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For the one who said yes

You said yes to them, not to the dog

Mohamed Abu Khadra

AUTHOR OF BEFORE YOU SAY YES TO THE DOG AND AFTER YOU SAY YES TO THE DOG

SYSTEM FIRST. PUPPY SECOND. FAMILY ALWAYS.

You said yes to them, not to the dog

"He just wants to play" is not a response to fear. You have probably heard it more than once, from somebody who meant it kindly.

You agreed because the children asked, or because saying no would have made you the difficult one. Since then nobody has asked how it is going, and the work has quietly become mostly yours, because you are the one who notices.

This does not ask you to love the dog more. It does not ask you to do exposure exercises, hold the lead, or get used to him.

It asks for one thing only: that you know what you are entitled to ask for. The household builds this. Your part is the first few pages.

IN HERE

what you are entitled to say ◆ the sentences that sound reassuring and are not ◆ the honest limit ◆ your path first — rooms and routes ◆ off-limits spaces that are real rules ◆ the hidden workload ◆ why never is a complete answer

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

What you are entitled to say

And the foundation of the whole thing is consent, not endurance. Mum does not need to train the puppy, touch him before they are ready, feed him to force a bond, hold him for photos, prove they are brave, bond on anyone else's schedule, or pretend the house is fine so everyone else can stay excited. They may choose to interact later, which is good, or they may not, which is equally fine. The system respects their pace, because comfort grows through control, distance, choice, and time — never through pressure. The goal was never forced bonding. It is safe coexistence, on terms Mum sets for themselves. A dog system that ignores Mum will not survive.

If Mum says stop, pause, gate, enough, move him, or I need space, the family acts — not later, now. No one asks for a long explanation, defends the puppy, makes that person prove the risk, or turns it into a court case. The puppy is controlled first. Then, calmly, an adult can review what happened: was the puppy too close, were the children too loud, was a gate left open, was the freedom too high, did the play run too long, was there mess the family had been ignoring? The moment that person has to argue for their own safety, the system has already failed. When they say stop, the system stops.

Useful Mum words

"This room is puppy-free."

"Too close."

"The smell is too much."

"Not now."

"I need space."

"He is too wild."

The family should treat these as instructions.

Not complaints.

Mum does not need long explanations.

They need the system to respond.

The sentences that sound reassuring and are not

You know the sentences, because almost every excited household says them. “He just wants to play.” “He’s only a puppy.” “Don’t be scared.” “You’ll get used to him.” “Just touch him once.” None of those sentences build comfort. They build pressure, and pressure builds resistance. This chapter is about the person in the house who feels least ready for the dog — and in my home, that person was my wife, who is genuinely afraid of dogs. Throughout the book this system is called SAFE, because protecting that person is the whole point. In yours it may be a husband, a parent, or a sibling. Whoever it is, this is the chapter that keeps the dog dream from quietly turning into their private burden.

If Mum says BOX NOW, everyone stops and secures the puppy immediately. No debate. No delay.

Dad must not say: “He is only playing.” “Don’t be scared.” “You need to get used to him.” “He won’t do anything.” That does not help.

Dad’s answer should be: “I’ll control him.”

The honest limit

If one family member feels unsafe, trapped, surprised, or overloaded, the system is not working. The puppy may be loved by the kids and wanted by Dad, but the dog dream will not survive if Mum’s comfort is ignored. Protecting Mum’s comfort is not anti-dog. It is how the family keeps the dog.

If Mum is forced into the workload against her comfort, resentment will grow. That is not a dog problem. That is a system problem.

PART TWO — FOR EVERYONE ELSE

Control first, think second

No surprise contact.

SAFE is not panic, blame, drama, or punishment; it is household management. It means one thing: control the puppy first, think second. When that person enters the room, walks a narrow path, sits down, carries food, opens a door, comes down the stairs, or simply says they need space, the puppy is brought under control — through his resting place, his calm place, a gate, a barrier, a leash with an adult, an off-limits room, or ending the play. The tool can change with the moment; the principle does not. When that person needs space, the puppy is controlled first, with no debate, no teasing, and no delay.

