

Spread Love & Acceptance

*Understanding yourself and
the people you share a life with*



For two or more • Full version

Part Two: sharing a home, work or care with the people around you.

by Christian

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FOR TWO OR MORE • FULL VERSION

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Spread Love & Acceptance
spreadloveandacceptance.com

Spread Love & Acceptance: For two or more, the full version.
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Not therapy. This book is general education about people and relationships. It is not a diagnosis, treatment or a replacement for help from a doctor, counsellor or other trained professional, and it can’t know your situation.

If you are not safe. If you feel afraid of someone you live with, or someone controls your money, phone or movements, that is not a problem to fix with a worksheet. spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety lists free, private help. If you are in danger now, call your local emergency number.

The examples are made up. The people in the scenes and examples are invented, built from common patterns. None of them is a real person or a testimonial.

Research mentioned in the chapters is listed, with links, in the research notes at the back and at spreadloveandacceptance.com/research.

Set in Lora, Fraunces and IBM Plex Mono.

If you need help now

If you might act on thoughts of ending your life, or someone is in danger right now, call your local emergency number: 999 in the UK, 112 or 999 in Ireland, 911 in the US and Canada, 000 in Australia, 111 in New Zealand.

If you are struggling, or worried about someone else, you can talk to a trained person now. These lines are free, private and open day and night. You don't have to be sure it is a crisis to call or text.

WHERE YOU ARE	CALL OR TEXT
United States	Call or text 988 (the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also text HOME to 741741 (Crisis Text Line).
United Kingdom	Call Samaritans free on 116 123 . Or text SHOUT to 85258 (Shout, a free text line).
Ireland	Call Samaritans free on 116 123 .
Canada	Call or text 9-8-8 (the Suicide Crisis Helpline), in English or French.
Australia	Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 , or text 0477 13 11 14.
New Zealand	Call or text 1737 (Need to talk?).
Anywhere else	findahelpline.com lists free helplines in many countries, by phone, text and chat.

For children and young people

UK	Childline, 0800 1111 (free, for anyone under 19)
Ireland	Childline, 1800 66 66 66 (free, for anyone up to 18)
Canada	Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 , or text CONNECT to 686868

Australia	Kids Helpline, 1800 55 1800 (ages 5 to 25)
New Zealand	Youthline, 0800 376 633 , or text 234
US	988 is for every age.

If you're worried about someone

Ask them plainly: "Are you thinking about ending your life?" Studies have found that asking does not put the idea in someone's head, and talking about it may even ease it. Listen, stay with them if you can, and call or text one of the lines above together. Part Three, Chapter 12 (online) says more about helping someone in a crisis, and Chapter 16 (online) about worry, low mood and when to get help.

This book is general education, not a crisis service. The website's tools keep what you type on your own device, so nobody there can see it or reply to it. The numbers were checked in October 2026. Numbers can change; findahelpline.com keeps an up-to-date list.

How to use this book

This is a book about seeing what is really going on, in yourself and between people, without blaming anyone, and then changing one small thing. This copy holds 6 chapters in one part, in the full version. There is no wrong way in.

THE PARTS

Part Two: Between us. One idea per chapter about sharing a life, a home or work with someone, each with a worksheet that puts it to use.

TWO SIZES OF EVERY CHAPTER

Every chapter comes in a short version (about 10 to 15 minutes) and a full version with the research, more examples and more to try. This is the full version. The short version is free at spreadloveandacceptance.com/book.

READ IN ORDER, OR BY NEED

Read it front to back like any book, or start with the chapter that fits what is going on. Each chapter ends with *What to remember*, *This connects to* (the chapters that explain it or put it to use, with page numbers) and *Put it to use*, with codes you can scan for the matching tool.

IN EVERY CHAPTER

-  A short scene: a made-up moment from everyday life.
-  **Words you could use:** sentences to say out loud.
-  **Try this:** one small thing to do this week.
-  **Common mix-ups:** easy mistakes, and what is closer to true.

THE SITE, THE PROGRAM AND PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The book has a free website with the workpapers (pages you fill in) and tools (helpers you use) that the chapters mention; the next page explains both. Nothing you type there leaves your device, and there is no account. The **six-week program** (spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01) puts Part Two to work a week at a time, and the **self path** does the same for Part One. **Professor Puddles**, the site's friendly guide, answers questions about the book's ideas.

GO GENTLY

Some chapters touch hard things: grief, shame, anger, worry, trauma. Skip anything that isn't right for today. Nothing here is a test, and nothing needs to be done all at once.

Workpapers, tools and three friends

WORKPAPER WP-03

Workpapers: pages you fill in

A workpaper is a page you fill in, on your own or together: a one-week log, a list of who owns which job, a short check. Each one has a number, like **WP-03**, and it is always called a workpaper, for example “Workpaper WP-03: One owner per job”. The blank workpapers are also at the back of this book, one page each, to copy.

TOOL

Tools: helpers you use on the site

A tool is an interactive helper on the website: a quiz, a calm-down timer, a card maker, or the Chat analyzer that reads a message with you. You use it and it gives you something back. It is always called a tool, for example “Tool: Chat analyzer”.

The book keeps the two apart: a workpaper and a tool never share a list. Both are free, need no account, and what you type stays on your device.

Three friends who give hints



Professor Puddles, the site’s cheerful raindrop professor, gives most of the hints: a thought to take with you, and the workpaper or tool that fits.



Tidbit, the quick, curious pup with the big smile and the collar, bounds in now and then with a playful tip.



Sugarfoot, the steady, gentle pup with the long soft ears and the best hugs, turns up with a calm, slow tip.

They keep to the lighter pages. Where a chapter talks about crisis, deep grief or being hurt, the pages stay quiet and plain.

Find it fast

Start with what is going on, not with chapter one. Each line points to the place in the book that helps most, and one tool to try. You can read that part on its own and stop.

