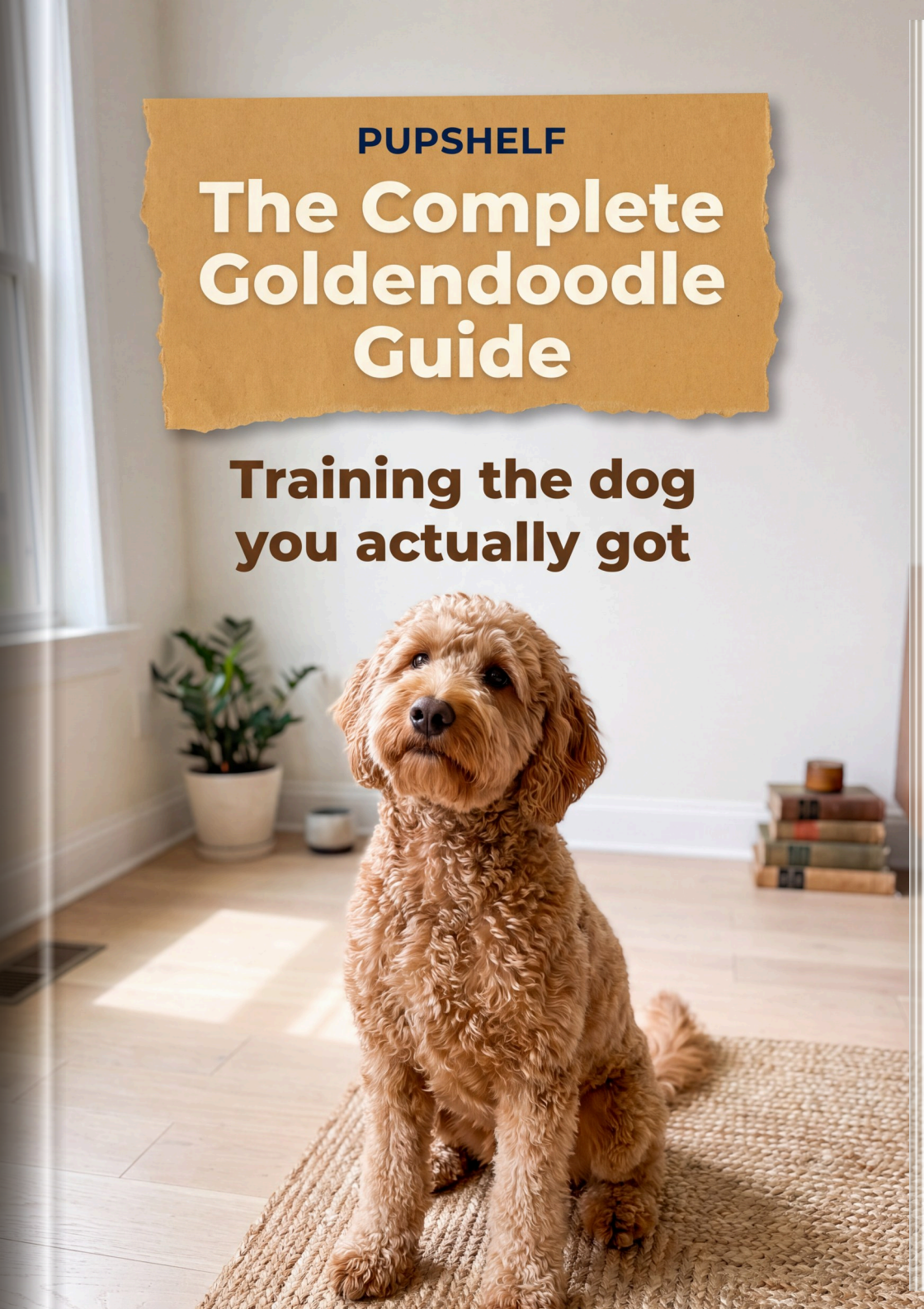
PUPSHELF

The Complete Goldendoodle Guide

Training the dog you actually got



Topics Included

1. Your Goldendoodle Is Not a Golden Retriever
2. The First Fourteen Days
3. The Marker Word and the Rule of One Command
4. The Teenage Phase
5. Finding the Off Switch
6. Home Alone
7. The Coat
8. Loose Leash
9. Recall
10. Jumping and Guests
11. Mouthing, Biting and Destruction
12. Brain Games for a Poodle Brain
13. Health and the Doodle Body
14. Potty Training Mastery

Your Goldendoodle Is Not a Golden Retriever



The sentence that changes everything

Somewhere in the first month, almost every Goldendoodle owner says a version of the same sentence:

Your Goldendoodle Is Not a Golden Retriever

> **"I did everything I was supposed to do. It worked on my last dog. Why isn't it working on this one?"**

You are not doing it wrong. You are doing it **for the wrong dog**.

Nearly every piece of dog training advice you will find – the books, the YouTube channels, the six-week group class at the pet store – was built around a specific type of dog. A dog that was bred for one job, by one breed standard, for a hundred years. A dog that is genetically predictable.

Your Goldendoodle is not that dog. And this chapter is about exactly why that matters, because everything else in this guide depends on you understanding it.





What a "breed" actually means

When we say Golden Retriever, we are describing a genetic contract that has been enforced for roughly 150 years.

A Golden Retriever was built to do one thing: find a bird that has fallen into cold water, pick it up without crushing it, and bring it back to a person. Every trait was selected for that job.

- **Soft mouth** – because a crushed bird is a ruined bird
- **Water tolerance** – dense double coat, love of swimming
- **Handler focus** – the dog must look back at the person constantly
- **Recovery from correction** – a dog that sulks after a harsh word is useless in the field

That last one is the important one, and almost nobody talks about it. Golden Retrievers are famously "easy to train" not because they are smarter than other dogs. They are easy to train because **they are built to care what you think.** The dog was selected, generation after generation, to check in with a human. That's not obedience. That's genetics doing the work for you.

A Poodle is a different contract. Poodles were also water retrievers originally – but the Standard Poodle was refined for something else along the way: **independent problem-solving**. A Poodle is famous for being one of the most intelligent dog breeds, and people hear "intelligent" and think "easy."

It is not the same thing.

> **A highly intelligent dog does not wait for instructions. It generates its own. It watches, tests, forms a theory, and acts on it. This is a magnificent trait in a working dog and a genuinely difficult one in a family pet, because a Poodle that has decided the correct answer is "jump on the counter when nobody is looking" did not arrive at that by accident. It ran an experiment, got a result, and filed it away.**





What happens when you cross them

Here is the part almost no breeder explains at pickup.

Your Goldendoodle Is Not a Golden Retriever

When you cross two established breeds, you do not get a blend. You do not get "50% Golden temperament plus 50% Poodle temperament, evenly mixed." Genetics is not paint.

You get a **lottery**.

An F1 Goldendoodle — one purebred Golden parent, one purebred Poodle parent — can land anywhere on the spectrum. In a single litter of eight puppies, you can have:

- Two puppies that are essentially Goldens in a curly coat: soft, biddable, desperate to please
- Two that are essentially Poodles: brilliant, busy, opinionated, testing every boundary by week ten
- Four somewhere in between, in unpredictable combinations

And here is the cruel part: **at eight weeks old, you cannot tell which one you have.** All eight puppies look the same. All eight act the same. The traits that will define your next fifteen years do not switch on until somewhere between twelve weeks and six months.

This is why two people can buy littermates from the same breeder, raise them with identical methods in identical homes, and end up with completely different dogs. One posts photos captioned "best dog I've ever had." The other is on a waiting list for a behaviorist.

Neither of them did anything differently.



The two failure modes

Because you don't know which dog you have, generic advice fails you in one of two directions.

Failure mode one: you got a Poodle-leaning dog and you're using Golden methods.

Golden Retriever training leans heavily on relationship and repetition. Ask, reward, repeat, and the dog's natural handler-focus fills in the gaps.

Run that on a Poodle-leaning Doodle and by week six the dog has worked out that "sit" is optional. Not because it doesn't understand — it understood on day two. It has simply tested the boundary, discovered there is nothing on the other side of it, and updated its model of the world. You are now in a negotiation you didn't know you had entered, with an opponent who is better at it than you are.

Failure mode two: you got a Golden-leaning dog and you're using Poodle methods.

Advice for smart, pushy dogs is structural: firm boundaries, clear consequences, don't let them run the house. Sound advice — for that dog.

Run it on a soft, handler-focused Doodle and you get a dog that shuts down. Flat ears, avoided eye contact, hesitation before every command. Owners read this as stubbornness and escalate. The dog gets softer. The owner gets firmer. Both are trying, and the relationship is quietly coming apart.

So how do you know which one you have?

You watch. There is a test, and you can run it this week.

The Doorway Test. Stand at a doorway your dog wants to go through. Say nothing. Don't cue, don't block, don't make eye contact. Just stand there and wait.

- A **Golden-leaning** dog will stop and look at your face. It is asking. This dog's default is *check with the human*.
- A **Poodle-leaning** dog will look at the gap, then at you, then back at the gap — and start calculating whether it fits. It is not asking permission. It is doing math.

Run this five or six times over a week, in different doorways, different moods. The pattern shows up fast, and it is remarkably stable. It tells you which half of this book to lean on.

Throughout this guide, wherever the approach genuinely differs, you will see two paths marked:

> → **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) → **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning)

Most dogs are not pure. You will find yourself using both. That is normal and correct.

One more inheritance nobody warns you about

There is a third thing your Doodle inherited, and it has nothing to do with temperament.

The Poodle coat does not shed. That is the reason breeders started reaching for Poodle crosses at all. The story people usually tell here belongs to a different dog: it was the **Labradoodle** that an Australian guide-dog breeding manager put together in the late 1980s, trying to place a working dog with a family where one person reacted to dogs. Goldendoodles followed the same logic later. Nobody can point to a first litter or a founding purpose for them the way they can for the Labradoodle, and this book is not going to invent one.

That does not make the breed hypoallergenic, and it is worth being honest about that now rather than letting you find out the hard way. Allergy research is consistent on this point: the proteins that trigger a reaction live in saliva and dander as much as in loose hair, and every dog produces both regardless of coat type. What a low-shedding coat actually buys you is less allergen circulating through your house — a real, meaningful reduction, not a guarantee. If allergies are a serious concern in your household, spend real time with the actual puppy, more than once, before you commit.

But a coat that doesn't shed is a coat that never releases dead hair. It keeps it. Every strand your dog sheds internally stays woven into the coat, and it will felt into a solid mat unless a human physically removes it.

Your Golden Retriever-owning neighbor vacuums. You have a maintenance obligation, and it starts before you think it does. This is why so many Doodles get shaved down to the skin at their first groom — not because the groomer was lazy, but because by then the coat had become one continuous mat and there was no other humane option.

Chapter 7 covers this properly, and I want to flag it here for one reason: **the coat clock starts at week ten, not at the first haircut.** Most owners find that out too late.

What to take from this chapter

1. Your dog is a genetic lottery ticket, not a blend. That is not a defect — it is what a first-generation cross is.
2. Generic dog training advice assumes a predictable dog. Yours isn't one. That's why it keeps almost working.
3. Run the Doorway Test this week. It costs nothing and it determines which path you follow through the rest of this guide.
4. The coat is a separate, non-negotiable obligation that starts earlier than you think.
5. Nothing in the chapters that follow requires you to be firmer, louder, or more dominant. It requires you to be **specific**.

Your Goldendoodle Is Not a Golden Retriever

Chapter 2 starts on day one, hour one — because the first fourteen days set patterns that take months to undo, and almost all of the common mistakes happen in the first seventy-two hours.

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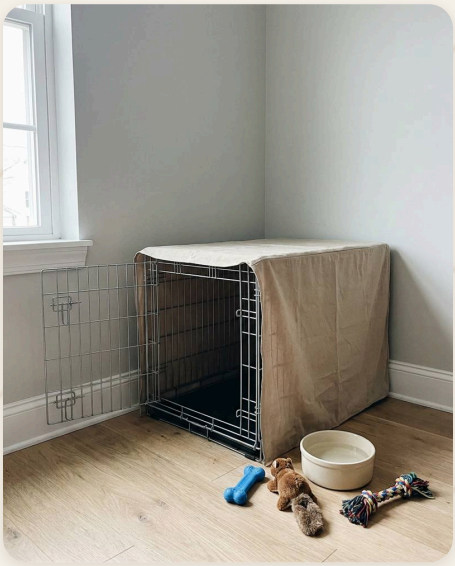
You are training a dog you cannot identify yet

Chapter 1 left you with an uncomfortable fact: you do not yet know which dog you brought home. The Doorway Test needs a week or two of observation before the pattern is stable, and the traits that will define your dog are still switching on.

That creates a real problem for the first two weeks. Every piece of new-puppy advice you will read assumes the writer knows your dog. They don't. Neither do you, yet.

So the first fourteen days have a different job than the rest of this book. You are not shaping temperament yet. You are doing something narrower and more important: **installing the handful of patterns that are correct for both dogs.**

There are six of them. Everything else can wait until you know what you're working with.





The seventy-two hour mistake

The First Fourteen Days

Almost every Doodle owner makes the same error in the first three days, and it comes from love.

The puppy arrives. The house is excited. Someone holds it, then someone else holds it. The neighbors come over. There are photos. The kids take turns. By the evening of day two the dog has met eleven people, been passed between six sets of arms, and has not had a single hour of genuine quiet.

Then on day three it starts biting hard, ignoring its name, and screaming when left alone, and everyone concludes they got "a difficult one."

They did not. They got a normal eight-week-old animal that has been removed from its litter, driven in a car, and placed in a loud unfamiliar building — and then given no time to process any of it.

Dogs do not decompress by being comforted. They decompress by being **bored in a safe place.**

For the first seventy-two hours, the correct amount of activity is far less than feels right. No visitors. No trips. No introducing the dog to your friend's dog. A small number of quiet interactions with the people who actually live there, and long stretches of nothing.

This costs you nothing and buys you a dog whose nervous system is not already running at redline when the real training starts on day four.





Pattern one: one room, not one house

Do not give a new dog the run of your home. Not because it will make a mess — because a space it cannot map is a space it cannot relax in.

> **Pick one room. Ideally the one where the humans actually spend their evenings, because the goal is a dog that learns to switch off near you, not one that learns to be alone in a laundry room and panics everywhere else.**

Set it up before the dog arrives:

- A crate or covered bed in a corner, away from the main walkway
- Water
- Two or three toys of genuinely different textures — something rubber, something soft, something you can freeze
- Nothing else worth investigating

The dog earns more house over the following weeks, one room at a time. Each new room is a small event, not a free-for-all.



Pattern two: the name is not a command

Your dog's name has exactly one job in the first two weeks: **it predicts that something good is about to happen.** That's it. It does not mean come, stop, or no.

Say the name once. When the head turns, something good happens — a piece of food, a scratch, a toy. Then stop. Ten to fifteen of these a day, scattered, never in a row.

The way people ruin a name is by using it as a summons before it means anything, then repeating it louder when the dog doesn't respond. Within two weeks the name has become background noise the dog has learned to filter out. It is genuinely hard to fix later, and completely free to get right now.

> **Pick a separate marker word — "Yes" — for the moment your dog does something correct. Chapter 3 builds on it heavily. For now, all you need is the name meaning good things, reliably, without exception.**

Pattern three: alone time starts on day one

This is the one that matters most for your breed, and it is the one almost everyone gets wrong.

Doodles are over-represented in separation anxiety cases, and the reason is structural rather than genetic bad luck. Both parent breeds were bred to work in close partnership with a human — a retriever at heel, a poodle in the water beside the boat. Neither was bred to be content alone. Then the cross became popular during a decade when more people worked from home than at any point in modern history, and a generation of Doodle puppies grew up never once experiencing a closed door.

You cannot wait until the dog is settled to start. By then, being alone will be a novel and frightening event.

Start on day one, at a scale so small it feels pointless:

1. Dog is calm, ideally slightly sleepy, in its room.
2. You walk out. Close the door.
3. Count to three.
4. Walk back in. Say nothing. No greeting, no fuss, no "did you miss me."
5. Repeat later. Sometimes five seconds, sometimes twenty, sometimes back in before the dog has noticed.

The variability is the active ingredient. A dog that learns "the door closing sometimes means three seconds" does not build the dread that a dog on a predictable escalating schedule does.

Two rules, both absolute:

- **Never go back in while the dog is screaming.** Wait for two seconds of quiet. Going in on the noise teaches, cleanly and permanently, that noise opens doors.
- **Never make arrivals and departures emotional.** Leaving should be as unremarkable as walking to the kitchen.

Chapter 6 handles this in full, including what to do if you are already past this point and the dog is panicking. If that's you, skip ahead now – the first fourteen days matter less than stopping a spiral that is already running.

Pattern four: the coat clock is already running

Chapter 1 flagged this and Chapter 7 covers it properly, but one piece belongs here because it expires.

Your dog's first professional groom will happen somewhere around sixteen weeks. What determines whether that appointment is a pleasant twenty minutes or a traumatic event the dog remembers for years is not the groomer. It is what you did in the two weeks after pickup.

