

Before You Say Yes to the Dog



After You Say Yes to the Dog

FOR SHELTERS AND RESCUES · FREE TO SHARE

Pass it to a shelter, a rescue, or a family in a hard week.

The Reset



A calm way back when the week falls apart

A complete chapter from Before You Say Yes to the Dog,
shared for shelters, rescues, and the families they help.



Free to print, share, and hand to a family who needs it.

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WHY THIS EXISTS

Most dogs are not surrendered because they are bad dogs

They are surrendered after a bad week — the accidents come back, the biting sharpens, the routine collapses, and a tired family quietly decides they have failed. Usually, they have not. They need a reset, not a rehoming.

Shelters and rescues: print this, share it, hand it to any family on the edge. It is free to pass on.

Families: if you are in the worst week, read this before you decide anything. A bad week is not a verdict.

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

from the introduction to Before You Say Yes to the Dog

This is not a promise that every dog and every family can be made to work. It is not a substitute for veterinary or professional behavioural support when those are needed. It is a way to tell a bad period apart from a wrong match, so that whatever you decide, you decide it from a stable picture rather than from the worst week you have had.

“Freedom is given on proof, never on hope.”

the rule this book uses from the very start

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Is this a bad period, or a wrong match?

Six questions. They will not decide for you, but they will tell you which of the two problems you are actually looking at.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| ☐ | Has the household structure slipped — illness, travel, a hard stretch at work or school? |
| ☐ | Has freedom increased faster than reliability? |
| ☐ | Is the dog rehearsing the same problem behaviour every day? |
| ☐ | Is everyone in the house exhausted? |

☐
☐

Is the dog actually unsafe, rather than difficult?

Was the workload never carryable, even before the bad week?

When I ran this test on my own family, the answer came back not yet. My daughter wanted a dog so badly that she cried real tears for one. But when she saw what saying yes actually meant — the daily workload, the first-week pressure, the jobs she and her siblings would have to carry, her mother's comfort boundaries, the cleaning, the broken sleep — she paused. We did not say no to the dog. We did not say yes either. We postponed the decision by one year. And when the year had passed and we were ready, the puppy did not arrive first. The system arrived first. Choosing to wait is the single decision that made everything afterward succeed.

Ticks on the first four point to a system that has come loose, and a reset is exactly what that needs. Ticks on the last two point at fit rather than structure, and no amount of technique replaces a readiness that was never there. Reset rebuilds a system. It does not manufacture a fit that was never there.

Please read. This is a family-readiness and educational resource. It is not a substitute for professional veterinary, medical, behavioural, training, or legal advice, and it does not establish any professional relationship. Always consult a qualified veterinarian or certified professional for your dog's specific needs, and never leave young children unsupervised with a dog. Living with a dog carries inherent risks; neither the author nor the publisher assumes responsibility for any loss, injury, or damage arising from the use or misuse of the information here. Results vary from family to family and dog to dog.

The Reset

More Effort Is Not the Solution.

There will be a week when it all comes undone. The accidents come back after you thought that was behind you. The biting turns sharp again. The puppy stops listening to words he clearly knows. Someone is ill, or you travelled, or work swallowed you whole, or the children had exams, and the routine you were holding together simply slipped — and once it slipped, everything slipped with it. By the end of that week the house feels like it did at the very beginning, and a quiet, heavy thought arrives: maybe this isn't working.

If you are in that week right now, read this slowly, because the first thing you need to hear is not a technique. It is this: nothing has gone wrong that means you have failed. No family runs this perfectly. No system survives real life untouched. The hard week is not the exception that proves you were not cut out for this — it is the completely normal thing that happens to everyone, and it is exactly what this chapter is for. There is a way back, and it has a name. It is called the reset.

Reset Is Not Magic

I also will not sell you a miracle, because that would be its own kind of lie.

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 asked for at the start of this book: if the answer was really "not now, no amount of technique replaces the readiness that was missing. Reset rebuilds a system. It does not manufacture a fit that was never there.

So I am not promising that the reset saves every dog in every home. I am telling you the truth so that whatever you decide, you decide it clearly.

But If It Is Worth a Try, Here Is Why This Is Different

Now, if you look at your situation honestly and think it is worth a try — if the fit is real and it is the system that broke, not the decision — then there is something you need to understand before you start, because it is the whole reason a reset works when "trying harder does not.

You have probably been trying harder. Most families in the hard week are not being lazy; they are grinding. More correction, more walks to burn him out, more repeating the same words louder, more pushing through. And it is not working, because doing the same thing the same way and expecting a different result was never realistic. The puppy is not failing to respond to your effort. He is responding, perfectly, to a setup that is teaching him the wrong things — too much freedom, too little rest, a routine that has gone loose, triggers he rehearses every day.

The reset is not more effort at the broken approach. It is the opposite. It is making the puppy♦s world small again, restoring the structure that worked, and handing freedom back slowly and differently this time. You are not turning up the volume on what failed. You are changing what failed. That distinction is everything.

What a Reset Actually Is

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 the least-ready person'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 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.

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

A reset has a shape in time, and knowing the shape keeps you from panicking on day one or drifting back into loose habits by day three.

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 stabilise 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 Freedom Ladder: Drop Back, Then Re-Earn One Rung at a Time

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.

Reset the Thing That Actually 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.