Which tool to use depends on the moment:

SAFE Tool	Use When
BOX	Puppy is wild, tired, biting, or cannot think
PLACE	Puppy is calm enough to settle near the family
Gate / barrier	Mum needs clear, protected space
Leash with Dad	Puppy must be near the family but controlled
Puppy-free room	Mum needs full separation

The reason this matters so much is that surprise contact destroys trust fast. A puppy rounding a corner at speed, jumping on clothes, brushing legs from behind, blocking the stairs, or slipping into an off-limits room because someone thought it would be funny — even from a perfectly friendly puppy, the surprise can feel truly unsafe. Friendly does not mean comfortable, cute does not mean acceptable, and small does not mean harmless. So the house is designed so Mum is not surprised. The gates, the doors, the resting place, the calm place, the leash, and the clear rules for the children are not extras. They are how the family protects trust.

The answer is “I’ll handle him”

This is the part that protects the relationship as much as the person. Mum should never have to manage the puppy in order to protect themselves. They should not have to raise their voice, argue with the children, shove the puppy away, close every door themselves, or become the unpopular enforcer in the house. An adult owns the SAFE response so that Mum never has to enforce their own boundary alone.

So when they say they need space, an adult acts. When the children wind the puppy up nearby, an adult stops the children. When the puppy rushes them, an adult reduces the freedom. When off-limits spaces get ignored, an adult fixes the system. The answer is never “he’s only playing.” The answer is “I’ll control him” — followed by doing it. That shift, from defending the puppy to controlling him, is the whole difference between a household that keeps the dog and one that slowly fractures over it. Mum is not the problem. Ignoring Mum’s comfort is the problem. Control the puppy early, and give Mum space.

Their path comes first

Every house has paths — to the kitchen, the bedroom, the stairs, the garden, the door, the chair where someone sits, the routes where someone carries food or laundry or coffee. Those paths get protected, deliberately, before the puppy ever arrives. The adults should know in advance which rooms are off-limits, which narrow spaces make contact uncomfortable, where Mum walks most often, which doors are risky, and where the puppy should be when that person passes.

If the puppy repeatedly blocks their path, jumps near them, follows too closely, or appears suddenly where they expected space, the system is weak — and the answer is not to wait until that person is angry. It is to fix the map: more gating, more use of the resting and calm places, more leash time with an adult, less child-led freedom. No one should have to negotiate for the freedom to cross their own home.

Off-limits spaces are real rules

Off-limits spaces are not emotional requests to be honoured only when someone is upset. They are standing rules, agreed by the family because the space is protected — full stop. They might include a bedroom, a bathroom, a quiet room, the kitchen during cooking, a study, or any space Mum keeps for their own peace. The children do not bring the puppy in. The puppy does not "just visit quickly." If he wanders in by mistake, he is removed calmly, with no debate in the moment. A boundary ignored once is easier to ignore the next time, so it is protected every single time. This is not anti-dog. It is what keeps the house livable enough to keep the dog at all.

Visitors do not override Mum's comfort. When a visitor enters, the puppy is controlled first. If a visitor excites the puppy, the puppy leaves. If the children start showing off, the activity ends. If Mum looks uncomfortable, SAFE starts immediately. If the puppy jumps or rushes, he goes to his resting place, onto a leash, or behind a barrier. And if a visitor says "It's okay," Dad still controls.

The hidden workload

Here is the failure that sinks more family-dog stories than biting ever does. The children enjoy the puppy, an adult loves the dream — and one person quietly becomes the one who notices the smell, cleans the accident, washes the bedding, moves the shoes, wipes the floor, deals with the dirty paws, and handles the chaos after everyone else has wandered off. It happens slowly, almost invisibly, and it is profoundly unfair.

Say it plainly: if the puppy turns into a load carried by one person alone, with no clear roles and no real commitment from everyone else in the house, then that person now has a second full-time job they never agreed to take. That is how resentment is built, and resentment is how dogs lose their homes. So if the dog creates work, the system assigns the work, out loud and in advance. Who cleans accidents? Who wipes paws? Who washes bedding? Who brushes and vacuums the shedding? Who handles the food mess? Who backs up Dad when they are busy? Mum may choose to help if they want to. They must never become the default worker simply because no one else took the system seriously.