Starting now, every day, thirty seconds:

- Hold one paw. Let go before the dog pulls away.
- Touch one ear, lift it, look inside, let go.
- Run a soft brush once down the back. Once.
- Open the mouth briefly.

Then stop, while the dog is still relaxed. The discipline is in stopping early, and it's harder than it sounds — everything in you wants to do a bit more while it's going well.

You are not grooming. You are teaching the dog that human hands arriving at its feet, ears and face are boring. The window for that being easy is open now and starts closing around sixteen weeks.

Pattern five: sleep is a training tool

An eight-to-twelve week old puppy needs somewhere between eighteen and twenty hours of sleep a day. Most Doodle owners are, without knowing it, running a chronically sleep-deprived animal.

The confusion is that overtired puppies do not slow down. They speed up. Hard biting, frantic zoomies, ignoring everything, grabbing pant legs — the classic picture of "my puppy is out of control at 7pm" is almost always a puppy that has been awake since two.

The fix is not more exercise. It is enforced downtime: after roughly an hour awake, the dog goes to its crate or covered bed whether or not it seems tired. Most fight it for a few minutes and then drop.

Track it for three days if you don't believe it. Owners are consistently shocked at how little their dog actually slept.

Pattern six: the potty routine nobody keeps

House training fails for one reason: people take the dog out when they remember, not on a schedule.

Out on waking, after every meal, after every play session, and otherwise every forty-five minutes in daylight hours. Same door, same patch of ground, no interaction until the job is done, then the marker word and something good. Then a few minutes of play outside — because a dog that gets taken straight back in learns that emptying itself ends the fun and will start holding on to stay out longer.

Accidents inside are cleaned with an enzymatic cleaner and nothing else. Household cleaners leave ammonia traces that read, to a dog's nose, as a marked bathroom spot.

No punishment, ever, including the tone of voice. A dog scolded for going indoors does not learn to go outdoors. It learns to go where you cannot see, which converts a two-week problem into a six-month one.

A word on socialization timing, because too many owners get this backwards

There is a specific piece of advice still in wide circulation that has aged badly: wait until your puppy has finished its full vaccination series — typically around sixteen weeks — before letting it meet anyone or anything new.

The professional body for veterinary behaviorists in the US, the AVSAB, has a formal, still-current position that says the opposite. Puppies should start controlled socialization at seven to eight weeks old, after the first round of vaccines and once a vet has confirmed they're healthy — not after the full series finishes. Their reasoning: the window for building a confident, non-fearful adult runs from roughly three to sixteen weeks and closes fast, and more young dogs are lost to behavioral problems that trace back to a missed window than to the infectious diseases the remaining vaccines protect against.

This does not mean the dog park at nine weeks. Controlled means chosen: a healthy, vaccinated friend's dog, being carried past new sights and sounds rather than set down on ground you don't know the history of, visitors who ask before reaching for the puppy. Ask your own vet what they consider safe in your specific area, since disease risk varies by location — but treat "just wait for the last shot" as the outdated default it is, not the cautious one it sounds like.

The two paths, early

By roughly day ten you will start to see it.

> → **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) Your risk in this two weeks is over-handling. This dog will tolerate a great deal of fussing and will look content while its stress accumulates. Protect its quiet time even when it seems happy to be picked up again. Be careful with your tone — a sharp "no" lands about four times harder on this dog than you intend.
>
> → **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) Your risk is boredom, and it arrives early. This dog will have finished mapping one room by day four and will begin generating its own projects — the baseboard, the rug fringe, the cabinet that opens. Rotate the toys, freeze things, hide food. And be consistent about small rules from day one, because this dog is already running experiments and recording the results.

Most owners will read both of these and recognize their dog in each. That is expected. You are not sorting the dog into a box — you are learning which failure you are closer to.

What to take from this chapter

1. The first seventy-two hours are for decompression, not bonding. Doing less is doing the work.
2. Install six patterns: one room, a name that predicts good things, alone-time from day one, daily handling for the coat, enforced sleep, and a clock-based potty routine.
3. Alone-time and coat handling are the two with expiry dates. Everything else can be fixed later; these get materially harder after about sixteen weeks.
4. Almost everything people call a difficult puppy at this stage is an overtired one.
5. You still do not know which dog you have. That is fine. All six patterns are correct for both.
6. Socialization does not wait for the vaccine series to finish. Begin controlled exposure at seven to eight weeks, after the first shots — the AVSAB's position, not a shortcut.

Chapter 3 is where the actual training starts — the marker word, the rule of one command, and why "sit" is the least useful thing you can teach a Doodle first.

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Why “sit” is the least useful thing you can teach first

> **Ask any new owner what their puppy can do and you get the same answer. He can sit.**

The Marker Word and the Rule of One Command

Sit is the first thing everyone teaches because it is the easiest thing to get. Hold food above a dog's nose, move it backwards, and the hindquarters drop on their own. No training happened. Gravity did it.

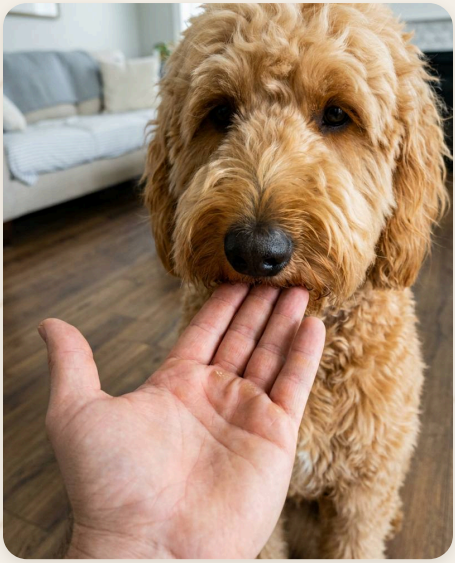
The problem is not that sit is bad. It is that sit is a **position**, and positions are almost never what you actually need. Think about the moments this week when you genuinely needed your dog to do something: the door was open and a delivery driver was on the doorstep; the leash was tangled and you needed the dog to hold still; something disgusting was on the sidewalk and you had two seconds.

None of those were solved by sit.

What solves them is a much smaller set of skills that almost nobody teaches first:

- The dog **looks at your face** when you say its name
- The dog **knows the exact instant** it did the right thing
- The dog **stays in whatever it is doing** until you say a word that means *finished*
- The dog will **follow your hand** anywhere

Those four are the foundation. This chapter builds two of them, and they are the two that make everything in the next ten chapters possible.





What a marker actually does

Here is a problem you cannot solve with food alone.

Your dog does something right. You reach into your pocket, find a treat, pull it out, and hand it over. Two seconds have passed. In those two seconds your dog has also lifted its head, shifted a paw, sniffed, and glanced at the door.

You meant to pay for the first thing. From the dog's point of view, you paid for the last thing.

This is why so many owners feel like their dog "sort of" understands. The dog is receiving payment on a two-second delay, and it is doing its best to work out what the payment was for.

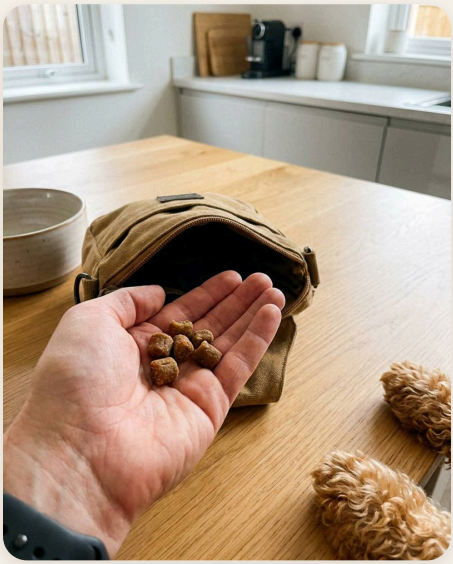
A **marker word** closes that gap. It is a sound that means one specific thing:

> **That. That exact thing you were doing at the instant you heard this sound. Payment is coming.**

It works because it is instant and can be delivered from across a room, mid-movement, before the dog has time to do anything else. The food still arrives — but the marker is what identifies the moment.

Pick a short word you do not use in conversation. **"Yes"** is standard and works. Avoid "good" — you say it fifty times a day about the weather, the coffee, and the game, and it has no meaning left.





Charging it

For the first week, the marker means nothing. You have to install it.

1. Sit down with fifteen small pieces of food.
2. Say **"Yes"** in a flat, ordinary voice.
3. One second later, hand over a piece.
4. Repeat. Do nothing else. The dog does not have to earn it.

Fifteen repetitions, twice a day, for three days. You are not training a behavior – you are building a reflex, so that the word itself makes the dog's head snap round in expectation.

You will know it has taken when you say "Yes" while the dog is looking away and it spins to face you.

Three rules from that point on, and all three are absolute:

- **The marker is always followed by food.** Every single time, for months. A marker you sometimes do not pay is a marker that stops working.
- **The marker ends the behavior.** When you say "Yes", the dog is free to move. That is the point. It is a full stop, not a comma.
- **Never use it to get the dog's attention.** It reports; it does not summon. That is the name's job.

The Rule of One Command

Watch any street, any park, any training class, and you will hear it.

> **"Sit. Sit. Sit. Sit down. SIT."**

> **The dog eventually sits, the owner is satisfied, and something quietly terrible has just been taught: the word "sit" does not mean sit. The phrase sit-sit-sit-sit-SIT means sit. The dog has learned to wait for the fifth one, because the first four never predicted anything.**

The rule is simple and almost impossible to keep: **say it once.**

If the dog responds, mark and pay. If the dog does not respond, do not repeat it. You have exactly two honest options:

1. **Help.** Move closer, make the food more visible, remove the distraction, make the task easier. Then set it up again and ask once.
2. **Walk away.** Nothing happens. No reward, no scolding. Try again in a quieter moment.

That second option feels like losing. It is not. A command that goes unanswered and produces nothing at all is far less damaging than a command that gets repeated five times and eventually works.

There is a version of this that matters even more for your dog, and it is worth saying plainly.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog is not ignoring you. It is testing whether the word has consequences. It heard you the first time. When you repeat a cue four times, you are not being clearer – you are handing over data, and the data says the word is optional. Ask once, every time, and this dog will conclude within a two weeks that words mean things. It is the single fastest change you can make with a Poodle-leaning Doodle.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) Your risk is different. This dog wants to comply and will often freeze when confused, which looks exactly like refusal. Repeating the cue louder reads to this dog as displeasure, and a worried dog gets slower, not faster. If it doesn't respond, assume confusion rather than defiance, make the task easier, and drop your volume rather than raising it.

The word nobody teaches: the release

Here is a gap in almost every home training plan.

You ask for a sit. The dog sits. You say "Yes" and hand over food. The dog gets up.

When did the sit end? Neither of you knows. So over the following weeks the sits get shorter, because the dog is guessing — and its guesses get earlier and earlier, since nothing has ever told it otherwise. Owners describe this as the dog "getting worse at sit". The dog is not getting worse. It never learned where the behavior finished.

Pick a release word. **"Break"** or **"Free"** or **"Off you go"** — anything you would not say by accident.

Then use it every time:

```
ask once → dog does it → "Yes" (mark) → food → "Break"
(release)
```

The release is what turns a position into a **duration**. Once the dog understands that the sit continues until it hears a specific word, you can extend from two seconds to twenty without ever asking twice. And you have quietly built the thing the door and the vet's table and the tangled leash actually needed: a dog that holds still until told otherwise.

The hand target

One more, and it takes about four minutes to teach.

Hold your palm flat, a few inches (5–8 cm) from your dog's nose. The dog will investigate. The instant its nose touches your palm — **"Yes"**, food.

Repeat ten times, then move the hand: a little to the left, lower, higher, a step away. The dog follows the hand and touches it.

This looks like a party trick. It is the most useful thing in this book.

A hand target moves your dog without touching it, without pulling a leash, and without a formal cue. You will use it to get the dog off the sofa, out from under the table, past a dog it is staring at, onto the vet's scale, and into the car. For a Doodle in particular — a breed that grew up being physically hauled around by well-meaning owners — a way to move the dog that involves no hands on the body is worth a great deal.

It also gives an anxious dog a job to do at exactly the moment it needs one, which is Chapter 6's whole subject.

What to take from this chapter

1. Sit is not a foundation. The foundation is a marker, one command, a release, and a hand target.
2. Charge the marker for three days before you use it for anything. Then pay it, every time, without exception.
3. Say it once. If nothing happens, help or walk away — never repeat.
4. Teach a release word, or your duration behaviors will quietly shrink to nothing.
5. The hand target takes four minutes and you will use it every day for fifteen years.

Chapter 4 is where all of this appears to stop working — because somewhere between seven and fourteen months your dog will forget everything it knows, and almost every owner concludes at that point that they have failed.

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The month everyone decides they have failed

Somewhere between seven and fourteen months, your dog will appear to forget everything.

The Teenage Phase

The recall that was solid at five months stops working in the park. The dog that slept through the night starts pacing at 2am. Things that were never interesting — the trash can, the baseboard, the mail carrier — become fascinating. A dog that has walked past the same gate twice a day for six months will suddenly plant its feet and stare at it as though it has never existed.

> **Owners describe this in almost identical words. He knew this last month. He's doing it on purpose now.**

He is not. He is thirteen months old, and the animal you trained is being structurally rebuilt while you stand in it.

This chapter is short on exercises and long on what is actually happening, because the single most useful thing during adolescence is knowing that it is adolescence.





What is actually going on

Three things happen at once, and they compound.

The brain is being rewired. Adolescence in dogs, as in people, involves a large-scale reorganization — connections that are not being used get pruned, and the parts of the brain that handle impulse control are among the last to finish. The dog is not being defiant. Its braking system is temporarily behind its engine.

Hormones arrive. Everything smells different. Other dogs mean something they did not mean before. A dog that was neutral about the world at six months has a great deal of new information to process at eleven.

The world stops being new. At four months, you were the most interesting thing in the environment by default. At eleven months, the dog has mapped its territory and can afford to be curious about everything else. You are now competing.

Add these together and you get a dog that hears you perfectly well and finds you the third or fourth most interesting option available.





The second fear period

There is a specific thing that catches Doodle owners badly, and it is worth naming.

Somewhere in this window, most dogs go through a **fear period** — a stretch of a few weeks where things that were previously unremarkable become frightening. A trash bag. A man in a hat. The stairs. Often something the dog has encountered a hundred times without concern.

It looks like a behavioral collapse. It is a developmental stage, and it passes.

What determines whether it leaves a mark is what happens during it:

- **Do not flood.** Dragging a frightened dog towards the thing to "show it there's nothing to worry about" is the most common and most damaging response. It teaches the dog that being frightened does not stop the approach.
- **Do not fuss over it.** You are not going to reinforce the fear with a kind word — that myth has been thoroughly retired — but a stream of anxious reassurance from you is itself information, and what it tells the dog is that you are worried too.
- **Do let it retreat, then pay.** Increase distance until the dog can look at the thing without reacting. Mark that look. Feed. Move on. That is the whole protocol, and it works.

A fear period handled well leaves nothing behind. A fear period handled by dragging can leave a genuine, lasting fear of that specific thing.



Reduce criteria, do not increase pressure

The instinct when a trained behavior breaks down is to demand it harder. This is the wrong direction, and it is worth being concrete about the alternative.

Take recall. At six months it worked in the park. At eleven months it does not.

The wrong response is to keep calling in the park, louder, and to chase the dog down when it doesn't come. Every one of those repetitions teaches the dog that its name in the park means nothing.

The right response is to **go back to a level where it works**:

1. Recall on a long line for a two weeks. Not because the dog needs restraining, but because you can no longer afford an unanswered cue.
2. Pay it far better than you did at six months. Adolescence is competing with a much more interesting world, so the wages have to go up.
3. Practice in the boring places – the hallway, the yard, the empty parking lot – where you still win easily.
4. Return to the park only when it is genuinely reliable elsewhere.

This feels like going backwards. It is roughly six weeks of protecting your cues from being devalued, and the dogs whose owners do it come out of adolescence with their training intact.

The coat crisis nobody schedules

There is a Doodle-specific event in this window, and its timing is cruel.

Your dog's soft puppy coat is replaced by its adult coat somewhere between eight and fourteen months. During the changeover, both coats are present at once — dead puppy hair trapped inside the incoming adult curl — and the matting rate goes up sharply. Coats that needed brushing twice a week now need it daily, and the mats form close to the skin where you cannot see them.

So the exact months in which your dog is least tolerant of being handled are the months in which it needs the most handling.

This is why so many Doodles are shaved to the skin at around a year old. Not neglect — a coat change that arrived on top of an adolescent who had stopped standing still.

Chapter 7 covers the tools and the schedule. The thing to take from here is the timing: **when the teenage phase starts, increase grooming frequency rather than reducing it**, and keep the sessions very short. Thirty seconds of calm brushing is worth more than a ten-minute battle.