SHARING THE LOAD

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
We keep arguing about chores.	Part Two · Chapter II · One owner per job	89	WORKPAPER WP-03 One owner per job
I do the remembering and planning, and nobody sees it (the mental load).	Preface to Part Two · The mental load	26	WORKPAPER WP-01 Who did what
We each think we do more than our share.	Preface to Part Two · Why the other person doesn't see it	29	WORKPAPER WP-01 Who did what
The same job keeps slipping, week after week.	Part Two · Chapter V · A repeat usually has no real owner	190	WORKPAPER WP-04 What keeps coming back?
Is the way we share things fair? Can it last?	Part Two · Chapter II · The setup score	95	TOOL Is the setup working for everyone?
We've just had a baby and we're both exhausted.	Part Two · Chapter II · Small children and a new baby	105	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?
We're about to move in together.	Part Two · Chapter V · Starting out: before you move in	206	TOOL The "Who does what?" page
Money between us feels unfair.	Part Two · Chapter IV · Money between you	174	TOOL Who does what? The Money tab
We co-parent across two homes.	Part Two · Chapter III · Two homes	140	WORKPAPER WP-03 One owner per job
We share a house with a housemate, or more than two of us share a home.	Part Two · Chapter IV · A couple and a housemate	177	TOOL The "Who does what?" page

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
I'm raising my grandchild (kinship care).	Part Two · Chapter V · Raising a grandchild	209	WORKPAPER WP-03 One owner per job
Faith matters to us, or family elders expect a say.	Part Two · Chapter I · Faith, culture and family voices	71	WORKPAPER WP-13 The 90-second daily check-in
I'm caring for a parent or partner, and it's wearing me down.	Part Two · Chapter III · When "full" has become normal	129	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?
I'm the only one who wants to try this.	Part Two · Chapter II · When only one of you is on board	111	WORKPAPER WP-01 Who did what (your side only)
Someone handed me this book, and I'm not sure why.	If someone handed you this book	11	WORKPAPER WP-03 One owner per job

TALKING IT THROUGH

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
Small things turn into big rows.	Part Two · Chapter I · How stress changes your frequency	57	WORKPAPER WP-11 The Calm-Down Kit
We move and talk at different speeds.	Part Two · Chapter I · What sets the frequency	55	WORKPAPER WP-12 Same moment, different speeds
A comment stings and I snap back.	Part Two · Chapter IV · Let a comment land before you react	167	WORKPAPER WP-09 Say it so it lands
Is it us, or is it everything else going on?	Part Two · Chapter III · Leftover stress	120	WORKPAPER WP-14 Is it us, or is it everything else?

HARD SEASONS

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
I'm thinking about ending my life, or I'm worried someone is.	If you need help now	5	The page itself

This copy holds only part of the book, so this map lists the problems it covers. The whole book's map has 16 more, and every chapter is free to read at spreadloveandacceptance.com/book. Each thing to try is marked as a workpaper (a page you fill in) or a tool (a helper you use on the site). All are free on the website, with nothing to sign up for; each chapter's end has a code you can scan for them. Looking for a word rather than a problem? The index at the back lists the main ideas.

If someone handed you this book

Maybe it was left on your side of the bed with a page turned down. Maybe someone said, “Could you just read this bit?” Either way, you didn’t choose it. Fair enough. Here is the short version, written for you.

This isn’t a case against you

The book starts from something researchers have found again and again: when two people each estimate their share of the housework, the two answers usually add up to more than 100%. Nobody is lying. You see every minute of your own effort and only some of theirs, and so do they (Chapter II, page 82). So the book never asks who the bad guy is. Its numbers score the setup, never a person.

What’s in it for you

- Fewer repeat arguments about the same jobs.
- Jobs that are clearly yours, so nobody needs to remind you about them.
- Credit for what you already do. Your jobs go on the list too: the car, the bins, the late-night lifts, the things you fix.
- A say in what “fair” means in your house. It isn’t always 50/50 (Chapter IV, page 151).

It doesn’t ask for therapy talk, and you never fill anything in about the other person. You can say no.

A first week: three small things

1. **Log your own week.** Rough minutes on “Who did what”, including the thinking part: booking, remembering, planning. Ten minutes in all. Only yours, never theirs.
2. **Ask one question, and just listen.** “What’s the one job you’d most like to stop thinking about?” Don’t defend or count. Write the answer down.
3. **Take over that job, the whole of it,** including the noticing (below).

Words to open the talk

“I read the bit you gave me. I don’t agree with all of it, but I get the point about the stuff nobody sees.”

“I’d rather own a couple of things properly than ‘help’ with everything. Which one would you most like off your mind?”

“Give me a week to see what I actually do. Then let’s look together.”

Best left out, for now: “Just tell me what to do” (it hands the thinking straight back), “You should have asked” and, in the first five minutes, “I do loads too.” That may be true. Save it for when you both have your logs.

Taking over a whole job, noticing included

Every job has a part you can see (doing it) and parts you can’t: noticing it needs doing, remembering, planning and checking it got done (the Preface, page 18). Taking a job over means all of it.

1. **Pick one job that repeats:** the children’s clothes and shoes, the bins, the car, school forms, the dentist.
2. **Get the handover once.** What it involves, when it’s due, where things are, who to call. Ask your questions now, not every week.
3. **Move the remembering out of their head.** A phone reminder, the calendar, a list on the fridge: anywhere but the other person.
4. **Do it start to finish for a month** without being reminded. If you need reminding, fix your reminder, not the relationship.
5. **Do it your way.** If the result is fine, the method is yours. Their part is to let it be done differently.
6. **Ask for a backstop if you like:** someone who notices a slip and says so once, kindly. A backstop isn’t a supervisor (Chapter II, page 89).

A made-up example. Hester has always looked after the children's clothes: spotting toes at the end of shoes, school sizes, swimming kit, passing on what's outgrown. Wilf takes it over. Hester writes the handover note: sizes, the shop, which drawer holds the next size up. Wilf sets a reminder for the first Sunday of each month: "Shoes, uniform, kit." In week two he misses the PE kit for a school trip. Hester says once, "The trip kit is Thursday," and he adds "school letters" to his Sunday check. A month in, Hester says the biggest change is that she no longer thinks about shoes at eleven at night.

