

TRAUMA WHISPERS BEFORE IT ROARS

Companion Workbook

Chapter 6: Four-Legged Trauma Mirrors

Pre-publication Draft

This is a living document.

Changes will be implemented as suggestions arrive.

Changes made since last update:

- Early and advanced reader (free) copies printed prior to launch date of 8/12/26 may not match the page numbers noted in the workbook. Readers may need to look for the content on neighboring pages.

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How to Give Feedback

Complete this chapter packet, then visit the OneEmprima.com/books/ or use the QR code on page 21 of your book to access the online feedback form and share your thoughts.

Let us know what helped in the book or workbook, what felt unclear, where you needed more room, and what you want to see included in the future editions of the book or companion workbook.



Check in before you begin. Where are you on the Roar Scale?

If you're at a 5 or above, turn to your Stand-Down Kit before continuing.

Awareness & Alignment Prompts

1. What behavior in your animal changes when your stress changes? Do you notice a correlation between your anger, anxiety, or sadness, and theirs?
2. What role does your animal appear to hold in your life: companion, protector, emotional anchor, source of comfort, reason to keep going, substitute for human connection, or something else? Is that role supportive for both of you?
3. What else could be contributing to your animal's behavior or health? Consider age, genetics, breed, pain, illness, environment, nutrition, routine, training, past experiences, and the behavior of other people or animals in the home.
4. Where might love have shifted into overprotection, control, people-pleasing, rescuing, or treating your animal as more fragile than they are?
5. What is one change you can make in your own regulation, your animal's environment, or your shared routine that could create more balance, movement, rest, play, or choice for both of you?
6. When fireworks, thunderstorms, or other loud noises occur, notice who reacts first. Does your animal respond directly to the sound, begin reacting after sensing your tension, or do both of your nervous systems activate together? What else, such as hearing sensitivity, past experience, breed, age, pain, or the intensity of the noise, might contribute to their response? What past traumas might contribute to your reaction?

Additional Journal Prompts

1. Think about the last two to five animals who have shared your home. What was happening in your life when each one arrived? What role did each animal seem to hold during that period? Look across their stories. Do you notice a recurring lesson, relationship pattern, emotional need, or type of animal you are repeatedly drawn to? *page 162*
2. When your animal receives a shot, examination, or medical treatment, what happens in your body? Do you brace, cringe, become tearful, feel guilty, or experience their discomfort as though it were happening to you? Has fear of failing them ever led you to agree to treatment before you fully understood its purpose, urgency, cost, alternatives, or likely benefit? What information would help you make decisions from responsible stewardship rather than panic or guilt?
3. Have you ever interpreted another person setting a reasonable boundary with your animal as rejection, cruelty, or evidence that they do not understand your bond? What did the interaction activate in you?
4. Are there natural behaviors you discourage because they make you anxious, create inconvenience, or challenge your sense of control? Consider sniffing, digging, climbing, exploring, running, vocalizing, playing roughly, spending time alone, or interacting with other animals. How can you honor your animal's nature while still providing appropriate boundaries and safety?
5. Have you ever continued rescuing, fostering, adopting, or caring for animals beyond your available space, finances, energy, or emotional capacity? What does being needed by an animal give you? What becomes harder to feel when your attention is focused on saving them?
6. Where does your animal have genuine choice within your relationship? How do they communicate yes, no, not now, enough, more, closer, or farther away? How well do you recognize and honor those signals?

EXERCISE 1

Shared Regulation

The Energy Reset Exercise in the book helped you intentionally settle your system beside your animal. This exercise asks you to observe what actually changes before, during, and after shared regulation.

Animals can be companions, co-regulators, and mirrors of the emotional weather in a home. Observe with care without turning every behavior into a message about you.

Choose a time when neither you nor your animal is highly distressed. If your animal welcomes proximity, sit nearby without forcing touch or interaction. Allow them to choose the distance. If no animal is currently present, you may complete this exercise by remembering an animal whose presence helped you feel safe.

Before deliberately changing your breath or posture, observe:

- Your breathing, muscle tension, heart rate, thoughts, and Roar Scale number
- Your animal's breathing, posture, pacing, vocalizing, gaze, distance, and overall softness or alertness
- Where each of you is positioned in relation to doors, windows, furniture, other people, and each other

Now soften one part of your own body. Unclench your jaw, lower your shoulders, place both feet on the floor, or lengthen your exhale. Do not call your animal closer. Let them decide whether to respond.

Wait quietly for two to five minutes.

1. What changed in your body when you slowed down?
2. What changed, or did not change, in your animal?
3. Who is regulating who, and is it equal or favoring one of you?
4. What does this teach you about the energy you bring into shared space?