The two paths through adolescence

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog's adolescence tends to show up as distraction rather than defiance — a genuine inability to hear you over the environment. It will also be more prone to the fear period, and more likely to carry something away from it if you handle it badly. Keep sessions short and successful. Resist the urge to correct: this dog is already trying, and pressure at thirteen months buys you a dog that hesitates before every cue at three years.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog's adolescence shows up as systematic re-testing. Every boundary you set at four months is going to be checked again, properly, to see whether it still holds. This is not a betrayal — it is the same experimental brain that made it easy to teach things. Hold the rules exactly where they were, without escalating, and it will re-file them within weeks. Waver on one and it will be re-tested for months. Also: this dog needs a substantially bigger mental workload now than it did at six months, and if you do not supply one it will design its own.

What to take from this chapter

1. Between seven and fourteen months your dog will appear to lose its training. It has not. Its impulse control is temporarily behind the rest of it.
2. Expect a fear period. Handle it with distance and food, never by dragging the dog towards the thing.
3. When a behavior breaks, make it easier and pay it better. Never repeat a cue into a situation where it will not be answered.
4. Grooming frequency goes **up** during the coat change, not down — and sessions get shorter, not longer.
5. Nothing in this phase requires you to be harder on the dog. Almost all of the lasting damage done to Doodles is done by owners who got firm at thirteen months.

Chapter 5 is about the thing that makes all of this survivable — teaching a dog to switch off, which is a trained skill and not, as almost everybody assumes, something you achieve by tiring the dog out.

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The tired dog myth

> **There is a sentence that has done more damage to more Doodles than any other piece of advice: a tired dog is a good dog.**

It is not wrong, exactly. A dog that has had enough physical exercise is easier to live with than one that has had none. The problem is what owners do with it, which is to treat exercise as the answer to every behavioral question. Dog is restless — walk it more. Dog is chewing — walk it more. Dog is manic in the evenings — clearly not enough exercise, walk it more.

Run that logic for a year with a young, athletic, half-retriever half-poodle and you will not get a calm dog. You will get an **athlete**.

The dog that needed forty minutes at six months now needs ninety to reach the same state. Its cardiovascular fitness has adapted, as bodies do. Meanwhile nothing has taught it how to be still, so the moment the exercise stops, it is back to pacing within twenty minutes.

Owners in this position describe a dog that is "never satisfied." The dog is not insatiable. It has been trained, very effectively, to need more.





Calm is a skill, not a state

The shift that fixes this is small and it changes everything:

> **Being calm is a behavior your dog performs, not a condition it falls into.**

Which means it can be taught, marked, and paid — exactly like a sit.

Most owners have never once rewarded their dog for doing nothing. Think about it honestly: the dog lies down quietly in the corner, and what happens? Nothing. The dog gets up, grabs a sock and runs past the sofa, and what happens? Everybody moves.

From the dog's side, the arithmetic is not complicated.





Capturing calm

This is the whole technique and it costs nothing.

Keep a small pot of food somewhere in the room where you spend your evenings. Then, several times a night, when your dog happens to settle by itself:

1. Say nothing. Do not make eye contact. Do not call it over.
2. Walk over quietly and place one piece of food **between its front paws**.
3. Walk away.

That is it. No marker word, no praise, no fuss — all of those would raise the dog's arousal, which is the opposite of the point. The food simply appears while the dog is lying still, and the dog draws its own conclusions.

Do this for two weeks. Most owners report the same thing: the dog starts settling earlier in the evening, and staying settled longer, without ever having been asked to.

You are paying for a state that used to be invisible.





The mat

Capturing calm is passive. The mat gives you something you can ask for.

> **Take any specific, portable mat or towel that has no other purpose. It goes down, and it means one thing: good things happen here, and nothing is required of you.**

Week one. Put the mat down. Every time your dog puts any part of itself on it, place food on the mat. Do not cue anything, do not say a word. Pick the mat up after five minutes.

Week two. Wait for the dog to lie down on it before feeding. Feed at intervals while it stays. Release with your release word from Chapter 3, then pick the mat up.

Week three. Start putting the mat down in slightly harder places – the kitchen while you cook, the hallway while the family moves about – and feeding at intervals.

From then on. The mat travels. It goes to the café, to friends' houses, to the vet's waiting room. A dog that has a portable, well-paid piece of "your job here is nothing" is a dog you can take places.

The mat is the single most useful piece of equipment in this book, and it costs about five dollars.

Enforced downtime does not end at twelve weeks

Chapter 2 covered the overtired puppy. The same mechanism runs at eleven months, and almost nobody keeps it up that long.

An adolescent Doodle that is frantic at 7pm is very often a dog that has been awake and stimulated since 6am. Adult dogs still sleep a great deal — considerably more than most owners assume — and a dog with no scheduled downtime will simply keep going until it falls over, badly, in the evening.

So the crate or the covered bed does not get retired. It goes on being used, once or twice a day, for an hour, whether or not the dog looks tired.

Owners routinely discover that the "evening madness" they have been managing for months disappears within a week of reinstating an afternoon nap.

Trade physical for mental

If you are going to reduce the walking — and if you have an over-exercised dog, you should — something has to replace it. The replacement is nose work, and the exchange rate is favorable.

Twenty minutes of sniffing is worth considerably more, in terms of how settled a dog is afterwards, than twenty minutes of ball throwing. Scent work engages a large part of a dog's brain and produces a tired-and-satisfied state rather than a wound-up one.

Three things you can do today:

- **Scatter feed.** Instead of a bowl, throw the dog's dinner into the grass and let it hunt. Ten minutes of work, zero preparation.
- **The sniffing walk.** One walk a week where you go almost nowhere. The dog chooses the direction and you let it stand and sniff a lamp post for four minutes without hurrying it. This is not a failed walk. It is the point.
- **Frozen work.** A wet-food-stuffed rubber toy, frozen overnight, is thirty to forty minutes of licking, and licking is a genuinely calming activity.

And one thing to stop: **the ball launcher.** Repetitive high-arousal chasing, twice a day, builds exactly the adrenalized dog you are trying to settle — and does the joints of a large adolescent no favors either. Once a week is fun. Daily is a habit that is hard to undo.

Chapter 12 goes much further into brain work. This is the minimum viable version.

The two paths to an off switch

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog will often *appear* settled while it is actually monitoring you. It lies down, but its head lifts every time you shift in your chair. That is not rest. Feed it on the mat when you are moving about the room, so that the mat means "you can stop watching," not just "lie down." Also be honest about how much of its arousal comes from the household – this dog runs on the room's emotional temperature, and a loud family produces a dog that cannot switch off.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog cannot settle while it has an unsolved problem, and it will generate one if none exists. Capturing calm alone will not work – it needs the mental workload met first, then the calm captured. In practice: nose work in the late afternoon, then the mat in the evening. Try it in the other order and you will be feeding a dog that is lying down while actively planning something.

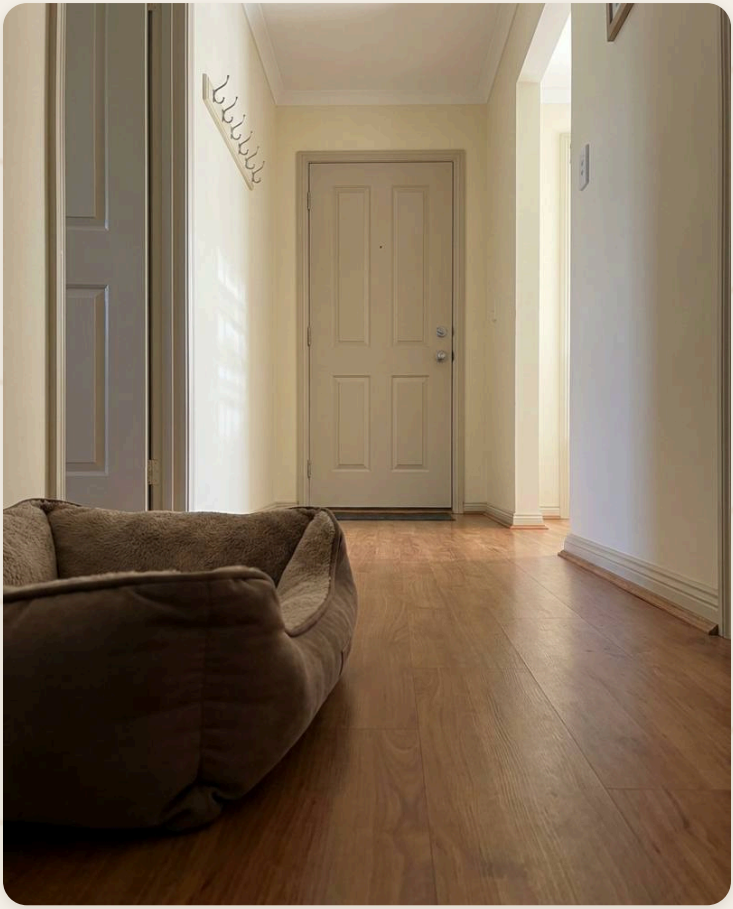
What to take from this chapter

1. Exercise does not produce calm. Past a point, it produces fitness, and fitness raises the requirement.
2. Calm is a behavior. Pay for it — silently, between the paws, while the dog is already doing it.
3. Build the mat. It is five dollars and it is the thing that lets your dog come with you.
4. Do not retire enforced downtime at twelve weeks. Most evening chaos in adolescent dogs is sleep debt.
5. Swap some walking for sniffing. Retire the daily ball launcher.

Chapter 6 takes all of this and applies it to the hardest problem your breed has — being left alone — including what to do if your dog is already panicking, which is the point most owners actually reach this book at.

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Home Alone



Why this chapter is longer than the others

Separation problems are the most common serious complaint in this breed, and they are the reason a significant number of Doodles are rehomed before their second birthday.

Home Alone

Chapter 2 explained the structural reason. Both parent breeds were built to work in close partnership with a person — a retriever at heel, a poodle in the water beside the boat. Neither was bred to be content alone. Then the cross became fashionable during the years when more people worked from home than at any point in living memory, and a great many Doodle puppies reached six months old having literally never been on the other side of a closed door.

This is not a character flaw in your dog. It is a mismatch between what the breed was assembled from and the life it was bought into.

The chapter splits in two. If your dog is fine alone and you are building maintenance, read the first half. **If your dog is already panicking, skip to "When it has already gone wrong."** That section is written for you and the first half will not help yet.





Part one: building it from calm

The scale is smaller than you think

The single most common error is starting at a duration the dog cannot do. An owner reads that they should practice leaving, so they leave for ten minutes, come back to a distressed dog, and conclude the dog "can't be left."

The dog can be left. Not for ten minutes. Start where the dog is genuinely comfortable, and for many dogs that is **three seconds**.

The protocol from Chapter 2, extended:

1. Dog settled, ideally on its mat, ideally slightly sleepy.
2. You get up and walk out. Close the door.
3. Return **before** the dog has had time to become concerned.
4. Come back in and say nothing at all.
5. Repeat at random durations — three seconds, then twenty, then five, then forty.

The randomness is the working part. A dog on a steadily increasing schedule learns that every absence is longer than the last, and starts worrying at the door click. A dog on a random schedule learns that the door closing predicts nothing in particular.

The two rules that decide everything

Never return to noise. Wait for two seconds of quiet. This is hard and it is not negotiable — going in on the barking teaches, cleanly, that barking opens doors. If you cannot wait, your durations are too long: shorten them until you can.

Never make arrivals or departures emotional. No goodbye, no greeting ritual, no "who's a good boy, did you miss me." Leaving should be as remarkable as going to the kitchen for a glass of water. A dog whose owner performs a two-minute farewell has been told, twice a day, that something significant is about to happen.

Uncouple the departure cues

Home Alone

Your dog knows you are leaving long before you leave. Keys, shoes, a particular bag, the laptop closing, a specific coat. By the time you reach the door, the dog has been building for five minutes.

Break the association by doing the cues without leaving. Pick up your keys and sit down. Put your shoes on and make a cup of tea. Take your coat off the hook and hang it back up. Do this at random for a two weeks and the cues stop predicting anything.

It feels absurd. It is extremely effective and it costs no extra time.

What the dog should be doing

Give the alone time a job. A frozen stuffed toy, given **as you leave and taken away when you return**, does two things: it occupies the difficult first few minutes, which are when most dogs escalate, and it gives being alone a positive association that exists nowhere else in the dog's day.

The taking-away matters. If the toy is available all day, it is not special. If it only appears when you leave, being left becomes the best part of the afternoon.

Camera or you are guessing

Point a phone at the room. Almost every owner who does this discovers they were wrong about something.

Some find the dog settles after ninety seconds and sleeps for three hours — and stop worrying. Others find the dog is silent, which they took as fine, and is actually pacing, drooling and unable to lie down for the entire duration. Silence is not the same as calm, and without a camera you cannot tell the difference.





Part two: when it has already gone wrong

If your dog screams, destroys the door frame, soils indoors, drools heavily or injures itself when left, you are not doing maintenance training. Stop the protocol above — it will not work yet, and running it will make the dog worse.

Three things, in order.

1. See a vet first

Not as a formality. Sudden separation distress in an adult dog that was previously fine can have a physical cause, and pain is a common one — a dog that hurts is a dog with no coping capacity left. There are also cases where medication, prescribed and supervised properly, is what makes behavioral work possible at all. That is a conversation for your vet, not for a book.

Go first. Not after six months of trying.

2. Stop leaving the dog alone

This is the part owners resist, and it is the part that decides whether any of it works.

Every single time your dog is left alone and panics, the panic is practiced and reinforced. You cannot train a dog out of an experience it is having daily. For a period of weeks, the dog does not get left: daycare, a sitter, a neighbor, family, a dog walker, working from a café with the dog, whatever the logistics require.

It is genuinely disruptive. It is also the difference between a problem that resolves in two months and one that lasts for years.

3. Rebuild from zero, with a professional

Restart the protocol from a duration the dog can do without distress – which in a serious case may be **you standing on the other side of the door with your hand still on the handle**, for one second. That is not failure. That is the correct starting point, and it is the one the dog can succeed at.

Progress in seconds, not minutes. Expect the work to take months. Expect setbacks after any disruption – a vacation, a house move, a change in your working pattern.

And get help. A qualified behaviorist working from video of your actual dog will see things this chapter cannot, and severe separation distress is one of the few problems where the professional genuinely pays for itself. Ask your vet for a referral rather than choosing on price.



The two paths

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog's problem is usually genuine hyper-attachment — it follows you from room to room and settles only where it can see you. Start by breaking that *inside* the house before you work on doors at all: use the mat from Chapter 5 across the room, then behind a baby gate, then in the next room. A dog that cannot be six feet (2 m) from you is not ready to be six hours from you.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog's version often looks less like grief and more like a project. It does not scream; it dismantles. Confinement frequently makes it worse rather than better, because a bored problem-solver in a crate now has both a problem and no options. This dog usually needs the mental workload solved first — Chapter 12 before this chapter — and then the alone time filled with something it can actually work at.

What to take from this chapter

1. This is a structural risk of your breed, not a training failure. Assume you have to build it deliberately.
2. Start at a duration the dog can genuinely do, and randomize. Three seconds is a legitimate starting point.
3. Never return to noise; never make departures or arrivals emotional; uncouple the departure cues.
4. Put a camera on it. Silence is not calm.
5. If the dog is already panicking: vet first, stop leaving it alone, then rebuild from seconds with professional help. Practiced panic is the thing that makes this chronic.

Chapter 7 is the other obligation that comes with this breed, and the one owners are least prepared for — the coat.

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The obligation you did not know you were buying

Chapter 1 flagged this and it is time to deal with it properly.

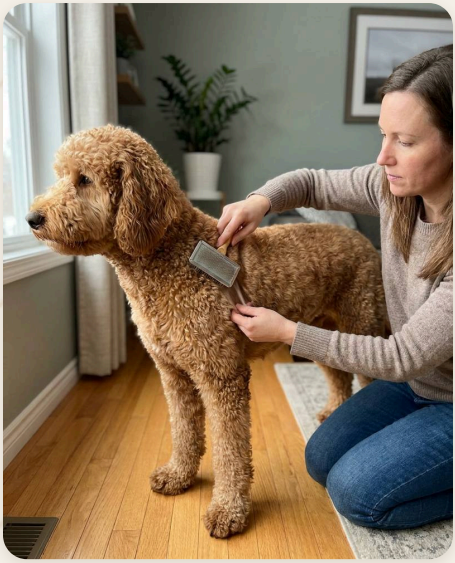
The Poodle coat does not shed. That is the entire reason your dog exists — the first Goldendoodles were bred specifically to produce a guide dog for people who could not live with a shedding retriever.

Worth being precise about what that actually buys you, because "hypoallergenic" gets repeated as if it's a guarantee, and it isn't one. Human allergic reactions are triggered by proteins in a dog's saliva and dander, not only in loose hair — and every dog produces both, coat type notwithstanding. A low-shedding coat means less hair carrying those proteins around your house and into the air, which does measurably help a lot of allergic households. It does not mean a reaction-free home. If anyone in the household has a serious dog allergy, spend real time with the actual puppy before you commit, rather than trusting the breed name to do that work for you.

But a coat that does not shed is a coat that never releases dead hair. It keeps it. Every strand your dog loses stays woven into the curl around it, and it will felt into a solid mat unless a human physically removes it.

Your neighbor with the Golden Retriever vacuums. You have a recurring maintenance obligation, for fifteen years, that cannot be skipped, delegated entirely, or caught up on later.