If you think it's already fair

Log your week anyway. If it comes out even, that is useful to know, and the book will say so: a fair score doesn't silence anyone, and a low one doesn't blame anyone. And if this book feels like the wrong place to start, Find it fast, page 9 lists other ways in.

The book in two pictures

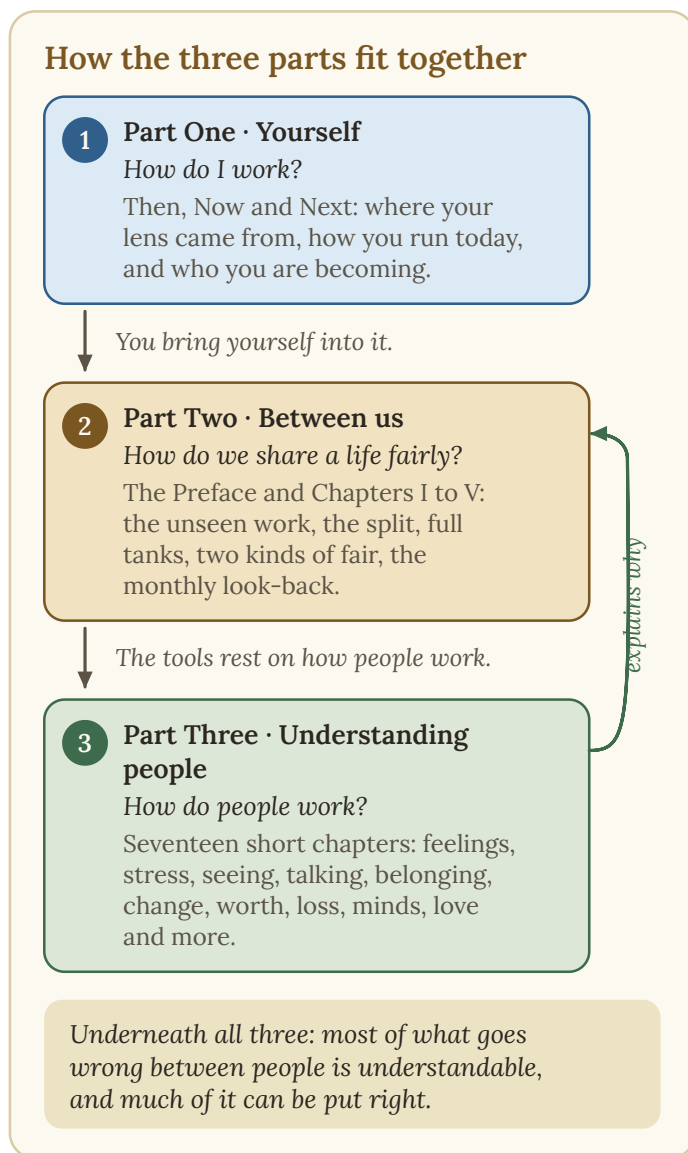


FIGURE 1 How the three parts fit together: you bring yourself into every shared life, and Part Three explains why the Part Two tools work.

Five ideas the book rests on

A shared life that works

I

See the whole load

Count the noticing, remembering and planning, not just the doing.

II

Fix the setup, not the person

When a job keeps slipping, change the arrangement.

III

Read your state first

Check how full your tank is before a hard talk.

IV

Tune how you send and receive

A clash is often crossed signals, not bad intent.

V

Notice the quiet incentives

Unclaimed jobs drift to whoever notices first.

Each starts inside you, then shows up between you.

FIGURE 2 Five ideas the whole book rests on. Each one starts inside you, then shows up between you and the people you share a life with.

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PART TWO

Between us

One idea per chapter about sharing a life, a home or work with someone, each with a worksheet that puts it to use.

IN THIS PART

Preface	The work nobody sees	18
Chapter I	Why we get out of tune	50
Chapter II	Is the split working?	80
Chapter III	Full tanks and different angles	118
Chapter IV	Two kinds of fair	151
Chapter V	The monthly look-back	185



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: this part comes with workpapers to fill in, together or on your own. Ooh, start with the one-week log!

WORKPAPER WP-01

Who did what · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-01

Preface

PREFACE TO PART TWO

The work nobody sees: invisible labour at home

Part Two of the book is about the people you share a life, a home or a job with, and it opens here. Running a life takes a lot of work that nobody sees. This preface helps you make that work visible, to yourself and to anyone you share it with, so you can talk about it fairly and kindly.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Where this fits: the five big ideas
2. Unbilled debt: the work that goes unseen
3. The kinds of unseen work
4. The mental load: what research finds, and what it doesn't
5. Why the other person doesn't see it
6. Writing it down is not keeping score
7. Your side, their side
8. Why the book borrows these words
9. How the book fits together
10. Who this book is for
11. An example week
12. Your part, and only your part
13. On your own: your own unseen work
14. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter
15. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right
16. Questions people often ask
17. Limits and cautions

SUNDAY, 9PM

Someone notices the laundry is still in the washer, the school forms are due on Tuesday, and the birthday card never got posted. They also notice that nobody else has noticed. The house looks fine. That's the problem.

Or, living alone: A widower says, "Since my wife died, I notice how many jobs she quietly carried: the birthday cards, the boiler service, knowing who to ring when someone was ill. I never saw them until they stopped getting done."

Every home keeps a set of accounts that nobody agreed to keep.

Someone notices the milk is low. Someone remembers the dentist appointment three weeks away. Someone senses the mood in the room shifting before an argument starts, and quietly steers it somewhere calmer. None of this shows up on a calendar. None of it gets a thank-you, because you can only thank someone for work you have seen. And this kind of work is hidden by nature: when it's done well, nothing seems to happen.

IN SHORT:

- **Running a home takes unseen work:** the noticing, remembering and planning that many people call the mental load.
- **The other person usually just hasn't seen it.** This work hides by nature. It isn't a sign that they don't care.
- **Each of you writes only your own side** of one ordinary week, and you read the two lists together.
- **The list is for seeing, not for billing.** Thank each other for the past, and plan next week.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This preface mostly teaches “See the whole load”, with help from “Notice the quiet incentives”. (Borrowed from finance and economics.)

