A bad week is not a verdict

Needing a reset is normal

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Needing a reset is normal

If you are in the week where it all came undone, read this slowly, because the first thing you need is not a technique.

In a large University of Helsinki study of dog owners, nearly half went through this. The researchers built a scale for it — frustration, anxiety, weariness — and compare it themselves to the weeks after a baby arrives. You are not weak and you are not uniquely bad at this.

Knowing it is common helps for about an hour. Knowing what to do on Tuesday helps for longer. This is the second part.

Nothing has gone wrong that means you have failed. There is a way back and it has a name.

IN HERE

six questions — bad week or wrong match ◆ how to read the answers ◆ what a reset actually is, and what it cannot fix ◆ dropping freedom back and earning it again ◆ the day you have nothing left ◆ when a reset will not fix it

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

Bad week, or wrong match?

Six questions. Ten minutes. Answer them honestly — nobody is watching, and there is no score to pass.

1. Has it been getting worse for three to seven days — or was yesterday just bad?

One bad day is just a bad day. Puppies have off days; everyone does. What calls for a reset is a pattern.

2. Before this week, was it working?

Not perfect. Working. Was there a stretch where the routine held and the house was manageable?

3. On a normal week, with the people you actually have — was the workload ever carryable?

Not the week you imagined. The week you really live, with the school runs and the work and the people who are genuinely in the house.

4. Have you been doing more of the same thing, and expecting it to change?

More correction. Longer walks to tire him out. The same words, louder. Most families in the hard week are not being lazy — they are grinding.

5. Could your house hold one small, calm, boring week — starting tomorrow?

A smaller space. Tighter toilet timing. Shorter play, longer rest. No new training, no testing.

6. Right now, is the only way to keep peace in the house to keep him permanently shrunk?

Not for a week while things settle. Permanently.

How to read your answers

There are three honest outcomes. All three are real answers.

If 1 and 2 say yes, and 3 says the workload was carryable —

This is a bad week, not a verdict. The system came loose and it can be put back. Read on: shrink his world, restore the routine, cut the triggers, and hand freedom back on proof. A reset begun early is a few days of adjustment. Left for a month while you hope it fixes itself, it becomes a rescue.

If all of that is true but you cannot face question 5 this week —

Start lower. Turn to the Bad-Day Minimum and do only that, for as long as you need. It is not the system running well; it is the system refusing to collapse. Hit the floor, get through the day, and pick the reset up tomorrow.

If 3 says the workload was never carryable, or 6 says the only peace is a permanently shrunk dog —

Then this is not a system that slipped. It is fit, and no amount of technique replaces readiness that was never there. A reset rebuilds a system; it cannot manufacture a fit that was never there.

That is a real answer, and it is the same honest answer this work has respected from the start: not this dog, or not this season. Letting a dog go to a home that fits him better is not shame. The author has made that choice himself, and knows its weight.

Whatever the answer is, you now have it clearly — which is more than most families in this week ever get.

What a reset actually is, and what it cannot fix

A reset is a deliberate return to control. When the system has slipped toward chaos, you stop trying to manage the chaos where it is and you take the puppy back to the conditions where he could succeed — the same conditions from his first weeks in the house.

In practice it means shrinking his freedom right back down: a smaller space, more time in his resting place and his calm place, a leash indoors with an adult, close supervision instead of free run of the house. It means restoring the routine that drifted — the toilet timing tightened again, the play shortened, the sleep protected, the meals and the rhythm made predictable. It means cutting the triggers that have been feeding the problem: if he is barking at the fence, the fence access goes; if he is stealing, the access to the stolen things goes; if play keeps tipping into biting, the play gets shorter and the rest gets longer. And it means the children go back to the calm, simple version of their role, and Mum's space is protected as firmly as it was on day one.

None of this is punishment. The puppy is not in trouble. You are rebuilding the floor beneath him so he can stand on it again.