Nobody says this at pickup. It is the single most common reason Doodle owners are unhappy with a dog they otherwise adore, and it is completely manageable if you understand three things.





Why mats are not cosmetic

Owners tend to think of matting as an appearance problem. It is not.

A mat is a tightening knot of hair attached to skin. As it contracts it pulls, constantly, on the skin beneath — which is painful in the way a braid wound too tight is painful, except it does not stop. Underneath, air cannot circulate and moisture cannot escape, so the skin softens, and hot spots and infections follow.

Mats form fastest in the places you cannot see: behind the ears, in the armpits, in the groin, under the collar, at the base of the tail, and between the toes. A dog can look perfectly presentable on top and be matted to the skin underneath.

There is also a consequence at the other end of it. Once a mat is close to the skin, it cannot be brushed out — not by you, not by a groomer. The only humane option is to shave beneath it. This is why so many Doodles come back from their first groom shaved to the skin, and why the owner is frequently upset with the groomer.

The groomer did the kind thing. **Brushing out a tight mat is painful, slow, and in serious cases causes more damage than clipping.** A groomer who shaves your matted dog has chosen the dog's comfort over your expectations, and that is the correct choice.





The tools

The Coat

Four things. This is the whole list.

- **A slicker brush.** Fine angled wire pins. This is what actually goes through a curly coat. The rubber-pin brushes sold for "all dogs" glide over the top of a Doodle coat and do nothing whatsoever.
- **A metal comb**, wide teeth one end, fine the other. This is the important one and most owners do not own it.
- **Blunt-tipped scissors** for the small stuff — feet, sanitary areas.
- **A detangling spray.** Never brush a dry, tangled coat; it snaps the hair and hurts.

The comb test

This is how you know whether you are actually grooming or just brushing the surface.

After you have brushed an area, take the metal comb and run it through **to the skin**. If it slides all the way through and out, that area is done. If it stops, there is a mat there, whatever the surface looks like.

Most owners who start doing the comb test discover their dog was substantially matted while looking fine. Do it in five or six places every session: behind each ear, both armpits, the groin, under the collar, the base of the tail.





The schedule

The honest version, by age:

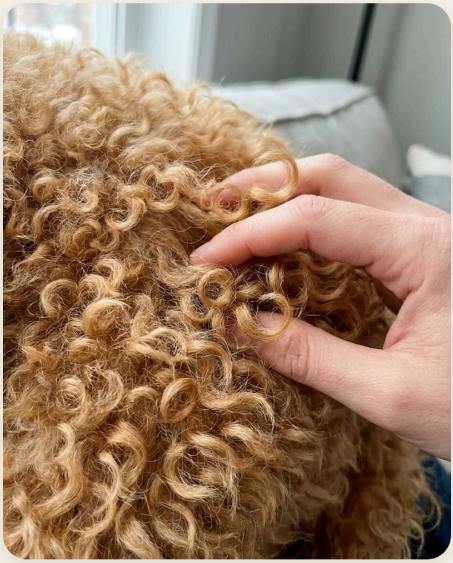
AGE	FREQUENCY	WHAT IS HAPPENING
8–16 weeks	30 seconds daily	Coat is easy. You are training tolerance, not grooming
4–8 months	10 minutes, 3× a week	Real grooming begins
8–14 months	**10 minutes daily**	Coat change — puppy and adult coat both present. Peak matting

AGE	FREQUENCY	WHAT IS HAPPENING
Adult	15 minutes, 3-4× a week	Maintenance

Professional groom every six to eight weeks throughout, from sixteen weeks old.

The 8–14 month row is the one that catches people, and Chapter 4 explained why the timing is so unkind: the coat needs the most work in exactly the months when your adolescent is least willing to stand still.





Teaching the dog to accept it

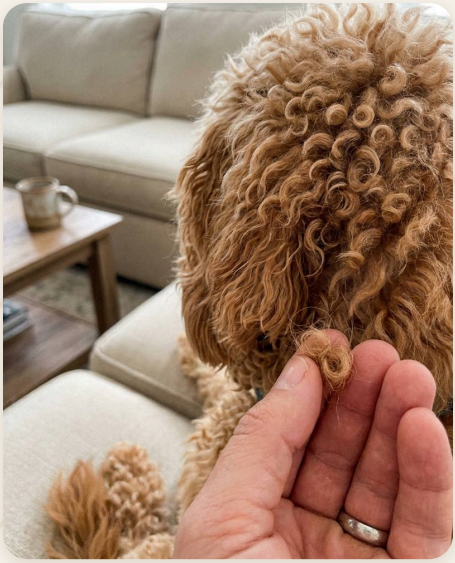
A dog that fights grooming will be groomed badly, briefly, and rarely – which is how coats get out of hand. So the handling is trained, not imposed.

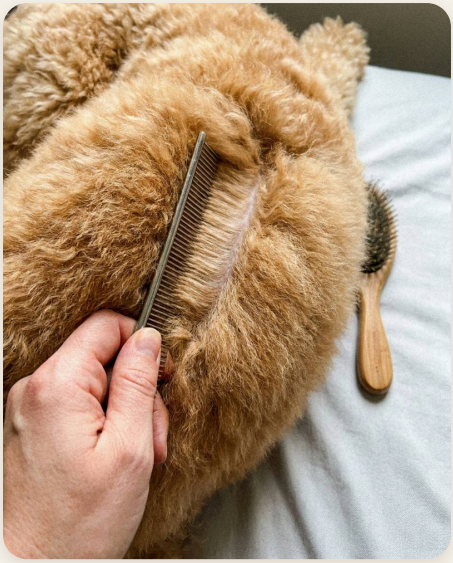
The Chapter 2 protocol, continued and extended:

1. **Sessions end early, while the dog is still relaxed.** This is the whole discipline and it is harder than it sounds. Every instinct says do a bit more while it is going well. Stop instead.
2. **One area per session.** Today the front legs. Tomorrow one side. Not the whole dog.
3. **Pay during, not after.** Food while the brush is moving, not as a reward at the end. You are building an association, and the association has to happen at the same time as the thing.
4. **Never groom out a mat by force.** Cut it out with blunt scissors, or leave it for the groomer. One painful session can undo months.
5. **Teach a chin rest.** Hand flat, dog rests its chin on it, mark and pay. A dog with a trained chin rest will hold still for ears, eyes and face for the rest of its life.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog will usually tolerate far more than it is comfortable with, and will show you almost nothing until it has had enough — at which point it seems to object out of nowhere. Watch for the quiet signals: lip licking, turning the head away, a stilled body. Stop at those, not at the growl. A soft dog that is repeatedly pushed past its limit becomes a dog that dreads the brush without ever having complained.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog will negotiate. It will offer a paw, wander off, bring you a toy, and generally propose alternatives to standing still. Do not chase it or wrestle it back. Use the mat from Chapter 5 — grooming happens *there* and nowhere else — and pay generously for stillness. Give this dog a defined place and a clear end point and it will usually cooperate; give it an unpredictable session of indeterminate length and it will opt out.





Working with a groomer

Book the first appointment at around sixteen weeks, and book it as a **puppy introduction** — bath, dry, feet, face, minimal trimming. The goal is a short, pleasant first visit, not a haircut.

Then, three things that make the relationship work:

- **Go every six to eight weeks and keep it up.** Groomers are booked well ahead; owners who appear only when the dog is a felt suit get the appointment they deserve.
- **Learn the words.** "A short puppy cut, one inch (2.5 cm) all over" gets you what you want. "Not too short" gets you whatever the groomer guesses.
- **Listen when they tell you the dog is matting.** They are not upselling. They have their hands on the parts of your dog you never check.

Budget for it honestly, too. A coat like this, run through a professional every six to eight weeks for fifteen years, is not a small line item — real-world reporting on doodle ownership costs puts the yearly total anywhere from several hundred to well over a thousand dollars, before the brushes, combs and detangling spray from earlier in this chapter. Owners who go in expecting an occasional trim are the ones who feel ambushed by the first year's total. Owners who budget for grooming the way they budget for food are not.

And when they tell you the coat has to come off — let it. It grows back in three months. A dog left in a matted coat because its owner wanted it to look fluffy is a dog in ongoing discomfort.

What to take from this chapter

The Coat

1. Non-shedding means you remove the dead hair by hand. Forever. It is the trade for no vacuuming.
2. Mats are painful and cause skin disease. They are not a cosmetic issue.
3. Buy the metal comb and do the comb test to the skin. Brushing the surface tells you nothing.
4. Grooming frequency peaks at 8–14 months, during the coat change, when the dog is least cooperative.
5. Short sessions that end early beat long ones. Never force a mat out — cut it.

Chapter 8 goes back outside. The leash is where most Doodle owners quietly give up, and the reason has almost nothing to do with the dog being strong.

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Loose Leash



The walk is the thing people give up on

Almost every Doodle owner has the same private complaint, and most are slightly ashamed of it: they have stopped enjoying the walk.

Loose Leash

The dog is out in front, the arm aches, the shoulder is sore, and the whole business has become a job of work performed twice a day. So the walks get shorter, or they happen at odd hours when nobody is about, or one person in the household stops doing them entirely.

It is worth being clear about why this happens, because the usual explanation is wrong. It is not that your dog is strong, or dominant, or hasn't been shown who is in charge.

It is that pulling works.

Your dog wants to get to the lamp post. It pulls. It arrives at the lamp post. That sequence has now run several thousand times, and it has never once failed. From the dog's perspective, pulling is the single most reliably rewarded behavior in its entire life — more reliable than sit, more reliable than its own name.

Nothing about a harness or a head halter changes that arithmetic. Equipment changes how much it hurts you. Only the arithmetic changes the dog.

Loose Leash





The one rule

Everything in this chapter comes from a single sentence:

> **A tight leash never gets the dog where it wants to go.**

That is the whole method. The rest is how you survive implementing it.

When the leash goes tight, forward motion stops. Not a jerk, not a correction, not a word — the world simply stops moving. When the leash softens, the world starts again.

Dogs work this out remarkably quickly. What is hard is the human side: it is tedious, it is slow, and for the first two weeks you will get almost nowhere. Which is exactly why the next section exists.





Separate the two kinds of walk

The reason loose-leash training fails in most households is that people try to do it on the walk they actually need — the twenty-minute one, to the park, before work.

You cannot train and commute at the same time. So split them.

The training walk. Ten minutes. No destination. Often just up and down outside your own house. The only goal is a loose leash. If you get forty yards (35 m) in ten minutes, that is a complete success. Do this four or five times a week.

The transport walk. You need to get somewhere. Put the dog in a different piece of equipment — a front-clip harness, or a head halter you have introduced properly — and accept that this walk is not training. Manage it, get where you are going, do not fight.

Use a different collar or harness for each, and the dog will learn the difference faster than you expect. The equipment becomes the signal.

Owners who split their walks succeed. Owners who try to do it on every walk give up inside a month, and they give up because the method is genuinely unbearable when applied to a walk with a deadline.

Loose Leash





The mechanics

Where the dog should be. Not at heel. Heel is a competition position and it is exhausting for both of you. What you want is a **J-shaped leash** — a visible loop of slack — and the dog anywhere within that. In front is fine. Sniffing is fine. Tight is not.

Reward position, not the dog. Feed at your pant seam, every time, on the side you want the dog. Where the food appears is where the dog will orbit. Owners who feed by holding food out in front build dogs that walk in front.

Change direction. When the leash tightens, stop — and after two or three seconds, turn and walk the other way. This is more effective than standing still, because it makes you unpredictable. A dog that does not know which way you are going has a reason to keep an eye on you.

Pay the check-in. Whenever the dog looks up at you, unprompted — mark, feed, immediately. A dog that offers eye contact on a walk is a dog you can steer.

Let it sniff. Deliberately. The single fastest way to make a walk unbearable is to spend it preventing the dog from doing the one thing walks are actually for. Sniffing is not a distraction from the walk; for the dog, it *is* the walk. Use it as payment: loose leash for ten yards (9 m), then "go sniff" as a released reward.

Loose Leash



Equipment, briefly

- **Front-clip harness** — the sensible default. Redirects the dog rather than restraining it. Not a training method by itself.
- **Back-clip harness** — comfortable, and gives the dog maximum mechanical advantage to pull. Fine for a dog that already walks well; unhelpful for one that doesn't.
- **Head halter** — effective for large strong dogs, and requires a genuine week of desensitization before use. A dog thrown into a head halter will spend every walk trying to get it off.
- **Retractable leash** — teaches constant light tension, which is the exact opposite of what this chapter is building. Fine on a beach. Not while you are training.

No equipment on this list trains a dog. All it does is make the two weeks survivable.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog's pulling is usually enthusiasm rather than independence, and it often walks beautifully until another dog appears. Its recovery is quick and it will check in readily — so pay those check-ins heavily and you will make fast progress. Watch the frustration end of it: this dog wants to *reach* things, and a Doodle that has been dragged past every dog it has ever seen becomes a leash-reactive dog by about eighteen months. Chapter 15 touches on this; the prevention is to let it greet appropriately sometimes, on a loose leash.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog is running the numbers on you specifically. If stopping is inconsistent — if you hold firm for ten minutes and then let it drag you to the park because you are late — it will conclude, correctly, that persistence pays. This is the dog that most needs the two walks kept genuinely separate, because it can tell the difference and will exploit the transport walk. On the training walk, be absolutely consistent. On the transport walk, do not pretend.

What to take from this chapter

1. Your dog pulls because pulling has worked several thousand times. It is not a character problem.
2. One rule: a tight leash never gets the dog where it wants to go.
3. Split training walks from transport walks, with different equipment. This is what makes the method survivable.
4. Feed at your pant seam. Pay every unprompted check-in. Use sniffing as the reward, not as the enemy.
5. Equipment manages a dog. It does not train one.

Chapter 9 is the other half of the outdoor problem, and the one that decides whether your dog ever gets to run off-leash at all.

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Recall



The most expensive word you own

Recall is the only piece of training that decides how much freedom your dog gets for the rest of its life. A dog that comes back can be let off in a hundred places. A dog that cannot spends fifteen years on a leash.

It is also the behavior owners damage fastest, usually within the first year, and almost always in the same four ways.





The four ways it dies

1. Calling when you know you will be ignored.

Your dog is fifty yards (45 m) away with its nose down. You call. Nothing happens. You call again, louder. This has now happened four hundred times, and your dog's name in the park has been comprehensively established as a sound that precedes nothing.

Every unanswered recall is a small withdrawal. Enough of them and the account is empty.

2. Only calling to end things.

For a lot of dogs, the recall word predicts exactly one thing: the leash going on and the fun stopping. Dogs are perfectly capable of noticing this. A recall that reliably ends the walk is a recall that gets slower every week, and the dog is not being disobedient – it is responding accurately to what the word has always meant.

3. Telling the dog off when it arrives.

The dog has been gone ten minutes. You are frightened and furious. It finally comes back and you shout at it.

From the dog's point of view, it has just been punished for returning. You have not taught it not to run off; you have taught it that coming back is dangerous. Next time it will hesitate – and hesitating is exactly what you cannot afford.

Whatever it did, however long it took, **the dog that comes back gets paid.** Every time, without exception, for its entire life.

4. Chasing.

Dogs run faster than you and they think this is a game. Chasing a dog teaches it that not-coming produces an excellent chase. Run the other way instead – most dogs follow.

Recall





Build a new word

If your dog's recall is already unreliable, do not try to fix it. The old word is carrying too much history. Retire it and build a fresh one, from zero, properly.

Pick something you would never shout by accident. "Here." "Come on." A whistle is better than any of them — a whistle sounds identical whether you are calm or terrified, and your dog can hear the difference in your voice at a hundred yards (90 m).

The charge

Do not ask the dog for anything. For the first week, the new word simply means food appears.

1. Dog is two feet (60 cm) away, doing nothing in particular.
2. Say the new word once.
3. Food appears, immediately.

Twenty a day for a week, in the house, with the dog making no effort at all. You are building the same reflex as the marker word in Chapter 3.

The wages

Recall payment is not the same as ordinary training payment, and this is where most owners are too thrifty.

You are asking your dog to leave the single most interesting thing in its current environment and return to a person it sees every day. That is a genuinely hard sell, and a piece of dry kibble does not cover it.

Recall gets paid in the best thing you have: roast chicken, cheese, sardines. Not what the dog gets for a sit. And it gets paid in **quantity** – not one piece, but five or six, fed one at a time over ten seconds, so the payment lasts longer than the decision did.

This feels excessive. It is the correct price for the one behavior that might save the dog's life.

The ladder

Add difficulty in a deliberate order, and only when the previous rung is boring:

1. House, no distractions
2. Yard, quiet
3. Yard, with someone else moving about
4. Long line (30 ft / 10 m), quiet field, no other dogs
5. Long line, field with dogs at a distance
6. Long line, dogs closer
7. Off-leash, enclosed field, quiet
8. Off-leash, real world

The long line is not a formality — it is what makes rungs four to six possible, because it means the cue is never unanswered. If you cannot make it happen, you do not say the word.

Most owners try to jump from rung two to rung eight and then wonder why it fell apart.