- **In you:** Notice everything you carry, including the thinking and feeling work you have never counted. Notice, too, the work others do that you may have missed.
- **Between you and others:** Put both lists on one shared, fair page, so nobody has to argue about whose work “counts.” Jobs nobody claims tend to drift to whoever notices first, and a specific thank-you helps keep things steady.

Put together, the five big ideas make one simple loop: you **see the load**, **redesign the setup** around it, **check your state** before you talk, **tune the message** so it lands, and **keep an eye on the quiet incentives** that let things slide back.

BIG IDEA	WHERE THE BOOK TEACHES IT
See the whole load	This preface, Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2) and Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5)
Fix the setup, not the person	Chapter II, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4) and Chapter V
Read your state first	Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3), with help in Chapters I, II and IV
Tune how you send and receive	Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1), with help in Chapter III
Notice the quiet incentives	This preface, Chapter IV and Chapter V

Unbilled debt: the work that goes unseen

Over months and years, that hidden work builds up like a debt that only one person can see on their books. The other person usually isn't refusing to pay it. Most of the time, they don't know it exists.

This book calls that gap **unbilled debt**: the difference between the work someone does and the work anyone notices. In a business, an unbilled hour is work that was done and logged, but never invoiced, so the client never sees it. At home, it's much the same. The work was real. It just never made it onto the page that the other person reads.

This debt isn't repaid in hours, and nobody sends a bill. It's cleared by being seen, thanked and shared differently from here on. You can thank someone for what they carried before; you just don't bill for the past.

Plato's Cave (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth) is an old story about people who mistake shadows for the real thing. At home, the few bits of work you happen to see are the shadows. The whole job is the real thing.

THE REASONING. A debt nobody can see can't be talked about, so it can't be shared. It doesn't disappear, though. It turns into tiredness for the person carrying it, and confusion for the person who isn't ("Why are you so upset about a birthday card?"). Naming it as a debt, not a failing, lets both people look at the gap without either one being on trial.

Worked examples

- **Two partners, both men:** Stefan handles every family birthday, the car insurance and the dog's vet visits. Omari works longer hours and thinks they split the home "about half and half." After a week of notes, Omari sees about four hours of Stefan's work he had never counted. He doesn't pay it back. He thanks Stefan for the past, and takes over the car and the vet from next month.
- **A grown-up daughter and her father:** Since her mother died, Siobhan has quietly taken over her father's bills, medicines and doctor visits. Her father thinks she "pops in now and then." When she writes it down, she realises it's most of her Saturdays. She doesn't send a bill. She asks him which parts he'd like to do again himself, and asks her brother to take the pharmacy run. See Caregivers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).
- **Two housemates:** Tilly is the one who always restocks the toilet roll, washing-up liquid and bin bags. It costs her money as well as noticing. They set up a small shared kitty and a list on the fridge. The unseen work becomes a shared job. See Money together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"Unbilled debt means they owe me hours."** It doesn't. The fix is to be seen, thanked and shared differently from now on. If you catch yourself adding up the past, switch to planning next week.
- **"If I name it, I'm calling them lazy."** Name the work, not the person: "Here's a job that's been invisible," not "Here's what you never do."
- **"It's only a debt if it's big."** Most unbilled work comes in small pieces. Small and often is exactly how it builds up.

If only one of you is on board: Write your own week anyway. Use it to see your real load, plan your energy and choose one job to hand back or let go. You can share a single item, kindly, without sharing the whole list.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I’ve been carrying a few things you might not have seen. I’d like to show you, not to blame you, just so we see the same picture.”

A note on safety: If someone insists you owe them for everything they do, keeps a tally to make you feel small, or controls the money so you can’t say no, that isn’t this idea. That is control. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help, and Money together explains the difference between normal limits and control.

Research notes

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild, with Anne Machung, described “the second shift” in 1989: the home work many people do after their paid work ends, much of it unseen. Later research on gratitude (for example, Amie Gordon and colleagues in 2012) found that people who felt appreciated by their partner tended to be more appreciative in return, and that appreciation was linked to staying together. *This book’s idea:* the name “unbilled debt” and the rule that it’s cleared by being seen and shared, not by being repaid.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The easiest way to see unseen work is to write it down for one ordinary week. Each of you logs only your own jobs, and the thinking counts too.

WORKPAPER WP-01

Who did what · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-01

The kinds of unseen work

Unseen work isn’t one thing. It helps to name the different kinds, because each one hides in a different way.

- **Noticing.** Seeing that something needs doing: the bin is full, the child has grown out of their shoes, the car is due for service.

- **Remembering.** Holding dates and details in your head: birthdays, bin day, which form goes back to school on which day.
- **Planning and deciding.** Working out the options and choosing one: what to cook this week, which plumber to call, when to visit family.
- **Checking.** Making sure the thing actually happened, and following up when it didn't.
- **Smoothing.** Keeping the peace, keeping in touch with relatives, cheering someone up, and sensing when a conversation needs to slow down.

People who study home life often call the thinking parts of this the “mental load” or “cognitive labour.” The name matters less than the idea: a job is more than the few minutes it takes to do it. Someone has to carry it in their head first.

THE REASONING. When people say “we split the chores,” they usually mean the doing. But each job has a front end (noticing, remembering, planning, deciding) and a back end (checking, following up). Whoever holds the front end is the one who can never fully switch off. Naming the five kinds lets you split the whole job, not just the visible slice.

Worked examples

- **Separated co-parents:** Both parents do school runs. But one parent is the one who reads every school email, knows which week is non-uniform day and remembers to tell the other. They agree that each parent owns all school emails for their own weeks. See Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).
- **Kinship carers:** A grandmother raising her grandson does the visible care, and also the smoothing: keeping the boy in touch with his mum, handling birthdays that bring up big feelings, and calming things after phone calls. Once she names that work, her partner starts taking the Sunday phone calls. See Foster, adoptive and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).
- **Two business partners:** One partner does the client work. The other notices when contracts are due, plans the cash flow and checks the invoices were paid. Neither had counted the second list as “work.” They give it a name, “running the business,” and a regular slot.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“If I do the task, I’ve shared it.”** Not if someone else still has to remind you. Try taking a job start to finish: noticing, doing and checking.
- **“Smoothing is just my personality.”** It may come easily, but it still takes energy. Put it on the list with a rough number of minutes.
- **“Lists are for planners.”** You don’t have to like lists. A five-minute chat with the five words (notice, remember, plan, check, smooth) does the same job.

