scott conkright psyd
PSYCHOLOGIST

Your Relationship *Archetype*

Understanding the pattern beneath your relationships

🐶 The Puppy · 🐱 The Cat · 🐕 The Sheepdog · 🦅 The Hawk · 🐴 The Horse
🐢 The Sea Turtle · 🐦 The Hummingbird · 🦔 The Hedgehog

What did your feeling system learn about closeness? Eight patterns, one shared signal — and a path to choosing your response instead of repeating it.

A guide by Dr. Scott Conkright, Psy.D. · Meaningful Happiness

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Begin here

Eight moves, one signal — and a wider gap to choose from.

This guide describes eight patterns the feeling system uses to manage one fast, shared signal — the *Drop*. It is not a personality test, and it is not a diagnosis. It is a map of *moves*: what your system tends to do in the half-second after closeness feels uncertain, and what becomes possible once you can see the move as it forms.

You are not one animal

Most people score meaningfully on two or three archetypes. Your **primary** is where the Drop fires most reliably; your **secondary** often shows up under stress. Read those two first, then return to the foundation.

How to read your scores

Above **70%** indicates a strong pattern. **45–69%** signals a meaningful presence. A true **zero** is meaningful too — that move is genuinely inactive for you, not simply quieter.

What it is for

Recognition, not correction. Every pattern protects something real and reflects a genuine capacity. The aim is not to stop the move — it is to widen the gap between signal and move, so you get to choose.

Where the patterns come from

Each move was learned, usually early and for good reason. The trouble starts only when a script written for the past keeps running in a present that no longer calls for it.

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A note on care: if reading these pages stirs up something heavy, that is worth taking to someone you trust or a licensed therapist. This guide is educational and is not a substitute for mental-health care.

THE FOUNDATION

The Drop

The signal that fires before you can think.

Something happens in a relationship and your body responds before your mind catches up. Not a thought, not a decision. A signal — a split-second drop in felt safety that your nervous system registers before you have language for it.

Silvan Tomkins called it a *shame affect*, but the word *shame* is misleading here. This isn't the shame of having done something wrong. It is the signal that fires when positive affect — specifically the interest-excitement that drives genuine connection — gets interrupted. Something you were moving toward closed, and the system registered the closure before you did.

> *"By the time you know something happened, you're already in your move."*
>
> The Drop fires at the level of affect, not cognition.

By the time awareness catches up, the feeling system has already begun its move — and that move is the archetype. Not a personality type. Not a fixed identity. A learned affective strategy that the system developed, usually early, usually for good reason, and has been running ever since.

Where the Drop comes from

Tomkins mapped nine innate affects — among them **interest-excitement** and **enjoyment-joy**, the two that power connection. In his sense, shame is not about wrongdoing; it is the signal that fires the instant one of those positive affects is interrupted. The Drop is that interruption, felt before thought.

The anatomy of a Drop



Interest rises toward connection · the Drop interrupts it · a gap opens · the move begins. The work lives inside the gap.

The strategy isn't the problem. The problem is when the strategy keeps running in situations that no longer require it — when the feeling system answers the present with a script written for the past. Each of the eight archetypes describes a characteristic Drop response, a relational pattern, and a path forward.

THE EIGHT ARCHETYPES

The eight at a glance

One signal, eight moves. Each archetype is a different answer to the same split-second question — *is this connection safe right now?* Find where you recognize yourself, then turn to the full profile.

	ARCHETYPE	THE DROP MOVE	CORE GIFT
	**The Puppy**	Reaches to close the distance.	**People feel found.**
	**The Cat**	Steps back to evaluate; returns when steady.	**Loyalty that lasts.**
	**The Sheepdog**	Turns the signal into protective action.	**Safety, created early.**
	**The Hawk**	Routes it outward as directness or defense.	**Clarity without pressure.**
	**The Horse**	Feels it at full volume, both directions.	**Presence you feel completely.**
	**The Sea Turtle**	Withdraws before closeness arrives.	**What's offered, holds.**
	**The Hummingbird**	Moves on before the flatness lands.	**Aliveness that lights people up.**
	**The Hedgehog**	Contains it behind a measured surface.	**Depth that's the real thing.**

The small marks show the **direction of the move**: toward, away, outward, contained, or at full amplitude. Your archetype is a starting point, not a cage — the point of naming it is to make the next move a choice.

ARCHETYPE PROFILES

In depth

The Puppy & the Cat — reaching, and evaluating.