The reset is a real tool, and it works — but it is not a spell that fixes everything, and it cannot undo a decision that was wrong from the start. If the honest truth is that your family was never ready, that the timing was wrong, that the workload was always going to be more than the house could hold, then resetting the system will not quietly turn that "no" into a "yes." It was not built to. This is the same honesty the Family Readiness Test™ asks for: if the answer was really "Maybe later," no amount of technique replaces the readiness that was missing. Reset rebuilds a system. It does not manufacture a fit that was never there.

The Trigger: A Bad Week, Not a Bad Day

One bad day is just a bad day, and it does not call for a reset. Puppies have off days, everyone does, and tearing the whole system down over a single rough afternoon would only create more instability. The signal to reset is a *pattern* — when things have been getting worse across roughly three to seven days, when the same problems keep returning, when you can feel the structure has genuinely come loose rather than wobbled once. That is the moment to act, and to act early, while the slip is still small. A reset begun early is a minor adjustment of a few days. A reset delayed for a month, while you hope it fixes itself, becomes a rescue.

Dropping freedom back and earning it again

The reset runs on a simple ladder of freedom, and the whole method is this: drop down the ladder, then climb back one rung at a time, on evidence rather than hope.

From the smallest world to the largest, the rungs look roughly like this:

- crate, pen, or a single small space, with rest protected;
- on a leash indoors, beside an adult;
- loose in one puppy-proofed room, closely supervised;
- loose across a wider part of the house, still supervised;
- unsupervised for short stretches in a safe, puppy-proofed zone;
- full, trusted freedom in the home.

When the system slips, you do not nudge it. You drop the puppy back to the rung below the one where things broke — somewhere clearly inside what he can handle — and you hold there until the basics are steady again. Then you climb: one rung, and you watch. A few good days on that rung, and you take the next. The rule for moving up is the one this book has used from the very start: freedom is given on proof, never on hope. The rule for moving down matters just as much: if the old problem returns, you drop a rung calmly, with no drama and no blame, and hold the smaller world a little longer. Up on evidence, down without shame — that is the entire engine of the reset.

You may climb, slip, and drop a rung more than once over a dog's life. That is not failure. It is simply how a real family lives with a real dog through real, imperfect years.

The Shape of a Reset: The First Day, Then the First Week

The first twenty-four hours are not about fixing anything. They are about stopping the slide. You shrink the puppy's world immediately — back to the small space, the resting place, the leash-with-an-adult, the close supervision of his very first days — and you hold it there. No new training, no testing, no trying to win back lost ground in an afternoon. You stabilize the basics: predictable meals, frequent toilet trips on a tight clock, protected rest, calm. The goal of day one is a quiet, contained, almost boring day, because boring is the floor you lost, put back.

Then, across the next several days — roughly the first week — you hold that small, calm world steady and let it do its work. You do not start handing freedom back yet. You keep the structure tight and watch the basics return to reliable: the toilet steady, the rest normal, the biting cooling, the listening coming back. Most resets need only a few steady days before you can begin the climb back. If a full week of the small, calm world brings no steadiness at all, that is not a signal to grind harder — it is a signal to look honestly at fit, which we will come to.

The 24-hour, 3-day and 7-day reset

The 24-Hour Reset

Stop everything extra. No visitors, no free roaming, no new training, no long outings.

Back to basics for one day: tight potty timing, more BOX and PLACE, leash indoors, calm only, reward quiet.

Goal: stop the slide and get one calm, boring day.

The 3-Day Reset

Run the same fixed loop every day: wake → potty → food → potty → short calm activity → rest, repeated.

Supervise everything. Reward calm out loud. Rebuild one system at a time — potty first, then calm, then play.

Track each day. Do not widen freedom yet.

The 7-Day Reset

Rebuild reliability. Keep the fixed loop and start widening the world one small step at a time, only as evidence allows.

Add back one freedom at a time (a room, a longer settle, a calmer visitor) and watch how he copes.