If only one of you is on board: Sort your own list into the five kinds. Most people find one kind takes far more of their time than they thought. That alone can explain why you feel tired.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Could you take this one from start to finish, including remembering it? That’s the part I’d most like to put down.”

A note on safety: Smoothing can hide something harder. If you spend your days managing someone’s moods so they don’t explode, that is not ordinary home work. You don’t have to manage it alone: Not safe at home?

Research notes

Sociologist Allison Daminger (2019) split the thinking side of home work into four stages: anticipating a need, identifying options, deciding and monitoring. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1987) named “kin work”: the cards, calls and visits that keep a wider family connected. Arlie Hochschild’s term “emotional labour” (1983) was first about paid jobs, but people now often use it for the smoothing work at home. *This book’s idea:* the five plain words, and adding “smoothing” as its own kind.

The work nobody sees

Most of a job happens before and after the doing.

What others see
washing up, the
school run

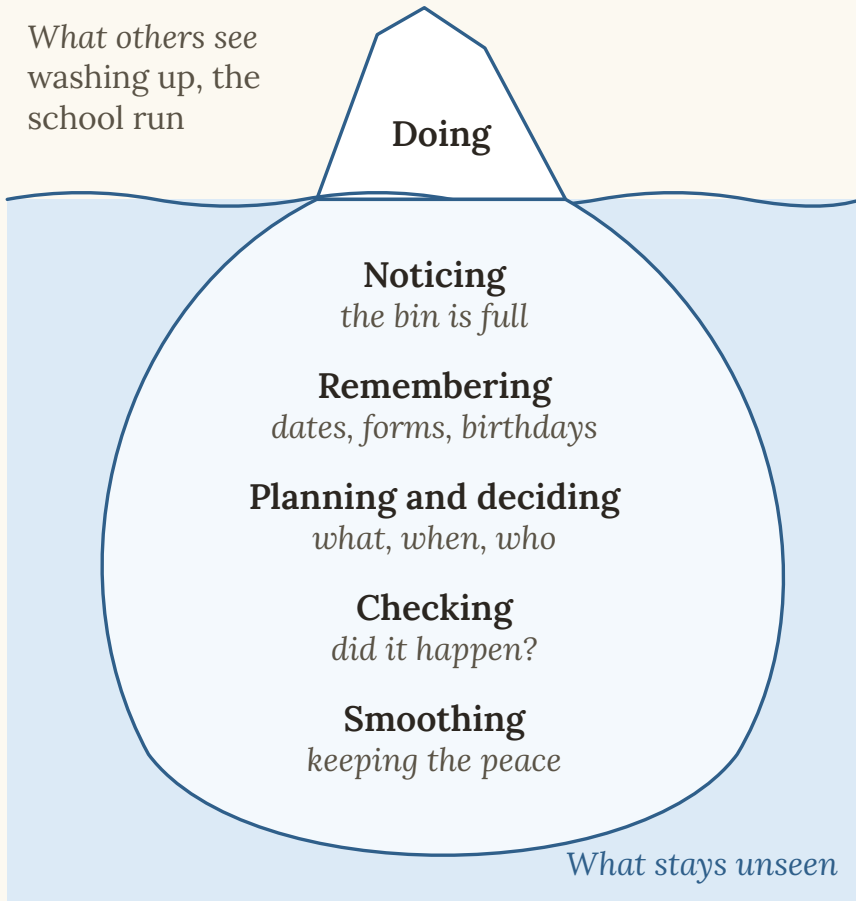


Illustration. The five kinds are this book's plain words; researchers call the thinking part "cognitive labour" (Daminger, 2019).

FIGURE 3 The work nobody sees. Most of a job happens before and after the doing, and whoever holds that part can never fully switch off.

The mental load: what research finds, and what it doesn't

The thinking side of home work has a popular name: the **mental load**. It means the noticing and planning (and the checking afterwards) that turn “we should” into “it’s done.” This book calls it unseen work, and the five kinds above are its parts. If you came looking for the words “mental load,” this section is for you.

What the studies find, on average

- **The thinking work is often shared less evenly than the doing.** Allison Daminger (2019) interviewed 35 couples and split the thinking work into four parts: anticipating a need, identifying options, deciding and monitoring. Women did more of it overall, especially the anticipating and the monitoring. Deciding was shared more evenly. Often neither partner fully saw it.
- **A first baby can open a gap.** Jill Yavorsky, Claire Kamp Dush and Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan (2015) used time diaries from working couples. After a first baby, mothers took on most of the extra childcare without cutting their paid hours, and the couples’ own reports made things sound more equal than the diaries did. Other long-term studies found that, on average, couples’ satisfaction dips after a first baby (Brian Doss and colleagues, 2009; Carolyn and Philip Cowan, 1992). A dip is common. It isn’t a sign you chose wrong.
- **“The second shift.”** Arlie Hochschild, with Anne Machung (1989), described the home work many working parents do after paid work ends, and the stories couples told themselves about the split being fair.
- **The other side of the coin: gatekeeping.** Sarah Allen and Alan Hawkins (1999) described “maternal gatekeeping”: beliefs and habits that, without anyone meaning it, keep the other parent at the edge, like redoing their jobs, holding all the standards, or being the only one who knows. About one in five mothers in their study fitted the pattern, and those mothers did more of the family work. Later, Sarah Schoppe-Sullivan and colleagues (2008) found that fathers of babies were more involved when mothers actively encouraged them (“gate-opening”). Any parent can hold the gate, and any parent can open it.

What the research doesn't say. These are patterns across many homes. They don't tell you who carries what in yours. Plenty of men carry the mental load. Plenty of couples share it well. In two-mum and two-dad homes it falls in its own ways. And in some homes the person carrying less is ill, on nights, or has simply never been shown the list. The book's answer is the same in every case: each of you writes your own side, and you look at one week together. The averages explain why the gap is so common. They never settle who is right.