Cleanliness is part of it

Comfort is not only about space; it is also about the state of the house. Hair, fur on furniture, smell, dirty paws, outdoor dirt, accidents, drool, wet-dog odour, dirty bedding, food mess, chewed objects — all of it matters, and none of it should be treated as one person's private problem. Cleaning is part of the dog system. Accidents get cleaned properly, paws get wiped when needed, the bedding from the resting and calm places gets washed, the food and water areas stay clean, shedding gets brushed and vacuumed as routine, he is washed with a dog-safe shampoo when needed and groomed on a regular routine, and the puppy-free spaces stay clean. The unhelpful answer is "that's normal with dogs." The better answer is "we'll improve the routine." A clean system protects Mum's comfort, and that comfort protects the family's ability to keep the dog.

This protects the dog too

None of this is anti-puppy — it actively helps the puppy. A puppy allowed to rush, jump, chase, block, and startle people is rehearsing the exact habits that will shrink his freedom later. A puppy who learns controlled movement, calm distance, his places, the gates, and predictable routines becomes genuinely easier to live with, which means more trust later, more access later, more calm family time later, and a far better chance of becoming the dog everyone gets to keep. Protecting Mum and raising a good dog are not in tension. They are the same project.

What the children must never do

Children often pressure Mum without meaning any harm. They want that person to love the puppy quickly, to take a photo, to touch him, to see how sweet he is, and so they say things like “look, he loves you,” “just touch him,” “he won’t hurt you,” “please.” This is not allowed, gently but firmly. Children do not manage Mum’s comfort, do not bring the puppy to them, do not laugh when they move away, do not ask them to hold or feed the puppy, do not let him block their path, do not surprise them with him, do not say “He just wants to play,” do not ignore a stop word, and do not open a gate to prove “he’s fine.”

Their job is the exact opposite, and it is the operator’s job again: they protect that person’s space. They end play when that person enters, move toys off their path, call an adult if the puppy gets too close, and respect the off-limits rooms without exception. If the children want the dog to stay in the family, the most important thing they can do is help Mum feel safe. When that person appears, the rule is simple — play ends, voices drop, the puppy is controlled, and a clear path opens.

The puppy must learn different rules around Mum. Around Mum, there is no jumping, no blocking Mum’s path, no chasing, no barking for attention, no rushing, no entering puppy-free spaces, no mouthing clothes, and no wild play nearby. If any of these happen, SAFE starts immediately. The goal is not for Mum to put up with chaos. The goal is for the puppy to learn calm around Mum.

CLOSING

How far the response climbs

When Mum needs space, the response climbs only as far as it needs to: first the puppy simply moves away; then he goes to his calm place; then to his resting place; then his freedom drops for the rest of the day; and if it keeps happening, an adult resets the system before continuing. What never happens is negotiating comfort after the puppy is already loose. The protection comes first. And if Mum's comfort keeps dropping, do not argue: comfort dropping is not a personality issue, it is a system warning, and the answer is to reset.

Coming closer, if they ever want to

Some families quietly hope Mum will warm up over time. It can happen — but it is never forced, because comfort grows through predictability, not pressure. If that person chooses to move closer to the dog, it stays small and entirely on their terms. They might first watch from a distance, then stand behind a gate, then share a room while the puppy is on a leash with an adult, then walk past while he holds his calm place, then perhaps drop a treat from across the room, then maybe offer a calm word — and maybe, much later, a touch. Maybe. Not because the children demand it, not because an adult wants proof, but only because that person chooses it. A calm person who trusts the system from across the room is a complete success. Forced bonding is not. Mum controls the pace. Dad controls the dog. The children control their excitement.

If this happens, do this

Situation	What to Do
Mum enters room	Kids calm down, puppy controlled
Puppy rushes Mum	SAFE immediately
Puppy blocks Mum's path	Dad removes puppy
Puppy jumps on Mum	BOX / leash / barrier
Kids push Mum to interact	Stop kids; Mum chooses pace
Mum says BOX NOW	Everyone stops and secures the puppy immediately
Mum says smell is too much	Improve cleaning and grooming
Puppy enters puppy-free room	Remove calmly, close access
Visitors excite puppy near Mum	Puppy leaves
Mum avoids rooms	Increase puppy-free access
Mum says puppy is too wild	Reduce freedom
Mum worries about kids' control	Pause kids' privileges
Mum is surprised by the puppy	Improve gates and barriers
Mum says "this is not working"	Dad reviews the whole system
Mum's comfort drops for several days	Reset 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.