EXERCISE 2

Mirror, Medical Need, or Something Else?

Behavior can reflect shared stress without being caused by it. It can also arise from pain, illness, age, genetics, breed, environment, nutrition, training, disrupted routines, previous experiences, or the behavior of another person or animal.

This exercise helps you remain curious without making yourself the cause of everything your animal experiences.

Choose one behavior that concerns, confuses, or interests you. Examples might include pacing, barking, hiding, overgrooming, feather plucking, overeating, guarding, clinginess, destructive behavior, aggression, withdrawal, toileting changes, disrupted sleep, or difficulty settling.

The behavior I am observing:

When did it begin?

How often does it happen?

Where does it usually happen?

Who or what is present when it happens?

What tends to happen immediately before it?

What tends to happen immediately afterward?

Now examine the behavior through four possible lenses.

Lens 1: Shared emotional weather

Does the behavior increase when I am angry, anxious, grieving, rushed, overwhelmed, or absent?

Does it decrease when I am calmer?

Does it change around another person or animal in the household?

Have I observed this pattern repeatedly, or am I relying on one memorable incident?

Lens 2: Body and health

Could pain, illness, medication, hormones, aging, hunger, thirst, sleep disruption, sensory changes, or another physical condition contribute?

Is the behavior new, sudden, escalating, or accompanied by physical symptoms?

Does this need evaluation by a veterinarian or another qualified animal-health professional?

Lens 3: Environment and routine

Has anything changed in the home, schedule, food, exercise, noise level, sleeping arrangement, household membership, or access to outdoor space?

Does the animal have enough movement, stimulation, rest, privacy, and species-appropriate activity?

Is the behavior occurring because the environment makes another choice difficult?

Lens 4: Learning and communication

Has the behavior been unintentionally rewarded?

Is my animal trying to gain distance, seek safety, request attention, communicate discomfort, or meet a natural need?

Would a qualified trainer, behaviorist, veterinarian, or species-specific expert help me understand it more accurately?

Discernment

What evidence suggests that my emotional state may influence the behavior?

What evidence suggests another explanation?

What information am I still missing?

What professional guidance, observation, or change in routine would help me learn more?

What is one safe, reversible change I can try without assuming I already know the cause?

If a behavior is sudden, severe, escalating, painful, dangerous, or accompanied by changes in eating, drinking, elimination, breathing, movement, or awareness, seek appropriate veterinary care.

Awareness and veterinary care are not competing explanations. Responsible stewardship can include both.

EXERCISE 3

Restoring the Counterbalance

The book describes search-and-rescue dogs after 9/11 being given staged opportunities for successful finds when real rescues became rare. The dogs needed more than work, stress, and repeated disappointment. They needed achievement, play, and relief.

Your animal also needs experiences that are not organized around your distress, their behavior problems, medical care, household tension, or the job of helping everyone else regulate.

Create one intentional counterbalance based on what your animal genuinely enjoys. It might include:

- A sniff walk without rushing
- A favorite game
- A safe opportunity to run, climb, dig, forage, splash, or explore
- A simple training task they can successfully complete
- Time in sunlight or fresh air
- A food puzzle or species-appropriate enrichment
- Quiet time without being touched
- Affection they actively request
- A familiar routine that helps them settle
- Time with a trusted person or compatible animal
- A comfortable place where no one asks anything of them

Choose something appropriate for your animal's age, health, species, mobility, temperament, and preferences.

The emotional or behavioral weight I have noticed:

The counterbalance I will offer:

Why I believe my animal enjoys this:

How my animal communicates yes or interest:

How my animal communicates no, enough, or not now:

Before beginning, observe your animal's posture, energy, distance, breathing, and level of engagement.

Afterward, observe again.

1. Did your animal appear more settled, energized, playful, connected, tired, avoidant, overstimulated, or unchanged?
2. What evidence showed that the experience was enjoyable for them rather than something I wanted them to enjoy?
3. Was I able to be present without using the activity to test whether my animal loves me, forgives me, or is emotionally okay?
4. What shifted in my own body while I watched my animal experience pleasure, success, freedom, or rest?
5. What form of counterbalance could become part of our regular routine?

A Shared Balance Plan

My animal appears to need more:

My animal appears to need less:

I need to take responsibility for:

My animal should not be responsible for carrying:

One shared practice that supports both of us:

One experience that belongs entirely to my animal's well-being and enjoyment:

Closing Check-In

What did this chapter help you recognize without turning that awareness into guilt?

What is one way you can love your animal as a companion without asking them to absorb your storms?