

# Is My Dog Regressing?

A handler's guide to recognizing and responding without spiraling

---

Noticing that something has shifted in your dog is not failure. It's awareness. This guide will help you identify what's happening, reframe what it means, and take your first steps forward without turning the moment into a verdict on yourself or your dog.

## PART ONE

### What You're Noticing

Check anything that has changed recently. You don't need all of these — even a few is worth paying attention to.

#### Behavioral changes

- Reacting to dogs, people, or environments they previously handled well
- Barking, lunging, or pulling more than usual
- Increased scanning or hypervigilance on walks
- Slower or absent response to familiar cues
- Body placement or task work feels less reliable
- Avoidance of spaces or situations they used to be comfortable in
- Stress signals appearing earlier or lasting longer (yawning, lip licking, whale eye)
- Less able to settle or decompress after outings

#### Relational changes

- Checking in with you less on walks
- Seems disconnected or "elsewhere" during work
- Less interested in reinforcement than usual
- Physical affection or proximity seeking has changed

#### Context worth noting

- Recent change in environment (move, travel, boarding)
  - Change in routine or handler schedule
  - A stressful or overwhelming event in the past few weeks
  - New sensitivities appearing that weren't there before
-

## PART TWO

### What This Isn't

Before you move forward, read these slowly.

*This is not proof that you did something wrong.*

*This is not permanent.*

*This is not a reflection of your dog's potential.*

*This is not a training failure — it's information.*

*Noticing early is a skill. You're already doing the right thing.*

---

## PART THREE

### What To Do First

Not a full recovery plan. Just where to start.

#### **Reduce pressure before adding more training**

Pull back on public access or high-demand environments temporarily. Decompression is not giving up. It's creating the conditions for recovery.

#### **Check in with yourself**

Your nervous system is part of your dog's environment. Are you bracing, scanning, or holding tension before anything has happened? Use the Handler Self-Check if you need somewhere to start.

#### **Keep what's working**

Don't overhaul everything. Find the contexts where your dog is still steady and spend more time there. Build from what holds, not only from what's broken.

#### **Give it time before you give it a verdict**

One hard week is not a trend. Two hard weeks might be. Watch for patterns over time rather than drawing conclusions from individual moments.

---

## PART FOUR

### When To Get Support

Consider reaching out to a trainer or behaviorist if you notice any of the following.

- Regression has been consistent for more than two to three weeks with no improvement
- New behaviors that feel unsafe for you, your dog, or others
- Your dog's stress signals are frequent and not resolving with rest
- You're avoiding walks or outings entirely due to anxiety about what might happen
- You're not sure if what you're seeing is regression or something medical

*Getting support is not an admission of failure. It's what good handlers do.*

---

*Regression isn't erasure. Your dog is still in there. So are you. Keep going.*

---