 The Puppy

Reaches toward connection when the Drop fires.

When something shifts in a relationship, your feeling system registers the change before your mind has a name for it. The move is already forming: you reach, you check in, you close the distance before anyone has said something is wrong. The reach is real love — and it can also keep the original fear in place, because every reach quietly confirms that the connection needed closing.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
Closeness suddenly feels uncertain.

THE MOVE
You reach in to close the gap.

THE HIDDEN COST
The reach can read as pressure, and confirms the fear it was meant to soothe.

THE GIFT
People feel found. You are often the reason a room feels safe.

GROWTH EDGE
Let a beat pass before you move. Ask whether the gap is theirs or yours.

SIT WITH THIS

What happens in my body in the second before I reach?

 The Cat

Manages exposure through evaluation and strategic distance.

Before you invest in someone, your feeling system runs an evaluation that completes before you are aware of it. When something feels off, you pull back, re-establish your footing, and return when you feel like yourself again. The loyalty, once it lands, is durable. The difficulty is that it can take longer to become visible than the other person can comfortably wait for.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
Something feels off, before you can say what.

THE MOVE
You step back to re-establish your footing.

THE HIDDEN COST
Distance can be read as a verdict when it is really a process.

THE GIFT
Chosen, lasting loyalty. The distance is protection, not indifference.

GROWTH EDGE
Name the pull-back out loud — “I need a beat; I’m coming back.”

SIT WITH THIS

What does the other person see while I’m finding my footing?

ARCHETYPE PROFILES

In depth

The Sheepdog & the Hawk — protecting, and defending.

The Sheepdog



Routes the Drop into protective action.

You show up before anyone asks. You notice the shift in someone's voice before they say a word, and underneath all that reliability there is an audit that never quite closes. The care is genuine, and it is also doing a second job: making sure you never have to find out whether you would be loved without it. Being needed became the closest available substitute for being loved.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
You sense a shift in someone before they speak.

THE MOVE
You anticipate, manage, and make things safe.

THE HIDDEN COST
An audit that never closes; being needed stands in for being loved.

THE GIFT
You create safety for people before they know they need it.

GROWTH EDGE
Let one thing go unmanaged and stay present to the discomfort.

SIT WITH THIS
Would I still feel safe here if I did nothing useful?

The Hawk



Routes the Drop outward into defense or dominance.

When someone challenges you, your feeling system does not register hurt first. It registers threat, and the response is forming before the thought catches up. The anger is fast. The shame underneath it is slower and usually invisible, even to you. You value directness because you mean it; the longing underneath the directness is to be met as an equal.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
A challenge registers as threat, not hurt.

THE MOVE
You meet it head-on — directness, defense, sometimes force.

THE HIDDEN COST
The slower feeling underneath stays invisible, even to you.

THE GIFT
Real clarity. Directness offered without pressure is rare.

GROWTH EDGE
Name the threat-read before the anger speaks; let the hurt arrive.

SIT WITH THIS
What was I protecting in the half-second before I pushed back?

ARCHETYPE PROFILES

In depth

The Horse & the Sea Turtle — amplitude, and pace.

 The Horse

Runs at high amplitude in both directions.

Your feeling system runs at high amplitude. When you're in, you're fully in. When you need space, that need is just as total and arrives just as fast. The move away isn't abandonment; it's the system regulating itself, and when it completes the cycle, the return is genuine and full. What doesn't travel is the information that a return is coming.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
The need for space arrives suddenly and completely.

THE MOVE
Fully in, then fully away — then a full return.

THE HIDDEN COST
The signal that a return is coming doesn't travel with you.

THE GIFT
Feeling at full volume. When you're present, people feel it completely.

GROWTH EDGE
Send the "I'll be back" before you go. Narrate the cycle.

SIT WITH THIS

What could I say on the way out that says a return is coming?

 The Sea Turtle

Manages the Drop through preemptive distance.

You sense closeness coming before it arrives, and pull back preemptively — not because you don't want connection, but because your system needs to approach it on its own schedule. External pressure to move faster produces the opposite effect. What you offer, when you offer it, is considered and real. The work is finding language for the pace before the silence becomes the whole story.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
You sense closeness approaching before it lands.

THE MOVE
You withdraw early, to approach on your own schedule.

THE HIDDEN COST
The space can hold people further than you meant; silence speaks for you.

THE GIFT
What you offer, when you offer it, holds.