Handing over a whole job, thinking included

The most common trap after a first look is this: the person who did less offers to "help more," and the person who did more becomes the manager, handing out tasks. The doing moves, but the noticing doesn't. "Just tell me what to do" is kind, and it still leaves one head holding the list.

So hand over whole jobs. A whole job has all five parts: noticing, remembering, planning, doing and checking.

1. **Pick a job that repeats** and can belong to one person: the children's clothes and sizes, the nursery bag, birthdays on one side of the family, the car.
2. **Hand it over once, properly.** Ten minutes: what it involves, where things are, what tends to go wrong. Write it on the job list with the new owner's name.
3. **The new owner does it their way.** Not worse, just different. The old owner doesn't redo it or check behind them. That is the gate-opening part.
4. **Agree a backstop.** The backstop steps in only if something will actually go wrong (a missed jab, not a mismatched outfit), says so plainly, and hands the job back.
5. **Look again in a month,** in the monthly look-back (Chapter V (page 185)).

For example (made up): Hollie hands Gareth the children's clothes: noticing what's too small, knowing the sizes, buying the next lot, and the bag of hand-me-downs for her sister. In week one, Gareth asks three questions and orders shoes in the wrong width. Hollie bites her tongue. By week four,

Gareth notices Alfie's wellies are tight before she does. The job, and the noticing, have moved. Their whole week is in Chapter II (page 105).



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: when you hand over a job, hand over the whole of it, the remembering too. Giving every job one owner means nobody has to carry it in their head "just in case".

WORKPAPER WP-03

One owner per job · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-03

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"The research proves my partner is doing less."** It doesn't. It shows patterns across many homes. Use your own week.
- **"Gatekeeping means it's my fault."** No. It names a habit, not a fault, and it often grows from being the only one who knew. Opening the gate is one small, generous step.
- **"If I take the job, they'll criticise how I do it."** Agree the backstop rule first: step in only if something will go wrong, not because it's done differently.

If only one of you is on board: Pick one whole job to put down or hand back, and say so once, kindly. Even one job, fully handed over, can make the load feel lighter.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Could you own the kids' clothes from now on, all of it, including noticing when things get too small? I promise not to redo it." "Show me once how you like it done. Then let me find my own way."

Research notes

The studies above are Daminger (2019); Yavorsky, Kamp Dush and Schoppe-Sullivan (2015); Doss and colleagues (2009); Cowan and Cowan (1992); Hochschild and Machung (1989); Allen and Hawkins (1999); and Schoppe-Sullivan and colleagues (2008). Most were done with couples of a man and a woman in the US, so they say less about other kinds of home. *This book's idea:* the five-part "whole job" and the backstop rule.

Why the other person doesn't see it

There are a few plain reasons this work stays hidden, and none of them need anyone to be careless.

- **Success looks like nothing.** When the milk never runs out, nobody sees the person who kept it from running out.
- **It happens inside someone's head.** You can see someone doing the dishes. You can't see them remembering the field trip money.
- **It comes in tiny pieces.** Thirty seconds here, two minutes there. Each piece is too small to mention, but together they fill a day.
- **Reliable work gets used to.** A job that always gets done stops being noticed, and a person who is always there stops being thanked. Minds get used to whatever stays the same. That quiet drift is called complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency), and it is part of why unseen work can stay unseen for years.
- **We remember our own effort best.** In a well-known 1979 study, married couples each estimated their own share of household jobs. For most couples, the two estimates added up to more than 100 percent. The likely reason isn't dishonesty: we each remember our own effort more easily than someone else's.

That last point is why this book never asks, "Who is right about how much they do?" Both people are usually describing their own week as they honestly remember it. The fix is to put both weeks on paper, side by side. Not seeing it is nobody's fault. Once you've both seen it, what you do next is a choice you make together.

THE REASONING. If you think the other person is choosing not to see, you'll feel hurt and talk like a prosecutor. If you know the work is hidden by nature, you can talk like a guide: "Let me show you something." The same facts, a very different talk.

Worked examples

- **Partners on different hours:** Zainab works from home and Craig works shifts. Because Zainab is "around," deliveries, repairs and the dog all drift to her. Craig honestly thinks she has "a quiet day." They swap places for

one Saturday, and Craig sees how many small interruptions there are. See *Different hours* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).

- **A teen and their parents:** Sixteen-year-old Jesse looks after a younger brother three afternoons a week. Their parents see a child who is “home anyway.” When Jesse writes down the snacks, homework help and settling arguments, the parents are surprised, and agree to pay Jesse a little and cover one afternoon. See *For teens* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).
- **Two partners after one has come home:** After months working away, Jude comes home and doesn’t know where anything is now, or who does what. The partner who stayed has built a whole system in their head. Talking through the hidden system, slowly, helps Jude find a place in it. See *Coming home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“They should just notice.”** Hidden work can’t be noticed from outside. Show it once, plainly, and see what happens next.
- **“They know, they just don’t care.”** Sometimes that’s true, but it is rarely the first explanation. Start with “Did you know?” before deciding.
- **“I do more, so my memory must be right.”** Everyone remembers their own effort best, including you. That is why both sides go on paper.

If only one of you is on board: Make your own work a little more visible without a big talk: a shared calendar, a list on the fridge, or a quick “I’ve booked the boiler service” message. Visible work is easier to thank and easier to share later.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I don’t think you’ve been ignoring it. I think it’s been out of sight. Can I show you what it looks like from my side?”

