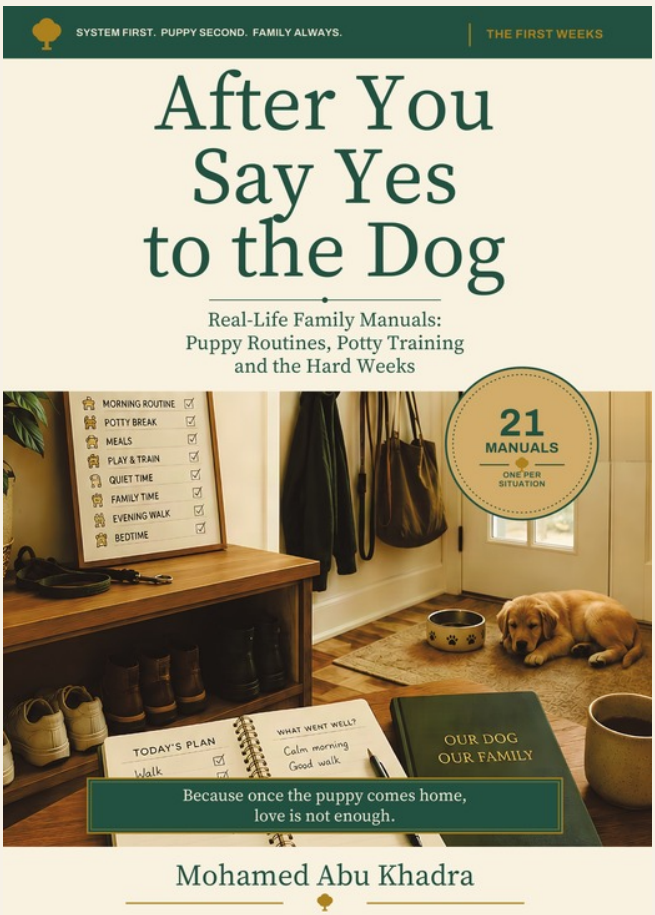
These pages are part of that system. I am doing the thing I wished someone had done for me.

Somebody gave you this. If it was useful, it is free to pass on — and everything else is at mohamedabukhadra.com.

I wrote this for my family. Then I shared it with the people I thought might get something from it. Use it, ignore it, or write back and tell me how to make it better. Up to you.

The two books





Before You Say Yes to the Dog

A Family Guide Before Bringing Home a Puppy

The decision before the decision. The real workload before it lands on one person. Who actually does what, including the children. A real say for whoever feels least ready. It ends at a test with three answers — Let's get the puppy, Maybe later, Not for us — and each one, given honestly, is a good answer.

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This document is a practical family operating and educational guide. It is designed to help families think clearly, prepare responsibly, assign roles, reduce chaos, and make better decisions before and after bringing a puppy home. It is not a substitute for professional veterinary care, medical advice, certified dog training, behaviour consultation, legal advice, or emergency judgment. It is not an obedience or training programme.

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Large-breed dogs can grow into strong, powerful animals. Adult supervision, safe handling, suitable training, and professional support are the responsibility of the family. Children should never be responsible for dangerous decisions, emergency handling, strong leash control, unknown objects, medical situations, unsafe behaviour, or bite-risk scenarios.

For health concerns, vaccination, feeding, medication, injury, illness, poisoning, breathing difficulty, collapse, bloat signs, severe fear, aggression, dangerous behaviour, bite risk, or any situation where the dog or family may be at risk, contact the appropriate qualified professional immediately.

When safety is unclear: Separate. Call. Go.

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