Review every evening: better, same, or worse? Let the facts set the pace.

Free to copy and share, as it is.

What to reset, depending on what broke

A reset is faster and cleaner when you aim it at the specific thing that came loose, instead of vaguely tightening everything. What you shrink depends on what broke:

- If the toilet training slipped, go back to timed trips on a tight clock with tighter confinement between them, exactly as in the first weeks, and rebuild reliability before you loosen the schedule again.
- If play keeps tipping into hard biting or over-arousal, shorten the play, lengthen the rest, and bring back the leash and the calm place so he stops rehearsing the wild version of himself.
- If he is chewing or stealing, the answer is access, not scolding: remove the temptations and the freedom that let him reach them, supervise closely, and give him legal things to chew instead.
- If he is barking or lunging at the fence or the window, the access to that trigger goes for now — close the route, manage the view — so he stops practising the behaviour every single day while you rebuild calm.

In every case the principle is the same: you are not punishing the puppy for the problem, you are removing his daily rehearsal of it so the right pattern has room to take hold again.

What Broke	What to Reset
Potty slipping	Smaller area, tighter timing, restart the tracker.
Biting sharper	More rest, shorter play, end before chaos.
Chewing up	Remove access, more legal chews and brainwork.
Fence or outdoor chaos	Less freedom outside, more control, shorter sessions.
Over-arousal everywhere	Quieter house, more PLACE and BOX, fewer triggers at once.

The day you have nothing left

Some weeks bring a day when even the reset feels like too much — someone is ill, the house is in crisis, you are simply empty. On those days you do not abandon the dog, and you do not try to be perfect. You hit the minimum, and the minimum is enough to hold the line:

- food and fresh water;
- toilet trips on time, often enough to avoid accidents;
- a little safe movement, even just leashed pottering;
- accidents cleaned calmly, with no blame;
- protected, genuine rest in the resting place and the calm place;
- one small useful activity, no more — a treat scatter, the name game, a PLACE reward, a calm chew, short sniffing, or two minutes of quiet attention;
- Mum's space protected, with no forced contact, and SAFE honoured;
- and the truth told to Dad, simply, so tomorrow starts clean — today was a minimum day.

The Bad-Day Minimum is not the system running well. It is the system refusing to collapse. Hit the floor, get through the day, and pick the reset back up tomorrow.

When a reset will not fix it

A reset rebuilds a system. It cannot manufacture a fit that was never there. So there is a clear line worth naming honestly. If a full week in the small, calm world brings no steadiness at all; if the only way to keep peace in the house is to keep the puppy permanently shrunk; or if the real workload was never carryable even before the bad week — then the problem is not the system that slipped, it is the fit. That is the same honest answer the Family Readiness Test™ respects: not this dog, or not this season. Reaching for a reset is right when the fit is real and the structure came loose. Recognizing when a reset cannot carry the weight is just as much a part of using it well.

Real aggression, fear that keeps getting worse, or bites that break skin — stop and get a qualified in-person professional. A reset is not for serious aggression.

No improvement after honest resets, or the fit itself was wrong — talk it through with Dad and a professional. A reset cannot fix a decision that was wrong from the start.

So if this is your hard week, take a breath. Decide honestly whether the fit is real. If it is not, let that be a clean and respected choice. Letting a dog go to a home that fits him better is not shame — I have made that choice myself, and I know its weight. But you will leave it knowing what the work truly is, so that if there is ever a next time, you start where this book began: ready before you say yes. And if it is — if this is your dog and it was only ever the system that came loose — then make his world small again, rebuild the floor, and start handing it back. You are not too late, you have not failed, and you are not out of options. You are exactly at the moment this tool was made for.

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.