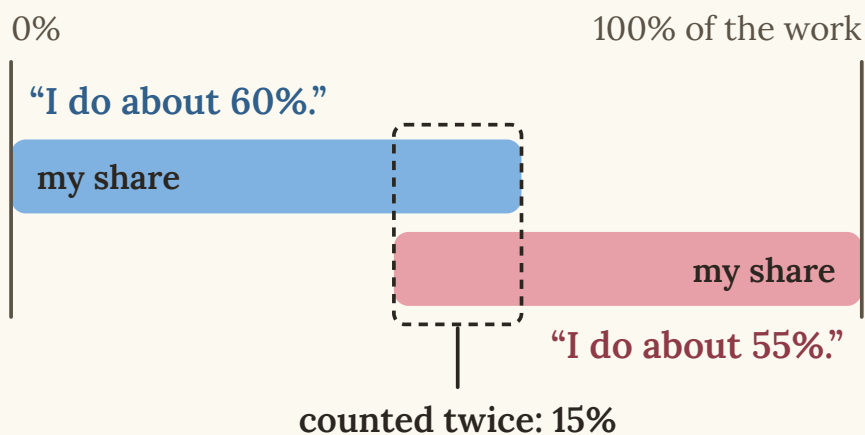
A note on safety: If someone refuses to see your work and also mocks, threatens or punishes you when you raise it, the problem isn’t visibility. Signs to look out for.

Research notes

The 1979 study above is by Michael Ross and Fiore Sicoly, and it is one of the best-known findings about how we remember shared work. Psychologists also describe “habituation”: we stop noticing things that stay the same, which helps explain why reliable work fades from view. *This book’s idea*: linking that fading to complacency in close relationships.

We each remember our own effort best

Two honest guesses about the same home.



Together: 115%. Nobody is lying.
Fix: put both weeks on paper, side by side.

Illustrative numbers. In Ross and Sicoly’s 1979 study, partners’ separate estimates of their own share usually added up to more than 100%.

FIGURE 4 We each remember our own effort best. Illustrative numbers; in Ross and Sicoly’s 1979 study, partners’ estimates of their own share usually added up to more than 100 percent.

Writing it down is not keeping score

This is not a book about keeping score to win an argument. A ledger that only one person gets to read isn't really a ledger. It's a grudge (an old hurt you keep holding on to) with neater handwriting.

The point of writing anything down is the opposite of scorekeeping. It makes the hidden column visible to *both* people, in the same terms, at the same time. Then the conversation can start from facts you share instead of two different memories.

Here is a simple test. Scorekeeping looks backward and asks who owes whom. A shared ledger looks forward and asks what to change next week. If a list is being used to prove a point, it has turned into scorekeeping. Put it down, and come back to it when you can both use it to plan.

THE REASONING. Scorekeeping makes people defensive, and defensive people stop listening. A shared ledger works only when both people feel safe to look at it. So the rules are simple: both write, both read, the past gets thanks, and the future gets the changes.

Worked examples

- **Two women married for twenty years, now with an empty nest:** Without the kids, old patterns are suddenly loud. Instead of listing two decades of who did what, they each log one week of the new, quieter life and plan from there. See Empty nest (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest).
- **Two friends sharing a holiday:** One booked the flights, the rooms and the car. Instead of a resentful tally at the airport, she says, "I did the bookings this time. Could you do the planning for the day trips?" See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Dorm roommates:** A cleaning rota starts to feel like a scoreboard. They swap it for a short room agreement they look at once a month, and only talk about what to change next. See Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“If I don’t keep score, I’ll be taken advantage of.”** Keeping a record is fine. Using it as a weapon isn’t. Write it to plan, and share it on a calm day.
- **“If they wrote less, they did less.”** Some people write short lists. Ask about what’s missing before you decide.
- **Bringing the list into a fight.** Put it away. Name a calm time to look at it together.

If only one of you is on board: Keep your list for your own clarity. Share what you need in one forward-looking sentence, without the list.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I’m not trying to settle the past. Can we look at next week together?”

A note on safety: If you are made to account for every minute or every penny, that is not a shared ledger. It’s monitoring. Not safe at home?

Research notes

Psychologists Margaret Clark and Judson Mills described two kinds of relationships: “exchange” ones, where people track what they give and get, and “communal” ones, where people give based on each other’s needs. Their research suggests that strict tit-for-tat tallies tend to feel cold in close relationships. Studies of couples have also often found that how fair the split feels matters a lot for satisfaction, sometimes more than the exact hours. *This book’s idea:* a ledger read together, looking forward, is a way to keep caring about needs without letting one person’s load stay hidden.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 1

Who did what

Marcus and Theo, a couple

Who did what

Person A

Marcus

Person B

Theo

Week beginning

5 October 2026

Part A: Who did what, this week

Day	Task noticed or done	Who did it	Minutes (rough)	How it came up: asked for, noticed, or thinking time?
Mon	Plan the week's meals	Theo	20	Thinking and planning
Mon	Cook dinner	Marcus	45	Asked for
Tue	Book the boiler service	Theo	15	Noticed and handled
Tue	Dishes	Marcus	20	Asked for
Wed	Laundry, wash to put away	Theo	60	Noticed and handled
Thu	Remember Marcus's mum's birthday card	Theo	10	Thinking and planning
Fri	Bins and recycling out	Marcus	10	Noticed and handled
Sat	Big food shop	Both	70	Asked for

THIS WEEK'S TOTALS

Marcus

110 minutes (44%), of which 10 noticed and handled without being asked

Theo

140 minutes (56%), of which 105 noticed and handled without being asked (30 of them thinking and planning)

Workload balance score

0.88. It describes how the logged work was split this week, not anyone in it.

Unasked-for work

Theo did 91% of the work that was noticed and handled without anyone asking. This is the work that is easiest to miss. Say it out loud, and give the jobs that repeat a named owner.

Part B (optional): Kind ways to say no

Left blank this week.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented.

Fill in your own: Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-01)

Your side, their side

Every tool in this book follows one rule: **each person fills in only their own side**. You write what you did, how you felt and how full your stress tank is. You never fill those in for the other person, and they never fill them in for you.

This rule does two jobs. It keeps the facts honest, because you are the only expert on your own week. And it keeps the tools kind, because a list you write about someone else quickly starts to feel like a report on them. After you have each written your own side, you read them together.

Each of you also holds **context** the other can't see: what your week was like, what you were carrying, what you assumed, what you meant. Giving yours, and asking for theirs, is how two people come to understand each other instead of trading two verdicts. It matters most when one of you has stopped noticing the other's work, or the other has stopped saying so. Context is the way back in (see how to bring it up).