The recall that is not a recall

Practice calling your dog, paying it, and then **releasing it back to what it was doing**.

Nine times out of ten the recall should mean: come here, get something excellent, go back to your afternoon. Only occasionally does it end the walk.

This one habit does more for long-term recall reliability than any other single thing in this chapter, and it costs nothing but the discipline of remembering.

The emergency recall

Build a second word, separately, and treat it as a fire alarm.

It has its own sound — a specific whistle pattern, or a word you use for nothing else. It is charged the same way, with something the dog gets on no other occasion in its life.

Then you use it **no more than three or four times a year**, and every single time it produces the extraordinary thing.

You will be very glad of it exactly once, and on that occasion it will matter more than everything else in this book.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) Recall is the easy half of this dog. Its default is to check in, so build on that: pay every voluntary return, whether you asked or not. The failure mode here is not defiance but *distraction* — this dog often genuinely does not hear you when it has found another dog to play with. Get in earlier, before it commits, and accept that its recall around other dogs will be the last rung to become reliable.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog performs a cost-benefit calculation every time you call, and it is good at it. It will come when the wages beat the alternative and not otherwise, which is not disobedience — it is arithmetic. Two consequences. First, keep the wages genuinely high forever; this is not a dog you can fade to praise. Second, never let a recall go unanswered, because each one is a data point telling it that ignoring you is free. Long line for longer than you think you need it.

What to take from this chapter

1. Never say the word into a situation where it will not be answered. Use a long line so it always is.
2. Retire a broken recall and build a new word from zero. Do not try to repair the old one.
3. Pay in chicken, not kibble, and in quantity. Forever.
4. Most recalls should end with the dog released back to its afternoon.
5. The dog that comes back always gets paid — whatever it did, however long it took.

Chapter 10 deals with the moment your training is most publicly tested: someone is at the front door.

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Jumping and Guests



Why your dog jumps at people

Not dominance. Not rudeness. Two much simpler things.

Your dog wants to reach your face. Dogs greet each other face to face. Yours is three feet (1 m) below where your face lives, and jumping is the shortest route.

Jumping and Guests

Jumping has always worked. When it was eight weeks old and weighed nine pounds (4 kg), everybody in the house picked it up when it put its paws on their legs. Some of them still encourage it. Then it hit fifty-five pounds (25 kg) and the same behavior became a problem, and nobody told the dog the rules had changed.

> **There is a third thing, specific to your breed, and it is the reason this chapter matters more than owners expect. A Doodle is friendly-looking, curly and soft, and a great many strangers will actively invite your dog to jump on them. Oh, it's fine, I don't mind! They mind less than the elderly neighbor your dog will knock over next month, and every one of those interactions is a training session you did not choose.**



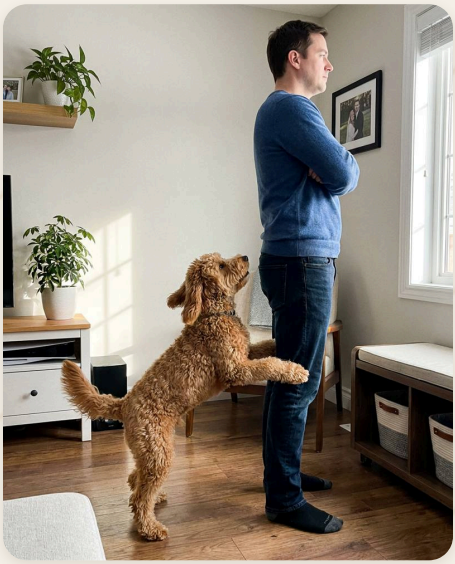


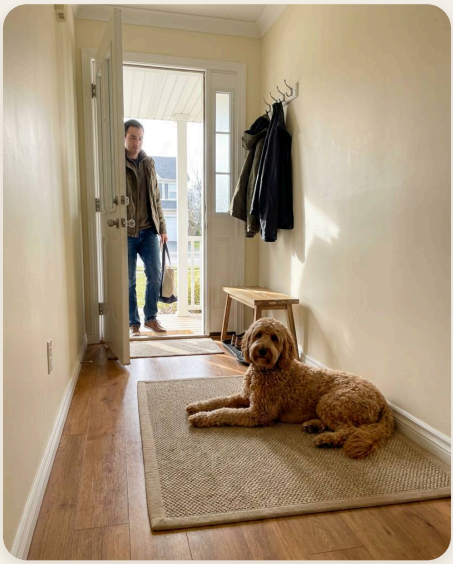
Why scolding does not work

The dog jumps. You shout, push it down, grab its paws.

You are a person, facing the dog, touching it, making noise. To a social animal that jumped up in order to get exactly that, you have delivered it. Loudly.

For most dogs, being scolded for jumping is indistinguishable from being greeted enthusiastically. This is why the shouting has not worked for eight months and will not work in the ninth.





The exchange

Jumping and Guests

You cannot delete jumping. You can make something else more profitable.

The behavior to build is **four paws on the floor** – the position, not a sit. A sit is harder to hold in an excited moment, and it gives the dog something else to fail at.

The rule for every human in the household, without exception:

> Four paws on the floor → attention exists. Paws leave the floor → attention vanishes.

"Vanishes" means: stand up straight, turn away, fold your arms, say nothing. No word, no eye contact, no touch. The moment all four feet are down, you turn back and greet warmly.

Most dogs work this out in a few days, provided everybody does it. Which brings us to the actual difficulty.





The household problem

This training does not fail because it is hard. It fails because one person in the house thinks it is a bit sad and lets the dog jump on them when nobody is watching.

That person has not broken a rule. They have created something worse: an **intermittent schedule**. Jumping now pays occasionally and unpredictably, which is the most persistent reinforcement pattern there is — the same one that makes slot machines work. A behavior on an intermittent schedule is dramatically harder to extinguish than one that is rewarded every time.

So this needs a conversation with everyone in the house before you start, and it needs to include the visiting grandparent and the teenager's friends. Either everyone does it, or you are training a slot machine.

The front door

The door is the hardest moment because the arousal is highest and you have the least control. So do not train at the door. Train the pieces separately and assemble them later.

Stage one, no visitor. Knock on your own door. Ring your own bell. Do it twenty times an evening while nothing happens. The bell stops predicting anything.

Stage two, the station. Pick a spot — the mat from Chapter 5, ten feet (3 m) back from the door. Knock, dog goes to the mat, gets fed there. Repeat until it is automatic. The mat is now what a knock means.

Stage three, a volunteer. A friend who will follow instructions, not a real guest. They knock. If the dog leaves the mat, they step back outside and the door closes. Repeat. The visitor only comes in while the dog is on its mat.

Stage four, greeting. Once the dog holds its mat, release it to say hello — but only while the visitor is standing still and the dog has four feet down. If the feet leave the floor, the visitor turns away.

For real life in the meantime, manage it. A baby gate or a leash on the door handle costs nothing and prevents your dog practicing the thing you are trying to remove. **Management is not cheating.** Every rehearsal you prevent is one you do not have to untrain.

What to tell visitors

Say it before you open the door, out loud, in plain words:

> **Please ignore him completely until he has all four feet on the floor. Then he'd love to say hello.**

Some will do it. Some will say "oh I don't mind" and let the dog jump anyway. For those, put the dog behind the gate. You are not being rude — you are protecting eight weeks of work from a stranger's thirty seconds of enthusiasm.

The one nobody mentions: the counter

The same instinct, applied indoors, produces counter surfing — and a full-grown Doodle can reach a kitchen countertop without effort.

The mechanism is identical and so is the fix. The counter pays out occasionally; that is enough. Clear the surfaces for a month so the behavior is never rewarded, feed the dog on its mat while you cook, and pay it there generously. A dog that has been paid forty times for lying on a mat in the kitchen has a reason to be there.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog jumps out of pure social enthusiasm and it will keep offering, because greeting people is genuinely the best part of its day. Turning away works well on it – possibly too well, so keep the withdrawal brief and the return warm. Do not let anyone correct this dog harshly at the door; a soft dog that gets frightened during greetings can become a dog that is worried about visitors, and that is a far worse problem than jumping.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog will test whether the rule applies to *this* person, in *this* doorway, on *this* day. Expect it to work perfectly with you and not at all with your sister. Do not treat that as a failure of the training – treat it as a dog that is correctly identifying which humans are consistent. It is also the dog most likely to work out that the counter pays at 11pm when the kitchen is empty, so clear the surfaces properly.

What to take from this chapter

Jumping and Guests

1. Jumping is about reaching your face, and it has been rewarded for months. It is not defiance.
2. Shouting and pushing look like greeting. That is why it has not worked.
3. Four paws on the floor is the behavior. Attention appears and vanishes accordingly.
4. One person who lets it slide creates an intermittent schedule and is worse than nobody training at all.
5. Train the doorbell, the mat and the greeting separately, and manage with a gate until the pieces assemble.

Chapter 11 covers the other thing those teeth and that brain get up to — mouthing, biting and the destruction of your baseboards.

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The chapter people are secretly upset about

There is a particular kind of distress that comes at about fourteen weeks, and owners rarely admit to it: they are a little bit frightened of their puppy, and they feel terrible about that.

The dog draws blood on a child's arm. It grabs the sleeve of a coat and will not let go. It goes for pant legs the moment anyone tries to leave a room. It has a look in its eye during it that seems, to a worried owner at eleven at night, genuinely aggressive.

Almost none of this is aggression. Nearly all of it is one of three things, and they have different fixes — so the first job is telling them apart.





Three different problems

Exploration. Under about sixteen weeks. The dog has no hands. Everything goes in the mouth because that is the only way it has to find out what a thing is. Constant, undirected, not especially intense.

Overtiredness. The single most common cause of hard biting in puppies. It arrives in the late afternoon and evening, it escalates fast, and it has a frantic quality that exploration does not. This is Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 in a different costume, and if the biting is worst between five and eight in the evening, this is almost certainly what you have.

Frustration. Later, usually four months and up. The dog wants something — to keep playing, to reach the other dog, to not be put in the crate — and grabs, often at clothing. This one is loud, targeted and persistent, and it looks the most alarming.

The test is timing, not intensity. Write down when the biting happens for three days. If it clusters after long awake periods, it is exhaustion. If it clusters when something is being denied or ended, it is frustration.





For exploration: redirect, do not punish

Have chewable things in every room, of genuinely different textures – soft, rubber, rope, frozen. When teeth arrive on skin, the hand goes still and a toy appears.

Two things not to do, both of them widely recommended and both wrong:

- **Do not yelp.** The advice comes from watching littermates and it does work for some puppies. For a great many others — especially the excitable ones — a high-pitched squeak from a human is thrilling and makes the biting worse. If you have tried it and the dog escalated, that is why.
- **Do not hold the muzzle shut, pin the dog, or put your fingers down its throat.** These circulate widely and they teach a dog that human hands near its face are threatening. You will pay for that in Chapter 7, at the groomer, and at the vet, for years.

What does work is unglamorous: the fun stops. Teeth on skin means you stand up and step over a gate for thirty seconds. Then you come back. Repeat, calmly, forever. A young dog needs a lot of repetitions of a boring consequence.



For overtiredness: this is not a biting problem

If the log says evenings, do not train the biting. Fix the sleep.

Reinstate enforced downtime — crate or covered bed, an hour, twice a day, whether or not the dog seems tired. Most owners who do this report the evening biting reduces sharply within a week, and they are usually surprised, because they had been managing it as a behavior problem for months.

You cannot train impulse control into an exhausted animal. There is nothing there to train.

For frustration: teach an off switch to play

Frustration biting responds to structure rather than consequences.

Build a pattern into play. Two minutes of tug, then the toy goes still and you ask for something simple — a hand target from Chapter 3 — then play resumes. The dog learns that stopping is not the end of the world, because starting always follows.

Teach a swap, properly. Offer something better than what the dog has. It drops, you mark, it gets the better thing, and — this is the part everyone skips — **sometimes it gets the original item back too**. A dog that has learned that giving things up occasionally means getting them back does not need to guard them.

Never chase the dog for an item. Chasing turns any object into treasure. This is how ordinary puppies become resource guarders, and it is entirely preventable.

Let it win at tug. Winning is not a dominance problem. Tug is one of the best games you can play with this breed — it is physical, it has rules, and it teaches a mouth to let go on cue.

Destruction, and what it is telling you

Chewing is normal and does not stop being normal at a year old. What matters is where it is aimed.

Scattered, casual, on things left out. Normal. Manage it — put things away, supply better alternatives.

Focused, and always at exits. Door frames, window sills, the carpet by the front door. This is not chewing. This is Chapter 6, and it needs that chapter's protocol rather than this one's.

Systematic, in a bored dog, in the daytime. This is a Poodle brain with nothing to do. It is not naughtiness; it is an intelligent animal generating its own employment. Chapter 12.

> **A useful question when you find something destroyed: what was the dog trying to achieve? Comfort, escape, or entertainment — three different answers, three different chapters.**

When it is worth getting help

Most of this is normal development. Some of it is not, and it is worth naming plainly.

Get professional help if you see: stillness and a hard stare before the mouth arrives; growling over food, toys or a resting place that escalates rather than settling; any bite that punctures rather than grazes; or a dog whose behavior changes suddenly with no obvious cause.

That last one goes to a vet first. A dog in pain is a dog with no tolerance left, and sudden mouthiness in a previously soft dog is a well-known sign of something hurting.

Asking for help early is cheap. Asking late is not.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) Retriever-leaning dogs are mouthy in a specific way — they carry. This dog will greet you with a shoe, bring you the mail, and want something in its mouth when it is excited. That is a hardwired retrieving instinct, not a behavior problem, and the fix is to give it a designated greeting toy rather than to suppress it. Its biting is usually enthusiasm rather than frustration, and it responds well to the fun simply stopping.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog's mouth is connected to its brain rather than its excitement. It will select the specific item you care about, it will notice that carrying it makes you get up, and it will use that. Do not chase, do not make a scene — trade, every time, and make the trade genuinely worth it. Its destruction is almost always an employment problem, and no amount of consequence-based training substitutes for giving it something to do.

What to take from this chapter

1. Work out which of the three you have by logging *when* it happens, not how hard it is.
2. Evening biting is usually sleep debt. Fix the sleep, not the biting.
3. Never yelp, pin, or hold the muzzle. You will pay for it at the groomer and the vet.
4. Teach a swap and let the dog win at tug. Never chase it for an item.
5. Destruction aimed at exits is separation. Destruction in a bored dog is employment. Neither is naughtiness.

Chapter 12 is the one that quietly solves about a third of the problems in this book — what to do with a brain that was built to work.

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The half of your dog that has no job

Chapter 1 made the case: the Standard Poodle was refined for independent problem-solving. That is a working trait. It exists because a dog that can assess a situation and act without instruction is more useful than one that waits.

Your dog inherited some fraction of that, and there is no work.

An intelligent animal with no assigned problem does not switch off. It finds a problem. The trash can has a lid — how does the lid work? The cabinet has a door — what is behind it? The yard has a fence — where is the fence weakest? None of that is naughtiness. It is a functioning brain doing the only thing it knows how to do.

This is why enrichment is not a nice extra for this breed. A substantial share of the problems in the previous eleven chapters — the destruction, the counter surfing, the inability to settle, some of the separation trouble — are the same underlying issue in different rooms.





The exchange rate

The useful fact, and the one that saves owners the most time:

> **Twenty minutes of nose work leaves most dogs more settled than a walk of the same length.**

Scent processing occupies an enormous proportion of a dog's brain, and unlike physical exercise it does not build fitness. You cannot make a dog better at sniffing until it needs three hours of it. There is no arms race.

Which means brain work is the only form of tiring your dog out that does not eventually demand more of your day. Chapter 5 made this argument about calm; here is the practical version.





Five things that cost nothing

Scatter feeding. Stop using the bowl. Throw the dog's dry food into the lawn or across a rug and let it hunt. Ten minutes, zero preparation, works from eight weeks to fifteen years. If you do one thing in this chapter, do this one.

The muffin tin. Food in the cups of a muffin tray, tennis balls on top. The dog has to move the balls. Four seconds to build.

The towel roll. Lay a towel flat, sprinkle food along it, roll it up. Harder version: tie a loose knot in it first.

The cardboard box. Food in a box with scrunched-up paper. Yes, it makes a mess. Twenty minutes of concentrated work is worth sweeping up for.

The find-it game. Show the dog a treat, have it wait, hide the treat in the next room, release with “find it.” Start easy, get harder. This one scales indefinitely and becomes genuinely impressive.

Notice what is not on this list: expensive puzzle feeders. They are fine, but most dogs solve a given plastic puzzle within a week and then it is furniture. Cardboard and towels are infinitely variable and free.



Real scent work

Once find-it is easy, the natural next step is to teach the dog to search for a specific scent rather than for food. It is the closest thing to actual employment you can give a dog in a suburban house, and Doodles are frequently very good at it.

The basic progression, which any scent-work class will formalize:

1. Food in one of several boxes. Dog indicates the right box.
2. A scented cotton swab in the box instead, with food delivered when the dog indicates.
3. Boxes replaced by hides around a room, then outdoors.