The Bad-Day Minimum

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 often enough to avoid accidents;
- ◆ a little safe movement, even just leashed pottering;
- ◆ any accidents cleaned calmly, with no blame;
- ◆ protected, genuine rest;
- ◆ one small, calm activity — a chew, a scatter of kibble, two minutes of quiet attention;
- ◆ the SAFE check honoured: the least-ready person still has their space, and there is no forced contact;
- ◆ and the lead adult told, simply, that 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 respected at the start: 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.

If the Puppy Is Already Home and It Is Already Chaos

Perhaps you did not read this book before you brought the puppy home. Perhaps the dog is already here, the house is already struggling, and you have been reading these chapters thinking it is too late for you, that this was all meant for someone who planned ahead.

It is not too late. The earlier chapters were written for a family that has not yet got the dog, but the system inside them does not expire the moment a puppy walks through the door. You can build it now, around the dog you already have. I will not pretend it is as easy as building the system first, before the chaos — it is not, and you may have a few habits to undo that an early-prepared family never had to. But that is okay. The reset is precisely how you do it: treat this week as your starting line, shrink the puppy's world back to the beginning, put the structure in place that was never there, and hand freedom back as he earns it. Thousands of families build the system late, after the chaos, instead of before it. Starting from the beginning is not starting from failure. It is just starting, from wherever you actually are.

And here is the most useful thing I can tell you if the dog is already in the house: do not try to carry the reset from memory. I strongly recommend the companion book, *After You Say Yes to the Dog*. This chapter teaches you what a reset is and why it works; that book walks you through actually doing it — the manuals, the step-by-step routines for each problem, and the printable trackers that turn this method into clear, day-by-day actions. You can run a reset with this chapter alone. But if you are in the chaos right now and you want it done properly, with the best chance of it holding, Book 2 was built to carry you through it.

Needing a Reset Is Normal

I want to end where I began, because it is the thing most worth holding onto. You will use this — and needing a reset is not a sign that you have broken anything. It is a sign that the system is working the way it was designed to. Real life will ruin a week — an illness, a trip, a hard stretch at work, a season when everything is too much at once — and when it does, the routine will slip. That is not your failure. It is what happens, to everyone, and the families who keep their dogs are not the ones who never slip. They are the ones who reset when they do.

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.

Chapter Rule

“Reset is not failure. It is how the system survives real life.”

What To Do Now

If this is your hard week, decide honestly whether the fit is real. If it is, reset: shrink the puppy♦s world back to the beginning, restore the routine that drifted, cut the triggers, protect rest, return the children to the calm version of their role, and protect the least-ready person♦s space — then hand freedom back slowly, on proof. If the puppy is already home and the house is in chaos, do exactly the same thing, starting from today. Do not keep doing the same thing the same way and expecting it to change.

After the puppy is home, the companion book, *After You Say Yes to the Dog*, turns this reset into step-by-step manuals, problem-by-problem routines, and printable trackers — so a family already living the chaos can run a proper reset and get far better results than working from memory alone. If the dog is already home, getting Book 2 is strongly recommended.

WHAT A RESET IS FOR

It does not make surrender impossible

The purpose of a reset is not to make letting a dog go unthinkable. It is to make sure that if you reach that decision, you reach it from a stable picture of your household rather than from the worst week you have had.

Letting a dog go to a home that fits him better is not shame. The author has made that choice himself, three times, and knows its weight. What the reset buys you is the certainty that you decided with the structure back in place, not while it was on the floor.

Share this with a family who needs it

Shelters and rescues are welcome to print this, email it, or hand it to any family who is struggling. No permission needed, no attribution required, no cost. It was written to be given away before a hard week becomes a permanent decision.

IF YOU WANT THE FULL SYSTEM

The two books

Before You Say Yes to the Dog

The decision before the decision.

The real workload before it lands on one person. Who actually does what, including the kids. A real say for whoever feels least ready. The reset, for families who already said yes. It ends at the Family Readiness Test, which gives one of three answers — now, later, or never. Each one, given honestly, is a good answer.

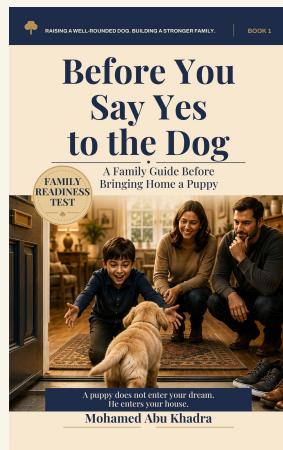
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One manual per pressure moment: the first 48 hours, potty, socialization, night barking, visitors, outdoor freedom, grooming, emergencies, and the reset. Printable routines and trackers you use on the day, not read about.

Shelters and rescues who would like copies, or a version to share with families, are warmly welcome to get in touch.

More at mohamedabukhadra.com



Before You Say Yes to the Dog

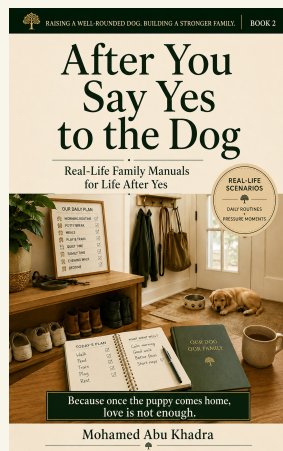
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Please pass this on.

If you know a rescue or a shelter, send it to them. If you know a family having a hard time with their puppy right now, send it to them too.

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A bad week is not a verdict — but most families never hear that from anyone.

Both books, one page.

Paperback, hardcover and Kindle, wherever you buy books.
Formats, samples and the current links are all on one page.

mohamedabukhadra.com/reset

Read to know. Use to do.