GROWTH EDGE
Find language for your pace — "I want this; I just move slowly."

SIT WITH THIS

What would it cost to name my timing out loud?

ARCHETYPE PROFILES

In depth

The Hummingbird & the Hedgehog — motion, and containment.

The Hummingbird

Moves fast enough to outrun the Drop.

Your attention moves fast and the interest is genuine when it fires. New people, new ideas, new possibilities generate real excitement that pulls your focus completely. The harder part is that a system that lights up fast also moves on fast. Once the initial charge shifts, the pull forward is stronger than the pull to stay and find out what's underneath the flatness.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
The initial charge fades and flatness appears.

THE MOVE
You move on — toward the next bright thing.

THE HIDDEN COST
You leave before finding what was underneath the quiet.

THE GIFT
Aliveness that genuinely lights people up.

GROWTH EDGE
Stay one beat past the flatness. Treat the dip as data, not an exit.

SIT WITH THIS
What have I never found out because I left when it got quiet?

The Hedgehog

Manages the Drop through containment.

You feel more than most people around you will ever know. The interior life is specific and runs at depth, and the surface you present is measured, revealing very little of it. The containment was built because the system learned that exposure before safety has a cost. When you let someone in, what they receive is the real thing.

WHEN THE DROP FIRES
Exposure before safety reads as costly.

THE MOVE
You contain it behind a measured, quiet surface.

THE HIDDEN COST
People may never know how much is actually there.

THE GIFT
Real depth. What a let-in person receives is the genuine article.

GROWTH EDGE
Let one true thing out before you're certain it's safe.

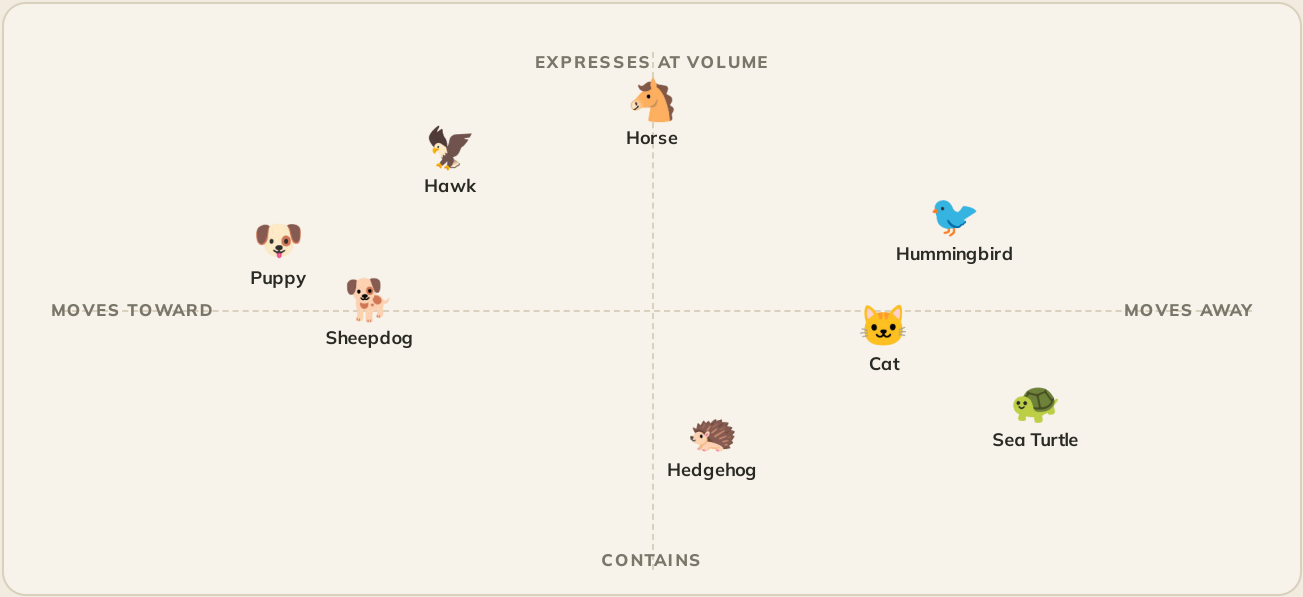
SIT WITH THIS
What's one real thing I could let someone see this week?

BETWEEN TWO PEOPLE

How your patterns meet

Your move never lands in a vacuum.