A dog running a scent problem is completely absorbed, and comes out of it satisfied rather than wound up. For a Poodle-leaning Doodle that has been driving its household mad, a weekly scent class is frequently the single intervention that changes everything.

Teach useless tricks on purpose

Spin. Bow. Put your toys away. Ring a bell. Fetch the remote.

The trick itself does not matter at all. What matters is that your dog spent fifteen minutes trying to work out what you wanted, and got paid when it succeeded. That process — offer a behavior, watch for the marker, adjust — is mentally demanding in exactly the way this dog needs, and it is the same skill that makes recall and grooming easier.

Ten minutes of trick training is worth about half an hour of walking, and you can do it in the kitchen in the rain.

Chewing and licking are activities

Both are self-soothing and both count.

A frozen, wet-food-stuffed rubber toy is thirty to forty minutes of sustained licking, and licking measurably lowers arousal. A lick mat smeared with something soft does the same in ten. Long-lasting appropriate chews do similar work.

> **This is the tool for the specific problem of a dog that needs to settle now — a guest arriving, a work call, the evening chaos hour. It is also, from Chapter 6, what should be given as you walk out of the door.**

How much, actually

A rough daily target for an adolescent or adult Doodle:

Scatter-fed meal	10 min
One puzzle or game	10 min
Trick training	5–10 min
Frozen toy or lick mat	20–30 min

That is under an hour, most of it while you do something else, and for a great many owners it is a straight substitute for the second walk they were dragging themselves out for.

The trap

There is one way to get this wrong.

If you give an already over-aroused dog a difficult puzzle, you get a frustrated dog making a lot of noise. Enrichment is not a sedative you apply to a spinning animal.

The order is: take the edge off physically, then give the brain work, then capture the calm from Chapter 5. Puzzles are for a dog that is capable of thinking, not for one that is past that point.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog often prefers work that involves *you* — retrieving games, trick training, anything cooperative — over solitary puzzles, and may lose interest in a box on the floor within minutes. That is not a failure of enrichment; it is a different currency. Build its independent work up deliberately anyway, because a dog that can only be entertained by a person is a dog that cannot cope alone, which takes you straight back to Chapter 6.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This is the dog the chapter is written for, and it needs more than you think — genuinely daily, not when you remember. It will also solve things quickly and get bored of a puzzle that worked last week, so rotate and escalate. The good news: this dog is enormous fun to train, learns tricks at a startling rate, and takes to formal scent work better than almost any other pet dog. Give it a job and most of the household complaints quietly disappear.

What to take from this chapter

1. Twenty minutes of nose work beats an hour of walking, and unlike walking it does not raise the requirement.
2. Scatter-feed every meal. It is free and it is the highest-value habit in this chapter.
3. Cardboard, towels and muffin tins beat expensive puzzle feeders, because they are infinitely variable.
4. Trick training is mental work. The trick is irrelevant; the problem-solving is the point.
5. Do not hand a puzzle to an over-aroused dog. Settle first, then think.

Chapter 13 is the one to read before you need it — what your dog's body is likely to do, what is normal, and the short list of things that mean you stop reading and pick up the phone.

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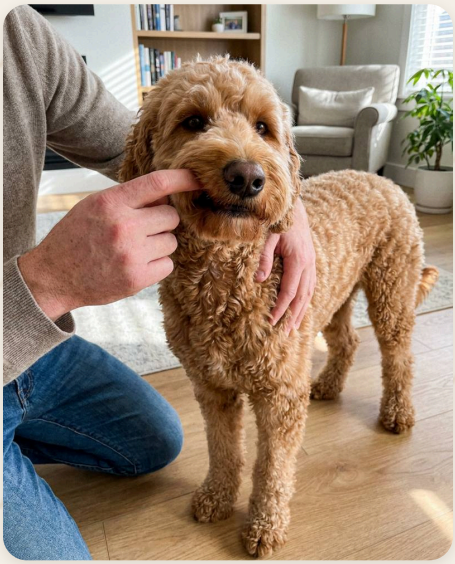
What this chapter is, and what it is not

This chapter will not tell you how to treat anything. It has no doses, no supplements, no home remedies, and no protocols.

What it does is narrower and, in practice, more useful: it tells you **what normal looks like for this dog**, what your breed is disposed towards, and the short list of things that mean you stop reading and call a vet immediately.

The most valuable thing an owner can have is not medical knowledge. It is a calibrated sense of their own dog — because you are the one who will notice, three days before anybody else could, that something is slightly off.

Everything below is educational. Every decision belongs to you and your vet.





Stop reading and call now

These are emergencies. In every case the correct action is to phone a vet or an emergency clinic **immediately** — not to look it up, not to try something first, not to wait until morning.

A swollen or hard abdomen, with unproductive retching. The dog tries to be sick and nothing comes up, is restless, cannot settle, may drool heavily. This is a suspected gastric torsion. It affects deep-chested dogs and Doodles can be deep-chested. It progresses in hours and it is fatal without surgery. There is nothing to do at home. Drive.

Straining to urinate and producing nothing. Especially in a male dog. A blockage becomes life-threatening quickly.

Collapse, seizure, or sudden inability to stand.

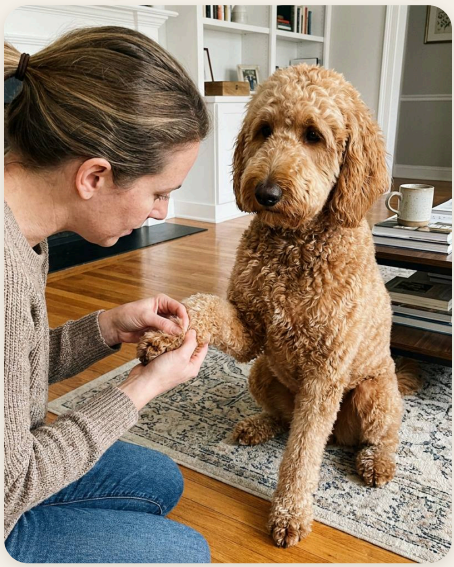
Heatstroke. Heavy distressed panting, bright red gums, staggering, vomiting, on a warm day or after exercise. Begin cooling with cool — not ice-cold — water while someone else phones ahead. A curly non-shedding coat is not a cooling system, and A heavy, dense coat holds heat, and owners are often caught out by how quickly that matters.

Suspected poisoning. Take the packaging with you. Common household dangers include chocolate, xylitol (in sugar-free gum and some peanut butters), grapes and raisins, and certain human medications.

A wound that is bleeding heavily, or any deep puncture.

Save your vet's number and your nearest after-hours clinic in your phone today, under names you can find while panicking. That is a five-minute job that people wish they had done.





What your breed is disposed towards

Health and the Doodle Body

A first-generation cross is not automatically healthier than its parents. It inherits the risk pool of both. A large 2024 Royal Veterinary College study comparing designer crossbreeds against both parent breeds found no meaningful health difference in the large majority – about 87% – of the conditions it looked at, and where there was a difference, the crossbred dogs came out worse about as often as they came out better, including higher rates of stomach upset and ear infections than the Poodle side of the pedigree. One caveat worth knowing: that study looked at Cockapoos, Labradoodles and Cavapoos – the three commonest doodle crosses – and not at Goldendoodles specifically. "Hybrid vigor" is a real genetic phenomenon in principle, but it is not a rescue plan for a litter from two parents who were never health-tested in the first place. Ask your breeder for health testing on **both** parents – hips, elbows, eyes, and the relevant genetic screens – and treat evasiveness on that question as an answer.

Hips and elbows. Both parent breeds carry developmental joint risk. What you control is growth: keep a young dog lean, avoid repetitive high-impact work – the daily ball launcher from Chapter 5 – and do not force long runs on a dog that is still growing. Watch for a bunny-hopping gait, stiffness after rest, or reluctance on stairs.

Ears. This is the one you will meet most. A floppy ear with hair growing inside it, over a warm moist canal, is a design that suits bacteria and yeast. Signs: head shaking, scratching at one ear, a yeasty smell, dark discharge, or a dog that flinches when you touch one side of its head. Ear infections are painful and they recur. Get them seen early — and do not put anything into an ear on your own initiative, because what is safe depends on whether the eardrum is intact, and you cannot know that.

Eyes. Both parent breeds carry inherited eye conditions. Annual checks, and any cloudiness, redness, squinting or bumping into things gets seen.

Skin. Allergic skin disease is common in both parents. Persistent itching, licking of paws, recurrent ear trouble and hot spots often travel together. It is manageable and it needs a vet, because the cause has to be identified before anything sensible can be done.

Heart, and other inherited conditions. Both breeds have known cardiac and other hereditary risks. This is what the parents' health testing is for.

Weight. Not glamorous, and the single largest thing you control. A retriever-leaning dog will eat as though it has no memory of the last meal. Excess weight worsens joints, heart, heat tolerance and lifespan simultaneously. You should be able to feel the ribs easily under a light covering and see a waist from above. Your vet will give you a calorie target for her weight and age; that number, not the scoop on the bag, is the one to feed to.





What normal looks like

Learn these on a healthy dog, so you have something to compare against.

- **Gums:** pink and moist. Press a thumb against them — the color should return in under two seconds. Pale, white, blue or brick red are all urgent.
- **Weight:** ribs findable without pressing hard; a visible waist from above and a tuck from the side.
- **Water:** a marked, sustained increase in drinking is a genuine early warning sign for several conditions. If you notice the bowl emptying faster for more than a few days, mention it.
- **Bathroom habits:** know what your dog's normal looks like, so a change registers.
- **Movement:** a smooth gait, willing to jump into the car, no stiffness after a lie-down.



The weekly two minutes

Once a week, hands over the whole dog. It takes two minutes and it is the highest-value health habit in this book — for a coated breed especially, because you cannot see the skin.

Ears (look and smell). Eyes. Teeth and gums. Down each leg, into each armpit. Along the ribs and belly, feeling for lumps. Each paw, between the toes — grass seeds hide there in summer, and mats form there year-round. Under the tail.

Note anything new. A lump you can date is far more useful to a vet than a lump you noticed "at some point."

This doubles as the handling practice from Chapter 7, so it is not extra work.

Routine care

Vaccination and parasite prevention on your vet's schedule for your area. Dental disease is common, underestimated, and painful — daily brushing from puppyhood is the single most effective preventive thing you can do, and Chapter 2's handling work is what makes it possible.

Neutering timing is genuinely debated, and the evidence differs by size, sex and breed — particularly regarding joint development. There is no universally correct age. Discuss it with your vet rather than following what a forum says.

Aging

Somewhere after seven or eight, watch for stiffness after rest, slowing on walks, hearing loss, cloudiness in the eyes, changed sleep patterns or confusion at night.

Old age is not a diagnosis, and "he's just getting old" is the sentence that lets treatable pain go untreated for years. Arthritis is manageable. Dental pain is fixable. A senior check twice a year finds things while they are still cheap and easy.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog is stoic and eager to please, which is dangerous in a patient. It will keep walking on a sore leg, keep eating with a painful mouth, and give you almost no warning. Weigh it regularly rather than judging by eye, and treat any subtle change in willingness — hesitating at the car, slower on the stairs — as information rather than laziness.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog tends to communicate discomfort earlier and more clearly, which is genuinely useful, and it also has strong opinions about being handled at the vet. Invest in that: practice the chin rest and the weekly check, and ask your clinic about a happy-visit — going in, getting fed, going home again. A dog that finds the vet unremarkable gets better care for fifteen years.

What to take from this chapter

1. Put your vet's number and an after-hours number in your phone today.
2. Learn the emergency list. Gastric torsion, urinary blockage, collapse and heatstroke do not wait until morning.
3. Ask for health testing on both parents. Evasiveness is an answer.
4. Ears, skin, joints and weight are the four you will most likely meet. Weight is the one you fully control.
5. Two minutes of hands on the dog, once a week. It finds things early, and early is everything.

Chapter 14 opens the final stretch of this guide — five chapters covering ground this book hasn't gotten to yet: house training specifics, safe play with other dogs, keeping training from quietly sliding backward, travel, and a proper look at the senior years.

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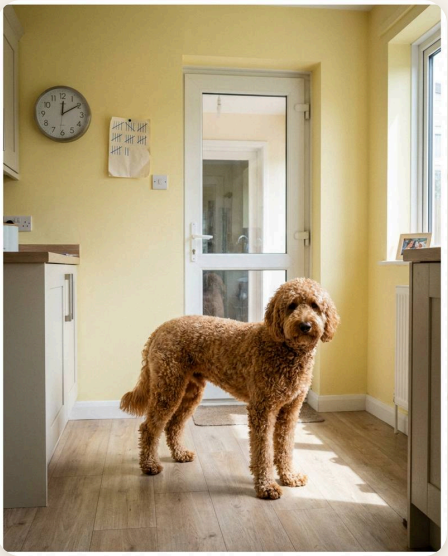
The advice that only works for one of your dogs

Most potty training guides give you one method because they assume one dog. Watch for the signal. Praise the dog. Repeat.

That advice was written for an animal that reliably tells you what it needs, every time, regardless of what else is happening. Chapter 1 already told you that you are not raising that animal. You are raising two possible dogs stitched into one body, and the Doorway Test that told you which one you got also tells you something less obvious: how much you can trust this particular dog's signals, and when.

A Golden-leaning dog is built to communicate with you. It will often signal early and clearly — heading for the door, sitting near it, giving you a look that means something. A Poodle-leaning dog is built to solve problems on its own, which is a different skill from announcing its needs to a human, and it is entirely capable of noticing that the rug is closer than the back door.

> **Neither of those is a character flaw. But it means the single most common piece of potty training advice — watch for the signal — is the least reliable tool you have for this breed, in the exact window when you need reliability most. What actually works is something more boring and considerably more effective.**





The schedule does the work the signal can't

A fixed schedule does not wait for a signal. It puts the dog outside before the need becomes urgent enough to announce itself, which means you are almost never troubleshooting a signal you may have misread.

Out on waking, after every meal, after every play session or period of excitement, and otherwise on a clock through the day – the interval gets longer as the dog gets older and its bladder capacity grows, but in the learning phase it should feel more frequent than seems necessary. This is the same routine Chapter 2 introduced in the first two weeks. What changes now is that you are running it deliberately, tracking it, and holding it in place until the dog has gone weeks without an indoor accident – not days.

The schedule is not a placeholder until the dog “gets it.” It is what gets it. A dog taken out often enough that its bladder is rarely full has very little opportunity to practice the wrong thing, and a behavior that never gets rehearsed indoors never becomes a habit indoors.





Reward outside, not back at the door

This is the detail that quietly sabotages more house training than any other single mistake.

A dog connects a reward to whatever it is doing at the moment the reward arrives — not to whatever it did twenty seconds earlier. If your puppy finishes in the yard and you wait until you're both back inside, drying paws, before producing the treat, you have just rewarded walking back through the door. The elimination itself got nothing.

Reward on the spot, within a few seconds, exactly where it happened. Have the treat ready before you go out, not fetched afterward. Then — and this matters as much as the timing — give the dog a few minutes of play or a bit more time outside rather than marching it straight back in. A dog that learns "finishing means the fun ends immediately" has every incentive to stall, and a dog that stalls outside in the rain for ten minutes has quietly taught you that going out doesn't work, when the actual lesson was one you installed by accident.

Supervise or confine — there is no third setting

During the learning phase there are exactly two acceptable states for a dog that is not yet house trained: under direct supervision, or confined somewhere it is very unlikely to want to soil. There is no safe middle option where the dog has the run of the house and you're "keeping an ear out."

The reason is not about catching the dog in the act to correct it. It's that relief is its own reward. A dog that empties itself on the carpet feels better regardless of anything you do afterward, which means an unsupervised accident reinforces itself whether or not you ever find out about it. Every rehearsal, caught or not, makes the next one more likely.

Supervision means the dog is in the room with you, ideally on a loose leash or tether if you're prone to losing track of it for a few minutes, so you can catch the early signs and get outside before anything happens. Confinement means a crate, a pen, or a single puppy-proofed room — small enough that the dog doesn't have a far corner to retreat to and soil, since most dogs have a strong preference against fouling the space they sleep in. If you cannot do either of those things right now, the dog goes into confinement. "Loose and unsupervised" is the failure mode, not a compromise.

Signals this breed makes easy to miss

A goldendoodle's size and coat work against you here in two specific ways.

The classic early signals — sniffing in tight circles, sudden restlessness, heading toward a door or a previously used spot — are subtler on a dog this size, because it has more floor to cover before the behavior becomes obvious, and a curly, longer coat can visually blur the tail carriage and the tight circling that would be easy to spot on a shorter-coated dog. You are often reading movement through fluff rather than a clean silhouette.

The second problem is temperament-specific.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog usually signals early and clearly when nothing else is competing for its attention. The failure mode is inconsistency under distraction — mid-play, with guests in the house, or absorbed in watching you do something interesting, the signal gets deprioritised or skipped entirely, not because the dog is being sneaky but because signalling you takes a back seat to whatever currently has its focus. Don't read a missed signal here as regression; read it as the schedule not yet covering that particular kind of distraction.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog is capable of noticing, the same way it notices which door is unlatched or which counter is reachable, that indoor elimination sometimes carries no real consequence — no interruption, no immediate correction, a soft rug instead of cold grass. That is not defiance. It is the same experimental process that makes this dog quick to learn everything else, applied to a question you'd rather it not investigate. The fix isn't punishment; it's making sure the schedule and confinement close off the opportunity to run that experiment in the first place.

