

# The First Shift

A practical tool for moving with your attachment style, not against it

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You have identified your pattern. Now comes the part that actually changes things. This is not about fixing your attachment style or performing a different one. It is about one small, specific shift you can make on your next walk. Not perfection. Not a complete overhaul. Just one thing, tried once, noticed honestly.

## IF YOU IDENTIFIED AS

### **The Anxious Handler**

*Your pattern: bracing before anything has happened, transmitting threat assessments your dog did not ask for.*

#### **THE SHIFT**

Before your next walk, set one intention: I will wait for actual information before I respond. When you notice the brace, the chest tightening, the hand moving up the leash, pause for one breath before acting on it. Check in with your body. What are you actually feeling right now? What is actually happening, not what might happen? Practice self-check-ins not to stop reading your environment, but to stay present in it. A regulated handler is a more effective one, not a passive one. The goal is not to stop scanning. It is to stop narrating every scan to your dog before you have decided it actually means something. Your dog is already reading you. When you regulate, you give them different information. That is not a small thing. That is the whole job in that moment. Start with one exhale. One shoulder drop. One deliberate loosening of your grip. Let your dog finish the sniff. Let the moment develop before you decide what it is.

#### **WHAT TO NOTICE AFTER**

- Did the brace come before or after your dog noticed something?
- How long was the gap between your alarm and theirs?
- What did you do with the feeling once you noticed it?
- You are not grading yourself. You are starting to see the sequence.

IF YOU IDENTIFIED AS

## The Avoidant Handler

*Your pattern: missing subtle stress signals, keeping the relationship consistent but not yet fully connected.*

### THE SHIFT

Pick one stress signal to look for deliberately on your next walk. Just one. A yawn at an unusual moment. A lip lick before a trigger appears. A slight tension in your dog's shoulders. When you see it, acknowledge it quietly. A small pace change. A word. A moment of contact. If something is unsettling your dog, try turning around before re-approaching it, or allow them to approach at their own pace with your calm presence beside them, without pressure. You are not being asked to feel more. You are being asked to notice more, and to let your dog know you noticed.

### WHAT TO NOTICE AFTER

- Did you catch the signal before or after your dog escalated?
- What did acknowledging it feel like?
- Did your dog respond differently when you slowed down or turned around?
- Awkward is fine. Awkward means you are doing something new.

IF YOU IDENTIFIED AS

## The Disorganized Handler

*Your pattern: inconsistent responses that leave your dog monitoring your state instead of relaxing into the walk.*

### THE SHIFT

Build one small predictable moment into every walk. The same thing, every time, before you leave. A grounding check-in. Three breaths. The same quiet phrase to your dog. It does not matter what it is. What matters is the repetition. You are giving your dog, and your own nervous system, a signal that says: this moment is structured, even when everything else is not. These small rituals will also help you get to know your own patterns, how different stressors affect how you show up, and where the wobble tends to come from. When a hard moment happens, come back to your dog with something quiet and warm. Repair is part of the pattern too.

### WHAT TO NOTICE AFTER

- Did the ritual help your body settle before you left?
- After a hard moment, did you find your way back to each other?
- Where did the inconsistency show up today?
- Notice the moments of reconnection. They count more than the hard moments.

IF YOU IDENTIFIED AS

## **The Secure Handler (In Progress)**

*Your pattern: building toward consistency, repair, and presence. Not arrived. Moving in the right direction.*

### **THE SHIFT**

Your work is maintenance and repair. When a hard moment happens, do not let it become a verdict. Notice what you did well, even imperfectly. Notice how quickly you came back to baseline. Notice whether your dog checks in with you after something difficult. When you catch yourself bracing, try the active approach: put your dog in a heel, exhale, and lead them past the distraction with at least outward steadiness. It does not have to be perfect. It just has to be a decision.

### **WHAT TO NOTICE AFTER**

- How quickly did you recover after a hard moment?
- Did your dog check in with you after something difficult?
- What old pattern showed up that surprised you?
- Secure is not the absence of patterns. It is catching them earlier.

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*One shift. One walk. One thing noticed honestly. That is how steady is built.*

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The Steady Handler . [thesteadyhandler.substack.com](http://thesteadyhandler.substack.com)