No archetype meets the world alone. When two feeling systems share a room, their moves answer each other — sometimes fitting, sometimes feeding a loop neither person chose. The map below places the eight moves by **direction** and **volume**.



The pursue–withdraw loop

When a moves-toward pattern meets a moves-away pattern, the reach reads as pressure and the pull-back reads as rejection. Each move becomes the other's trigger. Neither person is wrong — the loop is.

Same-direction pairs

Two reachers can escalate into anxious over-checking; two withdrawers can drift into a silence neither chose. Matching moves still need one person to name what is happening.

Repair is a signal, not a fix

Said out loud, *"I just dropped"* is often enough to keep two systems from escalating. You don't have to solve the moment — you have to let the other system know a move is underway.

The full assessment at scottconkright.com includes who you tend to match with — and where the predictable friction lives.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE

These patterns are learned.

That means they can change.

The Drop doesn't fire because something is wrong with you. It fires because the feeling system learned, at some point, that a particular kind of closeness was worth treating as a threat. It built a script; the script became a pattern; the pattern began running automatically. Affect Relational Theory doesn't treat these patterns as defects to be corrected. What changes isn't the capacity — it's the *automaticity*.

1

Notice

The Drop fires fast but leaves a trace. Learning to recognize the signal — the slight contraction, the quick reach, the sudden need for distance — is the first move. Not stopping it. Just seeing it.

2

Name

Language changes what the system does next. Saying *"I just dropped"* instead of reacting from inside the drop loosens the script's grip. The gap between signal and response widens.

3

Choose

Inside that gap, something new becomes possible: a response that belongs to the present situation rather than the original one. An actual choice about what this moment requires.

This is what the **C.A.T. practice** is built on — not a technique applied from outside, but a way of being present to your own feeling system with enough warmth that it learns it is safe to run a different script.

C

Curiosity

Meet the move with *"what just happened?"* rather than *"what's wrong with me?"*

A

Attention

Stay with the body's signal a beat longer than is comfortable, before the move carries you off.

T

Tenderness

Extend the warmth you'd give a good friend to your own system as it runs its old script.

Change isn't fast and it isn't linear. The old script will fire again. What shifts over time is the recovery — how quickly you notice, how much of the situation you can stay present to, how often you get to choose. That's enough. That's actually everything.

THE PRACTICE

Tracking your Drop

Insight opens the gap. Practice keeps it open.

The gap between signal and move widens with practice, not insight alone. Here is a simple way to catch the Drop in daily life. After a moment when you felt yourself *move* — a quick reach, a sudden need for space, a flash of defensiveness — note five things. Don't analyze. Just record.

1	**The moment**	What happened, in one line.
2	**The signal**	Where I felt it in my body — tight chest, heat, going blank, the urge to leave.
3	**The move**	What my system started to do — reach, pull back, push back, move on, go quiet.
4	**The protection**	What that move was trying to keep safe.
5	**The choice**	What I did next — or what I might try next time.

When did I last reach, pull back, or push back faster than I meant to?

What does my Drop feel like — before I have words for it?

Whose voice is the old script written in?

A MICRO-PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK

Once a day, when you notice a move forming, name it silently: **"I just dropped."** That is the whole practice. You don't have to change the move. Noticing *is* the work — and it is what gradually teaches the system that it is safe to choose something else.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

About Dr. Scott Conkright



Dr. Scott Conkright, Psy.D.

Dr. Scott Conkright is a licensed clinical psychologist with over 30 years of experience practicing in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., with PsyPact licensure across 40 states. He is the founder of Meaningful Happiness and The Relationship Workshops, and the developer of **Affect Relational Therapy (A.R.T.)** — a framework that integrates Silvan Tomkins' affect science with attachment theory and relational neuroscience.

His work focuses on the feeling system as the primary driver of relational behavior, and on restoring affective movement as the path to genuine change. A certified group psychotherapist, he is committed to diversity and inclusion and supports the LGBTQ+ communiy. He is the host of *The Meaningful Happiness Podcast* and the author of the forthcoming book, *Feel First.*

WORK WITH DR. SCOTT

You don't have to change the pattern *alone*.

If something in these pages felt familiar, that recognition is where the work begins — and it tends to go further with support. Dr. Scott works with clients directly on the patterns this guide describes, through individual therapy, group work, The Relationship Workshops, and with telehealth available across 40 PsyPact states. Reach out to start a conversation.

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Your feeling system learned its patterns. It can learn new ones.