Why punishment after the fact backfires

Scolding a dog for a mess you discover minutes or hours later teaches nothing about where to go to the bathroom, because dogs do not connect a consequence to an act that finished before the consequence arrived. What the "guilty look" owners describe actually is a submissive response to your tone, posture, and volume in that moment — not an admission tied to the mess.

What the dog does learn is that your presence, combined with the smell of a mess, sometimes means something unpleasant happens. That produces exactly the opposite of what you want: a dog that hides to eliminate — behind furniture, in a spare room, somewhere out of sight — rather than one that trusts you enough to be predictable in front of you. A problem you could solve in two weeks with a schedule and supervision becomes a much slower one involving a dog that actively avoids being watched.

If you find a mess after the fact, clean it with an enzymatic cleaner and say nothing. The only useful information in an old mess is where your supervision gap was.

The adult dog that suddenly forgets

A young dog making mistakes during the learning phase is normal. A grown dog that has been reliable for months or years and suddenly starts having accidents is a different situation entirely, and it should be treated as one.

This is not a training relapse to be corrected with a stricter schedule. Sudden regression in a previously solid adult is one of the more reliable early signs of a physical problem — a urinary tract infection, a bladder or kidney issue, diabetes, or in an older dog the cognitive changes Chapter 13 touched on, along with joint pain that makes the trip to the door genuinely harder than it used to be. See a vet before you retrain anything. If the cause is medical, no amount of schedule or reward is going to fix it, and every day spent treating it as a behavior problem is a day the actual cause goes unaddressed.

What to take from this chapter

1. A fixed schedule beats watching for signals, because it gets the dog outside before urgency forces an unreliable signal.
2. Reward within seconds, on the spot outside — not back at the door, which rewards the wrong behavior entirely.
3. During the learning phase there are only two settings: supervised or confined. Loose and unwatched is how accidents get rehearsed and reinforced.
4. Size and coat make this breed's early signals genuinely harder to spot, and a Poodle-leaning dog may test indoor elimination the same way it tests every other rule.
5. Punishment after the fact teaches hiding, not house training. A sudden regression in a previously reliable adult means a vet visit first, not a stricter schedule.

Chapter 15 moves outdoors properly, to the other place all of this training gets tested at once: off-leash time with dogs your dog didn't choose.

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The dog everyone assumes is safe

Your Goldendoodle has a face built for trust. Curly, soft-eyed, permanently pleased to see the world — strangers assume good manners on sight, and at the park they will walk their dog straight up to yours without asking first. Most of the time this goes fine. The breed's reputation for friendliness is earned.

But temperament is not the whole story, and this chapter covers the part that gets left out. A friendly dog moving at speed is still a large body in motion. Good intentions do not change the physics of a body-slam, and a genuinely happy, well-socialized Doodle can knock a small dog off its feet, flatten a puppy, or terrify a stiff-hipped senior – while having a wonderful time and understanding none of it as a problem. This is one of the most common complaints leveled at the breed, and it has nothing to do with aggression. It is size, exuberance, and a dog that has not yet learned to read the room.





What real play actually looks like

Good play is loose. Watch the whole body, not just the tail.

Safe Play With Other Dogs

- **Bouncy, exaggerated movement** — a real play run has a springy, floppy quality that a genuine chase does not.
- **The play bow** — front end down, rear end up, tail loose and wagging. This is a dog announcing *everything after this is a game*.
- **Self-interruption** — dogs that are actually playing stop themselves. They shake off, sniff the ground, circle back, sneeze, then start again. A play session with no pauses in it is worth a second look.
- **Role reversal** — the dog being chased becomes the chaser a few minutes later, and both dogs keep coming back for more. Play that only runs in one direction is not a mutual game.
- **Soft, open mouths** — even during wrestling and mock-biting, jaws stay loose and un-tensed, and a yelp gets an immediate change in the other dog's behavior.





What tension looks like instead

- A **stiff, frozen body** – weight forward, legs locked, no bounce anywhere in the posture.
- A **fixed stare** held longer than a glance.
- A tail held **high and rigid**, vibrating rather than wagging – a different signal from a loose, low wag.
- **One-sided chasing** that does not stop when the chased dog tries to hide, freeze, or get behind its owner.
- **Growling with a stiff body**, as opposed to the loose, bouncy growl that shows up mid-wrestle and means nothing at all.

Safe Play With Other Dogs

The single most useful question is not "does this look rough?" — wrestling looks rough and is usually fine. The question is **does it pause and restart on its own?** Real play self-interrupts every twenty or thirty seconds without anyone stepping in. Real tension does not interrupt itself. It only escalates, and the escalation is smoother and quieter than most owners expect — it rarely looks like the dramatic snarling scene people are watching for.

One behavior confuses almost every owner the first time they see it: mounting. Puppies do it in play and it is usually meaningless, just an overexcited body doing something clumsy. In an adolescent or adult dog, repeated mounting during a group play session is less about play and more about one dog trying to control another's movement. It is worth interrupting the same way you would interrupt any escalating pattern — calmly, before it becomes the other dog's problem to solve alone.

Safe Play With Other Dogs



How to interrupt without punishing the fun

Most owners either intervene on every bit of noisy play, which teaches the dog that having fun gets it in trouble, or wait for a full-blown fight, which is too late. Neither is the skill you want.

Build a **check-in during play**: call your dog away mid-game with the recall word from Chapter 9, feed something good the instant it arrives, and release it straight back to play. Practiced early and often, in sessions that are going *well*, this does two things at once — it makes your recall reliable in the one setting where it usually fails, and it means your dog never learns that being called away from another dog is the end of the good part.

When something has actually tipped into tension, you do not need drama to fix it. Walk in calmly, clip a leash on your dog or take it by the harness, and move it away without shouting or grabbing at collars. A calm, unhurried separation rarely upsets either dog further. A loud, panicked one usually does.

The off-leash dog park, honestly

Off-leash parks are where the breed's size problem shows up hardest, because nobody at the gate is filtering who gets in. A young, athletic Doodle running full speed genuinely does not register that the elderly dog in its path cannot take a shoulder check the way another Doodle could. This is not a training failure in the moment — it is a mismatch that should never have been allowed to develop, and spotting it coming is entirely the owner's job, not the smaller dog's.

> **Watch the other dog as closely as you watch yours. A dog backing into a corner, pressing against its own owner's legs, or repeatedly trying to put a bench between itself and your dog is telling you it does not want this game, regardless of how thrilled your dog looks. Call yours off before that dog is airborne, not after.**

It also helps to remember that not every dog at a park is there to meet yours. A dog on a leash while every other dog runs free is very often a dog in training, in recovery from an injury, reactive, elderly, or simply not in the mood — and a large exuberant Doodle bounding over to introduce itself is not a kindness in that moment, it is an ambush. Ask before you let your dog approach any leashed dog, and treat "no" as a complete answer.

Choosing playmates on purpose

"Dogs love other dogs" is not a matching strategy. Size, energy, and age matter more than species-level friendliness.

Safe Play With Other Dogs

A boisterous six-month-old Doodle with no body control yet is a poor match for a frail senior of any breed, and a full-grown adult Doodle is a poor match for a puppy that has not yet built the confidence to say no. Energy matters as much as size — two similarly built dogs can still be a bad pairing if one wants a wrestling match and the other wants a slow sniff around the perimeter. The best playmates are dogs your dog already plays well with, met somewhere quieter than a crowded off-leash field: a friend's yard, a quiet corner of a park, a small structured playgroup.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog is so busy checking in with people that it can genuinely miss what another dog is telling it — it will keep soliciting play from a dog that has already stiffened and looked away, not out of pushiness but because it never clocked the signal. You have to watch the other dog, because yours is watching you.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog reads other dogs accurately and tests the boundary anyway, nudging a gentle game one notch rougher to see what it can get away with. That is not a reading failure — it is the same boundary-testing you have already seen at doorways and countertops, aimed at another dog instead of you. Step in on the testing early, before the other dog runs out of patience and ends the conversation itself.

What to take from this chapter

Safe Play With Other Dogs

1. Real play is loose, bouncy, and interrupts itself. Tension is stiff, fixed, and does not stop on its own.
2. Practice calling your dog out of play and releasing it straight back in — it builds recall without ending the fun.
3. Separate genuine tension calmly, without shouting or grabbing. Drama makes it worse, not better.
4. A large, exuberant Doodle can be too much dog for a small or elderly one with entirely good intentions. Watch the other dog, not just yours.
5. Match playmates by size, energy, and age — friendliness alone is not a safety plan.

Chapter 16 looks at the training you already have, and how easily it slips backward without anyone noticing.

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The dog that suddenly forgot

Preventing Regression

Somewhere after the teenage phase settles, most owners relax. The dog that took months to build — a reliable recall, a door it doesn't bolt through, a sit it holds without three reminders — starts to feel finished. Then, often with no warning, a piece of it goes missing. The recall that has worked for a year stops working at the park. A dog that slept through the night for months starts pacing again. A dog that greeted guests calmly is suddenly jumping, or backing away from people it has met a dozen times.

> **The instinct is to read this as a character judgment. He knows better. He's being difficult. Almost none of that is true. Regression has causes, and they are more useful to know than to guess at. This chapter goes through them in the order to actually check.**





It might be working, not breaking

Start with the possibility owners get backwards most often.

If you have recently tightened something – started paying a recall properly again, stopped letting the dog up on the sofa, gone back to saying a cue once instead of five times – a behavior will often get **worse before it gets better**. This has a name: an **extinction burst**. When something that used to work stops working, the animal doesn't quietly give up. It tries harder for a while, testing whether the old rule still applies somewhere.

> **A dog that used to get away with jumping on guests, now being asked to keep four paws down, will often jump more for the first few days of consistent handling – not because the training failed, but because it is confirming the rule really changed. Owners see the spike, conclude the new approach isn't working, and quit right at the point it was about to pay off. A behavior that would have faded by day three of consistency comes back by day ten of inconsistency, having now learned that persistence wins.**

If you have just gotten stricter about something, expect a short, louder version of the old behavior before it fades. That is not a setback. That is the middle of the process.





The household went soft without a meeting

The opposite failure is quieter and takes longer to notice, because nobody decided anything.

Training holds when everyone in the house enforces it the same way. It erodes when one person quietly stops. Someone gets tired and lets the dog up on the bed “just tonight.” Someone finds it easier to feed from the table than to redirect. Someone stops asking for a sit before the leash goes on, twice a week, then most days.

None of this feels like a decision at the time. The dog experiences it differently: as new information about which rules are enforced and which are optional if you wait the human out. A Poodle-leaning dog especially notices the exception fast and generalizes from it. Allow the bed once, and within a week it is testing the sofa, the counter, and the front door — because the rule it actually learned was never "no," it was "no, usually."

Before concluding the dog has regressed, ask the boring question first: **has anyone in the house quietly stopped being consistent, and for how long?** Ask it as a genuine conversation, not an accusation. Most people can name the exact week once asked directly.

A known window, not a mystery

Chapter 4 covered the fear period most Doodles pass through in adolescence. Worth saying plainly here: for a real minority of dogs, something like it can recur later, in the settling-down stretch of young adulthood, roughly between one and two years, as confidence and hormones keep shifting after the main adolescent surge.

It looks identical to the first one. A dog that has been fine around traffic, or vacuum cleaners, or men in hats, suddenly is not. The protocol is also identical: increase distance rather than closing it, let the dog retreat, mark and pay calm behavior near the trigger, and never drag the dog toward the thing to prove there's nothing to fear. Handled the same careful way, a second fear period passes the same way the first one did — provided you recognize it as a stage, not permanent backsliding.

What actually changed at home

Dogs are far more sensitive to environmental continuity than most owners credit, and regression often traces back to something that changed around the dog rather than in it.

A new work schedule that shifts walks to a different time, or drops them some days. A house move. A new baby, a new pet, a relative staying for a month. The mat moved when furniture got rearranged. The dog park closing for renovation, leaving only a small yard. None of this feels dramatic to a person. All of it removes structure the dog was quietly relying on.

Run through the last month before assuming the dog itself is the problem: **what changed about the routine, environment, or schedule — even something too small to mention?** Owners are often surprised to find the "unexplained" regression started the same week the walk moved from morning to evening, or someone began working from home and the dog's quiet daytime hours disappeared.

When it isn't training at all

Here is the check that has to come before all the others, and the one owners skip most, because "he's just testing me again" is a more comfortable story than the alternative.

Sudden regression in a previously reliable adult dog is one of the most common early signs of a medical problem, not a behavioral one. Pain changes behavior in ways that look exactly like disobedience. A dog with an ear infection may snap at a hand reaching for its head — a handling failure, on the surface. A dog with early joint pain may stop coming when called across the yard, which reads as recall breaking down, when trotting across grass now simply hurts. A dog with declining hearing may not hear the cue at all, and one with declining vision may hesitate at thresholds it used to clear without a thought. A urinary tract infection can undo months of house training in a week, in a dog that isn't being naughty at all.

This is where Chapter 1's temperament split matters again, more here than almost anywhere else in this book.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This is the dog to worry about first. A soft, eager-to-please dog is the one most likely to keep performing through discomfort, because its whole orientation is toward not disappointing you — it will keep sitting on a sore hip, keep coming when called on a leg that hurts, right up until it genuinely can't. By the time its behavior visibly changes, the problem is often further along than it would be in a more vocal dog. Do not wait for a dramatic symptom. A quiet change — slower to get up, half a second longer before answering its name — is the entire warning you get.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog tends to announce discomfort sooner and more clearly — avoiding a paw, refusing a jump it normally takes without hesitation. That's useful, but don't read it as "just being stubborn about that one thing" because this dog has a track record of opinions. A sudden, narrow refusal that wasn't there last month is still worth ruling out physically before you treat it as a boundary test.

The rule that covers both: any sudden behavioral change in a dog with an established, reliable history deserves a veterinary check before you assume it's a training problem and start retraining. Retraining a pain response as defiance doesn't just fail to fix it — it teaches the dog that telling you something hurts gets it corrected instead of helped.

Audit before you retrain

When something that used to work stops working, resist jumping straight back into drilling the behavior. Run through this in order — the answer changes what you do next:

1. **Have I recently gotten more consistent about something?** If yes, this may be an extinction burst — hold the line two more weeks before deciding it isn't working.
2. **Has anyone in the house quietly gotten less consistent?** Ask directly. One honest answer here solves more "regressions" than anything else in this book.
3. **Is this a known developmental window?** Check the dog's age against the fear-period timelines in Chapter 4 and above.
4. **Has anything changed about the routine, environment, or schedule this month?** Include the small things.
5. **Has anything changed about the dog physically?** Appetite, energy, sleep, willingness to jump or climb stairs, reaction to being touched somewhere specific. If the answer is yes, or even maybe, this is a vet visit before it is a training session.

Only once you've gone through all five does it make sense to retrain anything — and by then you usually already know which one it was.

What to take from this chapter

1. A behavior that briefly worsens right after you get consistent is often a sign the consistency is working, not failing. Hold the line for two weeks before concluding otherwise.
2. Check for household inconsistency before retraining anything. One person quietly relaxing a rule is the most common cause of "unexplained" regression.
3. A second fear period can genuinely recur in young adulthood. Handle it exactly like Chapter 4's: distance and food, never dragging the dog toward the thing.
4. Changes to routine, environment, or schedule are silent triggers. Audit the last month before you audit the dog.
5. Sudden regression in a previously reliable adult dog is a medical question first and a training question second — especially in a stoic, eager-to-please Golden-leaning dog that will keep performing through real discomfort until it visibly can't.

Chapter 17 covers travel and car safety — territory where a dog's tolerance can look identical to what this chapter describes, and where knowing the difference between "hasn't been taught yet" and "something actually changed" matters just as much.

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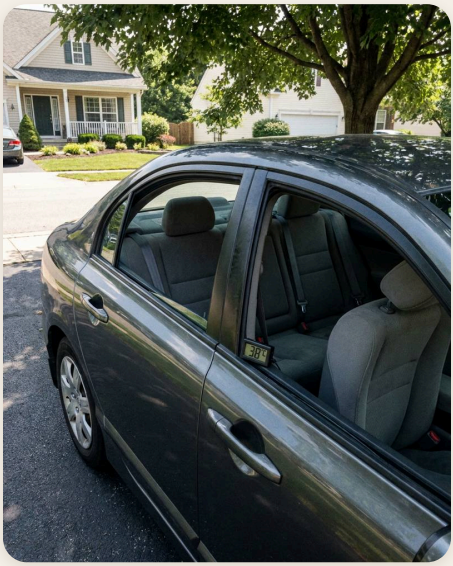
The car is not the dangerous part

Most owners worry about the wrong half of travel. They worry about whether the dog will settle on a long drive, and they give almost no thought to how the dog is actually secured while it does — or to the ten minutes at a rest stop that turns out to be the riskiest part of the entire trip.

