

Handler Self-Check

A grounding tool for when the pressure is rising

Before you can help your dog regulate, you need to know where you are. This check-in is not about performance. It's about honest awareness. Use it when you feel the pressure building: before a walk, after a difficult moment, or whenever you notice yourself bracing.

PART ONE

What's happening in your body right now?

Check anything you notice.

- Tension in my chest, shoulders, or jaw
- Grip tightening on the leash
- Breath is shallow or held
- Scanning the environment more than usual
- Heart rate elevated
- A sense of dread or anticipation before anything has happened
- Stomach tight
- Feeling detached or on autopilot

Anything else you notice?

PART TWO

What are you bringing to this moment?

Your dog is reading your state constantly. These questions help you see what you're transmitting.

Am I already expecting something to go wrong?

Am I treating this walk as a test?

What happened earlier today that I might still be carrying?

On a scale of 1–10, how regulated do I feel right now?

What does my dog need from me in this moment? Not what do I need from them.

PART THREE

Ground yourself before you continue

Choose at least one before moving forward.

- Take three slow breaths. Exhale longer than the inhale.
 - Feel your feet on the ground. Notice the weight of your body.
 - Drop your shoulders. Unclench your jaw.
 - Loosen your grip on the leash, even slightly.
 - Name five things you can see right now.
 - Remind yourself: this moment is not an emergency.
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PART FOUR

After the moment

Use this space after a difficult walk or interaction. Not to judge yourself, but to notice and release.

What triggered me (not just my dog)?

What did I do well, even imperfectly?

What would I do differently, without self-blame?

What does my dog need from me right now to recover?

What do I need?

The goal isn't a perfect walk. It's showing up regulated enough that calm becomes available to your dog.