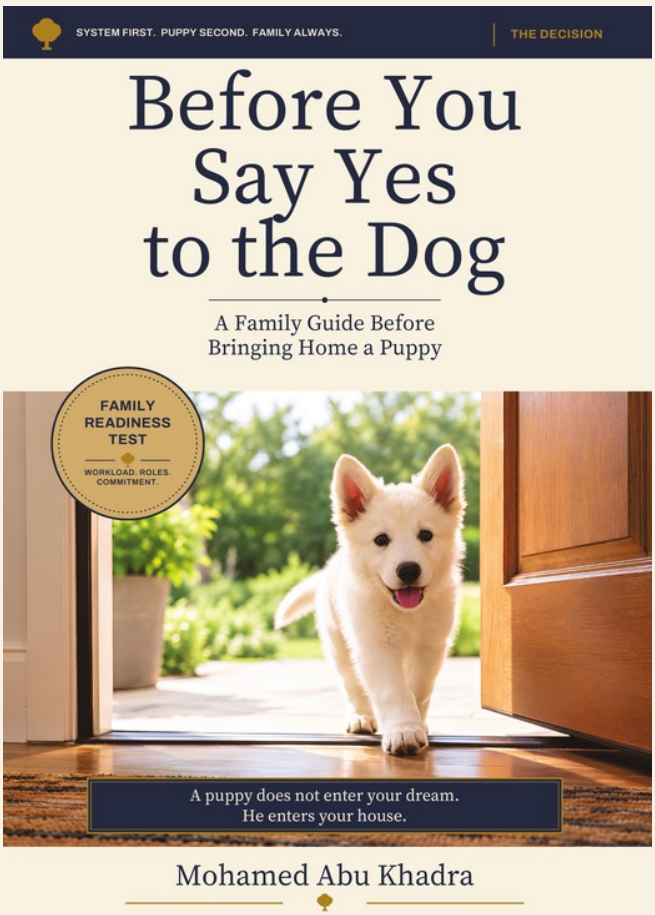
He stayed. His name is Oden.

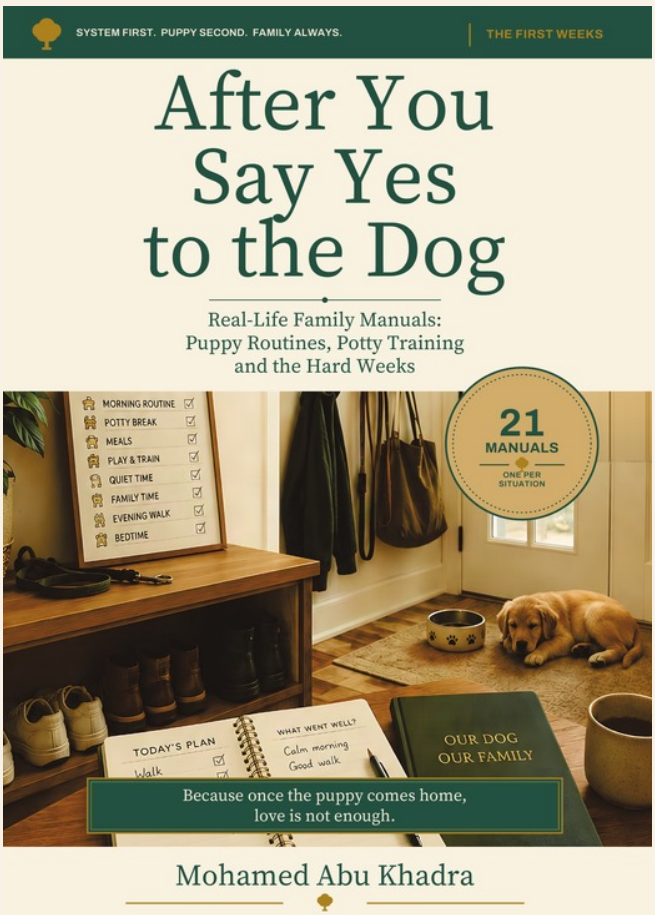
These pages are part of that system. I am doing the thing I wished someone had done for me.

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





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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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