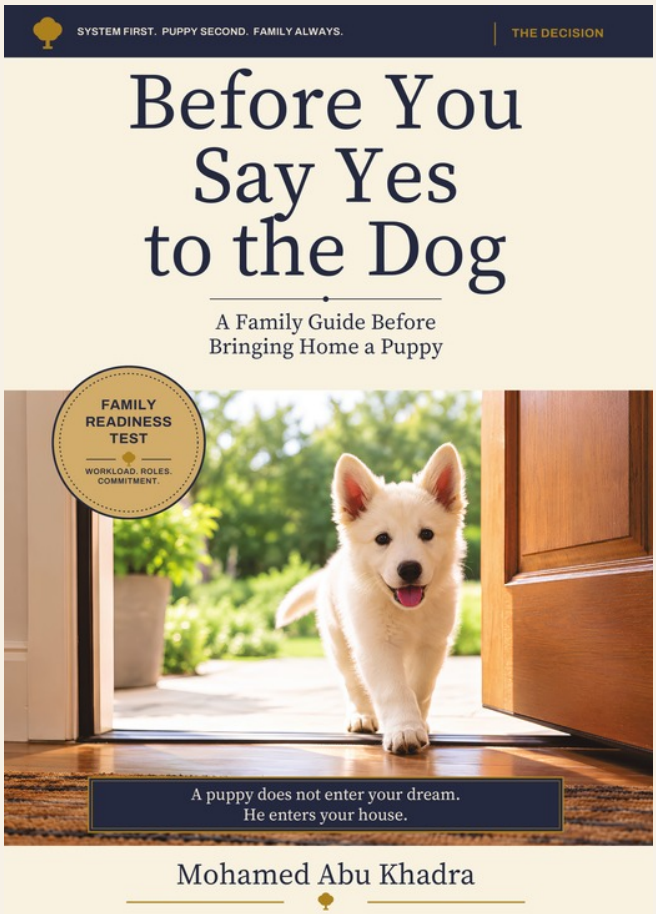
He stayed. His name is Oden.

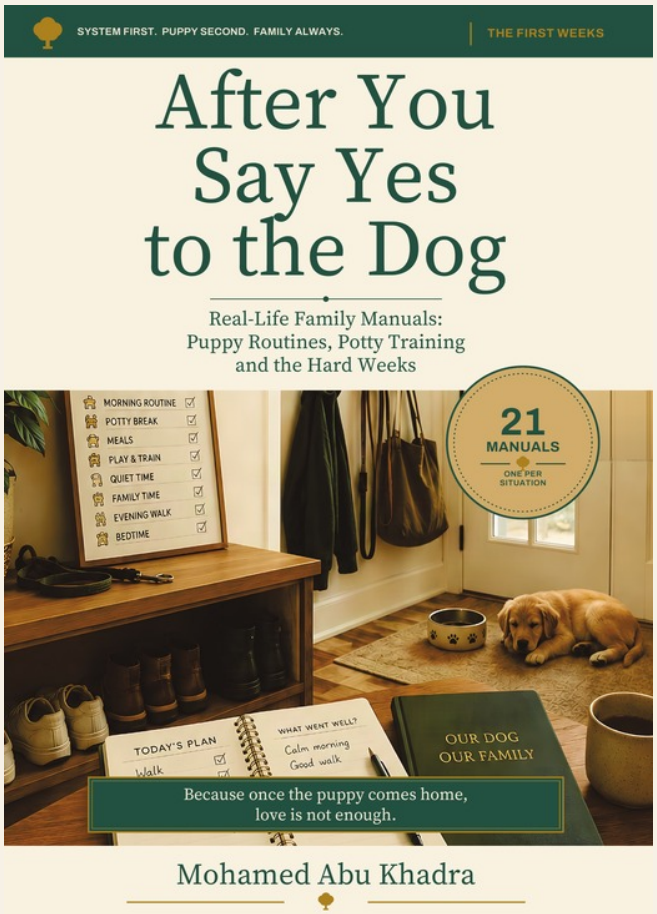
These pages are part of that system. I am doing the thing I wished someone had done for me.

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

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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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