Travel & Car Safety

This chapter covers both halves: getting your Doodle safely from A to B, and getting through the times someone else is holding the leash — a sitter, a boarding kennel, a flight. None of it is complicated. Almost all of it is just deciding, in advance, to take the boring precaution rather than the convenient one.





Restrained, every single trip

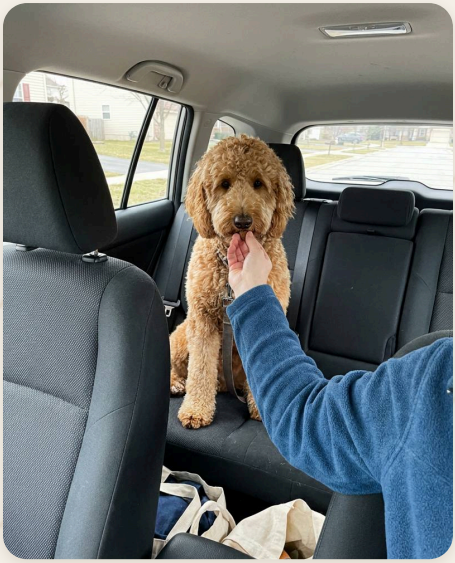
Travel & Car Safety

A Doodle at full adult size is a large, dense animal, and in a collision an unrestrained dog of that size becomes exactly as dangerous as any other unsecured heavy object in the car — to itself, and to the people in the front seats. Loose in the cargo area is not a compromise. Riding on a lap is not a compromise either, and it is worse: a dog on a lap is between an airbag and a person.

Two options are genuinely safe:

- **A crash-tested harness**, sized correctly and clipped into the seatbelt buckle, on the back seat. Look for independent crash-test evidence for a dog your Doodle's size — a manufacturer's claim of "safety tested" on the packaging is marketing copy, not a certification.
- **A secured crate**, appropriately sized, strapped down so it cannot slide or tip — either in the back seat or the cargo area, never simply set in loose.

Pick one and use it every time, not just for long trips. Most journeys with a dog are short ones — the vet, the park, a friend's house — and short journeys are exactly the ones owners skip the harness for.





The rule with no exceptions

> A dog left alone in a parked car is never safe. Not for five minutes. Not with the windows cracked. Not in the shade. Not on a mild day.

This is not a warning specific to flat-faced breeds, and treating it as one is how well-meaning owners talk themselves into "it's fine, it's not that hot." It is not fine at any temperature that would make you consider it. A parked car heats up faster than intuition suggests, and a dog cannot cool itself the way you can. Chapter 13 already told you why this breed is worse at heat management than most: a curly, dense coat holds heat rather than shedding it, and it is not doing your dog any favors in a hot cabin.

If the errand cannot include the dog, the dog stays home.

Teaching the car to mean nothing in particular

The same principle that built the mat in Chapter 5 and the alone-time protocol in Chapter 6 applies here: **start smaller than feels necessary, and separate the pieces before you combine them.**

A dog that has only ever experienced the car as the vehicle to the vet, or the vehicle to a chaotic, overstimulating outing, has good reason to find it stressful. Build a different association before you need one.

1. Put the dog, restrained, in the car with the engine off. Feed a few pieces of food. Let it out again.
2. Repeat with the engine running and the car stationary.
3. Add a short drive around the block — out, straight back, nothing else.
4. Only once all three are boring does the car earn a real destination.

Do the early sessions often enough that they stop being an event. A dog that has sat calmly in a parked, running car a dozen times before its first real road trip arrives at that trip with no novelty left to react to.

Motion sickness in a young dog

Puppies and young adolescents get carsick more often than mature dogs, partly because the inner ear structures involved in balance are still developing and partly because an anxious dog and a nauseated one drool, yawn and lick their lips in almost identical ways — which makes the two easy to confuse. Most dogs outgrow the physical component somewhere around a year old.

Until then, manage it rather than push through it: travel on an empty or lightly filled stomach, keep the car cool and well ventilated, and favor short, frequent trips over one long one while the dog is still finding its feet. If vomiting continues well into adulthood, or is severe, that has stopped being a puppy-motion-sickness question and become a vet question.

Road-trip logistics for a heat-sensitive coat

Long drives need a bit more planning for this breed than for a short-coated dog.

- **Water on hand at every stop**, not just when the dog seems thirsty.
- **Shade, not pavement**, for rest breaks — hot asphalt burns paw pads well before it feels uncomfortable to the sole of a shoe, and a curly coat in direct sun heats up fast.
- **Exercise before the long stretch of driving, not after it.** A dog that has just had a hard run and gets straight into a warm, stationary car has no way to shed the heat it is still carrying. Let it cool down first; save the run for after, once the car has had a chance to air out.
- **Keep rest-stop breaks on leash.** An unfamiliar rest stop, with unfamiliar smells and traffic nearby, is not the place to test the recall from Chapter 9.

Packing for someone else to run the household

Whenever another person is temporarily in charge — a sitter, a friend, a boarding kennel — the goal is to make your absence as uneventful as possible for the dog, which means handing over your systems, not just your dog.

Write down, plainly, for someone who has never met this dog:

- **The marker word** from Chapter 3 and what it means — a sitter who says "good boy" instead of "Yes" hasn't broken anything, but a sitter who doesn't know the word exists can't use it to communicate clearly in the first two days.
- **The feeding schedule**, amounts and timing, not just the brand of food.
- **The mat and its meaning**, from Chapter 5 — a familiar mat traveling with the dog gives it one predictable thing in an unpredictable place.
- **The release word**, so cues don't quietly stop meaning anything for a few days.
- Your **vet's details and the nearest emergency clinic**, per Chapter 13, even if the sitter is only booked for two nights.

None of this replaces the actual bond the dog has with you. It does mean the dog is not also relearning an entirely new set of rules on top of missing you.

Flying and kennels, at a glance

A standard-sized Doodle is too large for most airlines' in-cabin allowance and will typically need to travel in the cargo hold, which comes with its own health-certificate requirements and breed or size restrictions that vary by airline and route — call the airline directly and confirm current policy well before booking, rather than relying on what was true last year. Do not sedate a dog for a flight without your vet's explicit guidance; sedation and altitude are not always a safe combination, and it is a vet decision, not a convenience one.

For a boarding kennel, the same due diligence applies as for a sitter, plus a site visit if you can manage one: ask how a large, energetic breed's exercise needs are actually met there, and confirm the facility can accommodate a dog this size and this active before you commit, not on the drop-off day.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) For this dog, the hard part of travel is rarely the car itself — it's the separation on the other end. A boarding stay without you is a bigger ask than any drive. Brief your sitter thoroughly on the marker word and the mat, so the dog gets recognizable signals even without you in the room, and don't be surprised if it settles fastest with a familiar object of yours nearby.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) For this dog, the hard part is boredom, not distance. Long stretches of stillness with nothing to do are exactly when this dog starts working on a seatbelt clip or a crate latch out of sheer problem-solving instinct. Give the drive a job — a stuffed or frozen chew, the same frozen work from Chapter 5 — before it invents one of its own.

What to take from this chapter

1. Restrain the dog properly on every trip, not just the long ones — a crash-tested harness or a secured crate, never loose and never on a lap.
2. Never leave any dog in a parked car, in any season, for any length of time. There is no safe version of this.
3. Build calm car tolerance in stages, the same way you built the mat and the alone-time work — parked, then running, then a short drive, before any real trip.
4. Young-dog motion sickness is usually outgrown; manage it with an empty stomach and short trips until then, and see a vet if it persists into adulthood.
5. Whoever runs your dog's routine while you're away needs your actual systems — marker word, feeding schedule, mat, vet's number — not just a leash and a bag of food.

Chapter 18 closes the book with the stretch of life every one of these chapters has been quietly preparing you for — the senior years, and what changes as this breed gets older.

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What Chapter 13 didn't have room for

Chapter 13 gave you the short version of aging: what to watch for, and how often to get a senior check. All of that still applies, and none of it is repeated here.

Senior Years & Longevity

This chapter is the longer version — what actually changes in the day-to-day running of the house once "he's slowing down a bit" stops being a passing comment and becomes the shape of your routine. It covers exercise, furniture, games and food, and it closes the book the way a relationship this long deserves: without pretending any of it is optional.

Nothing here replaces your vet. Aging produces a wide range of normal — and an equally wide range of things that only look normal — and only a professional examining the dog can tell them apart. What follows is what to bring to that conversation, and what to change meanwhile.





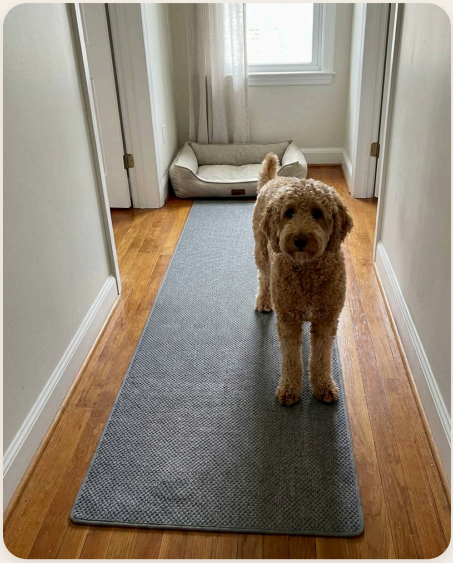
Recall and off-leash freedom, recalibrated

Chapter 9 built a recall on a long line, up a deliberate ladder, until your dog could run full-out across an open field and still turn for home. That freedom doesn't have to end with age. It has to be re-graded.

Favor terrain over distance now — flat, familiar ground is where an aging hip stays safe; an uneven field with rabbit holes is where it gives out. Several short outings beat one long one; a stiffening joint tolerates twenty minutes twice as well as sixty minutes once, and a second short walk in the evening often prevents the overnight stiffness. Swimming, where your dog has always liked it, is close to ideal: real cardiovascular work with almost no impact.

The word itself doesn't need retraining. What often needs retraining is you. Watch for a recall that's gone from instant to a beat slower — not the cost-benefit delay Chapter 9 described in a Poodle-leaning dog, but a genuine half-second where a stiff dog is getting itself moving. That's information, not disobedience returning. If your dog's hearing is going, back the word up with a hand signal you've paired with it for years, and stop relying on distance and volume the way you once could. An emergency recall built for three or four uses a year is worth rehearsing again as hearing fades — better to find that out in a quiet field than at a roadside.





The house itself becomes part of the routine

Chapter 13 named hips and elbows as a real, inherited risk for this cross — not a maybe. Everything below exists because of that one fact.

A ramp into the trunk of the car, or up to a favorite sofa spot removes the single most repetitive high-impact movement in a senior dog's day: the jump. Landing is harder on joints than taking off, and a dog that's jumped in and out of a car for a decade will keep doing it long after it should stop — nothing in its own head tells it otherwise. You have to make that call for it.

Orthopedic bedding — genuinely supportive foam, not a flat cushion — matters more now: a dog with joint changes spends more hours lying down and gets less benefit from ordinary padding. The floor matters too. Hardwood, tile and laminate, common in exactly the kind of home this book describes, are a real hazard for declining grip and confidence — a slipped back leg on a smooth floor is a genuine way for an old dog to hurt itself in its own hallway. Runners and rugs along the routes it actually uses do real work here, and keeping the hair between the pads trimmed (Chapter 7's weekly check) removes one more small slip risk.

None of this is premature. Put it in place while your dog is still managing well, not after the first fall.



Enrichment, scaled down but not switched off

Chapter 12 made the case that a Poodle-leaning brain needs a job and will invent a bad one if you don't supply a good one. That need doesn't retire when the body does — a dog doing less physically has more spare mental capacity looking for somewhere to go, and a bored senior dog develops the same "problems" a bored adolescent one did.

Keep the low-impact games from Chapter 12 and let the demanding ones go. Scatter feeding still works beautifully and costs the joints nothing. Snuffle mats and lick mats suit a senior dog even better than a young one — all the mental engagement, none of the movement. Scent work ages especially well: a dog that can't run for twenty minutes can often still search with total focus for five, and come out just as satisfied. Trim back on repeated jumping, spinning or hard twisting — a stationary trick like a paw or a chin rest earns roughly the same mental workout as a full-body one, for far less cost. Shorter, more frequent sessions suit an older dog better than one long one.

The difference between slowing down and something else

Some decline in a senior dog is straightforwardly physical: slower on stairs, more sleep, less enthusiasm for the third lap, a longer warm-up before it moves easily. That's ordinary aging.

Cognitive decline shows up differently, and it's worth knowing the shape of it so you notice rather than explain it away: disorientation that has nothing to do with stiff joints — standing at the hinge side of a door, getting stuck behind familiar furniture, staring at a wall; a sleep-wake cycle coming apart, pacing or panting at night after sleeping through the day; house-training reliability slipping with no physical cause; a moment where your dog seems not to register a familiar person or place. Any of these, especially together, is a specific conversation for your vet — not a diagnosis to make yourself, and not something to file under "he's just old." One of these is unavoidable; the other is often manageable once it's named, and confusing them costs your dog time that mattered.

Food, appetite, and the numbers on the scale

Chapter 13 named weight as the single largest thing an owner controls, and metabolism shifts again in the senior years. A dog doing less can gain weight on the same portion that suited it at five, and extra weight on a body already carrying joint risk compounds the very problem it's meant to be comfortable in. Equally, unplanned weight loss or a genuine drop in appetite isn't something to wait out — it's often the first visible sign of something worth investigating, well before anything else shows.

Ask your vet directly whether a senior diet, a change in protein or calorie content, or a joint supplement suits your dog, rather than choosing one off a shelf label. A seven-year-old merely slowing down and a twelve-year-old managing diagnosed arthritis are not the same answer, and your vet has the dog and the bloodwork; you have the daily observation. Together that's a complete picture — alone, neither of you has one.

Paying attention on purpose

Decline this gradual is nearly invisible from inside it. You see your dog every day, which is exactly why you're the last to notice the muzzle going gray or the jump onto the bed becoming a pause-then-jump. Most owners only see the whole shape of it in hindsight — a photo from two summers ago, held next to the dog asleep at their feet right now.

There's a simple corrective, and it costs nothing but the choice to do it: look on purpose, occasionally, rather than only in passing. Weigh your dog periodically rather than trusting your eye, as Chapter 13 suggested, and notice, out loud if it helps, what's different this month from last. None of this is about bracing for an ending — it's about being genuinely present for the years you have left, instead of taking in all the changes at once, later, in a photograph. A dog that's spent its whole life checking your face, or calculating the gap, deserves an owner who's actually looking back.

→ **If your dog looked at you** (Golden-leaning) This dog will keep trying to do the old routine for as long as its body technically allows, because keeping up with you matters more than comfort does — it won't opt out of the second lap on its own, even with sore hips. The pacing has to come from you, proactively, well before it visibly struggles. Waiting for it to tell you it's had enough means waiting for a dog that was never going to tell you.

→ **If your dog looked at the gap** (Poodle-leaning) This dog will generally tell you plainly when it's had enough — balking at the car ramp, declining a third throw — and that refusal is useful information worth respecting. But a Poodle-leaning dog that suddenly seems to be regressing in old age — chewing again, restless at night, the Chapter 16 problems reappearing — is rarely being difficult. Far more often it's a sharp mind that still wants work, in a body that can no longer spend the energy it used to, looking for somewhere to put the surplus.

What to take from this chapter

1. Scale back exercise before your dog is visibly struggling, not after — shorter and more frequent beats long and occasional, and flat familiar ground beats new and interesting.
2. Ramps, real orthopedic bedding, and non-slip flooring aren't premature fuss for this breed. They're prevention for a joint risk Chapter 13 already told you was real.
3. Keep the brain games from Chapter 12 running, just gentler and shorter. A dog that can't run still needs something to think about.
4. Ordinary slowing is physical. Disorientation, a broken sleep cycle, or house-training changes with no physical explanation are a specific conversation for your vet, not a shrug.
5. Weight can climb or drop in an older dog, and either direction is information your vet needs — alongside the daily observation only you have.

Where this all started

Go back, for a moment, to the doorway from Chapter 1.

You ran that test in the first week or two — stood still, said nothing, watched whether your dog checked your face or measured the gap. Nothing about the answer has expired. The dog that looked at you is, years later, still the one that will hide discomfort rather than trouble you with it, still the one you have to pace and protect on its own behalf, right through to the ramp by the car door. The dog that looked at the gap is still doing arithmetic — about the recall, about the muffin tin, about whether tonight's restlessness is boredom or something worth mentioning to the vet. Seventeen chapters of advice, and underneath all of it was really one instruction: find out which dog you actually have, and answer that dog, not the one in the book.

That, more than any technique, is what a good Goldendoodle owner ends up with — not a list of commands the dog performs, but a working fluency in one particular animal: what its silences mean, what a hesitation at a doorway or a car trunk or a bowl is telling you. You built that fluency chapter by chapter, mostly without noticing. It doesn't retire when the dog slows down. If anything, it's the only thing that gets more valuable.

There's no dramatic finish to write here, and this book was never going to invent one. There's a dog getting grayer around the muzzle, still checking your face or still weighing the gap, still worth the two minutes of hands-on attention every single week regardless of which one it is. Keep doing that. It was always the whole job.

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