THE REASONING. Everyone is the expert on their own week. As soon as one person writes about the other, the list becomes a report, and the other person has to defend themselves instead of adding what they know.

Worked examples

- **Three partners:** Arran, Dani and Sol each write their own side. Dani's list is short, but her context line says "two night shifts and a migraine." Nobody argues about the short list. See *More than two partners at home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).
- **Two adult siblings who haven't spoken much:** After their father's funeral, Patrick and Marta each write what they did over those weeks. Marta had handled the will and the house; Patrick had sat with their father every night in hospital. Neither knew what the other had carried. See *Family rifts* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).
- **An interfaith couple:** Yusuf keeps track of Ramadan, Eid and his family's visits. Eleanor keeps track of Christmas, Easter and her family's. Writing their own sides shows both of them are doing a full set of "festival work." See *Two faiths, one family* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"I'll just fill in theirs to save time."** Don't. Even a kind guess turns the list into a report on them.
- **"Context is making excuses."** Context isn't an excuse. It's what makes the numbers make sense. "I did less this week because my mum was in hospital" is information.
- **"My list is right and theirs is wrong."** Two honest lists can disagree. Talk about the gap with curiosity: "What did that job look like from your side?"

If only one of you is on board: Write only your side, and add your context. If you share it, say what it is: “This is just my week, as I saw it.”

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Would you write your side, in your own words? I won’t fill in anything for you.”

A note on safety: Nobody should be made to write their side, or have their notes read without asking. Your notes are yours to keep private.

Research notes

Psychologists use the term “naive realism” (from Lee Ross and colleagues) for the everyday sense that we see things as they really are, and that people who disagree must be missing something. Two side-by-side lists are a simple way to check that feeling. *This book’s idea:* the “your side, their side” rule for every tool.

Why the book borrows these words

You’ll notice this book borrows words from accounting, engineering and the science of stress. That’s on purpose. These fields are good at one particular thing: describing how a system is working right now without blaming anyone for it.

A set of accounts that doesn’t balance isn’t evil. A body under stress isn’t broken. Both are just information: a place to start, not a judgment of either person’s worth.

Here are the main ideas, in plain words:

THE IDEA	WHAT IT MEANS	WHERE
Unbilled debt	Work that got done but nobody saw or thanked	This preface
Why we get out of tune	A picture of two people who are slightly out of step, so fine words come out as a clash	Chapter I (page 50)

THE IDEA	WHAT IT MEANS	WHERE
Is the split working?	A simple check of whether the way you share the work can keep going. It uses only what you both wrote down, not what either of you remembers in the heat of the moment. It's about the setup, never a person	Chapter II (page 80)
Leftover stress (how full your tank is)	How full your stress tank already is from other things	Chapter III (page 119)
Seven angles on the same moment	Seven different angles from which two people can see the same moment	Chapter III (page 131)
Fair by promises	An agreement that each job is judged by whether its owner did it	Chapter IV (page 152)
Letting a comment land before you react	Giving a comment a moment to land before you react to it	Chapter IV (page 167)
The monthly look-back	A look back each month for jobs that keep slipping: a careful, friendly self-check, not an inspection	Chapter V (page 185)

When the words don't help: if the borrowed words start to feel cold, drop them. Plain words work just as well. "Unbilled debt" can simply be "the stuff nobody sees."

If you're new together: words like "ledger," "debt" and "audit" can sound heavy eight months in, as if you're about to be inspected. You're not. The ledger idea is simply this: both of you can see the same honest list, so nobody has to carry it all in their head or guess. Call it "our list." Call the monthly look-back "our monthly chat," and the setup check "how it's going." Start with one light week, and stop if it isn't useful. Chapter V has a gentle plan for moving in together (page 206).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Can we look at the setup, not at each other?" "I think this job has no owner."

How the book fits together

What follows is set out as a working ledger, not a lecture. You read a chapter, try its tool, and build a small habit. The steps go like this:

1. **See the work.** Each of you logs one ordinary week with Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-01), then you read the two logs side by side.
2. **Notice when you're out of step.** Chapter I explains why fine words can still clash, and how to retune.
3. **Check whether the split can last.** Chapter II turns your notes into one simple number about the setup, never about a person.
4. **Know what you're carrying.** Chapter III helps you tell leftover stress from this-moment stress, and name the angle you're seeing things from.
5. **Agree on what fair means.** Chapter IV gives every job a clear owner, the person who does it start to finish, and gives every comment a moment to land.
6. **Look back once a month.** Chapter V finds the jobs that keep slipping and fixes the setup.

Along the way, three rhythms keep things running: a 90-second daily check-in (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-13-daily-check-in) that asks how much you were carrying today, a short weekly catch-up where you tally the week in the “Who does what?” page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand) (where each person lists their hours) and glance at your job list, and a monthly look-back (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-04-what-keeps-coming-back).

The goal isn't a perfect 50/50 split measured to the minute. It's a home where both people can see the whole picture, and neither one is quietly carrying a debt the other doesn't know about.

Going at your own pace. You don't have to do every step. Some people stop after the first week, because seeing it was enough. Others pick it up again a year later, after a new baby, a move or an illness. Coming back is part of the plan.

If only one of you is on board: Start at step 1 with only your own week, then read Part One (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now), which is written for one person.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Could we try one week, just to see what we notice? We can stop after that if it’s not useful.”



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

On the way through, Tidbit, Sugarfoot and I pop up with small hints. A *workpaper* is a page you fill in; a *tool* is a helper you use on the site. This chapter’s workpaper is the one-week log, and its quick tool is the split check.

WORKPAPER WP-01

Who did what · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-01

TOOL

Who does what? Quick look · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

lemonade-stand

Who this book is for

The examples often use two people sharing a home, because that’s where unseen work is easiest to picture. But the ideas fit any shared load: partners, grown-up siblings looking after a parent, roommates, co-parents in two homes, friends on a trip, and coworkers sharing a role. How it fits your relationships (spreadloveandacceptance.com/relationships) shows where to start in each one.

The tools are written for two people. If more people share the load, each person still writes their own side, and you read all the lists together. Chapter II shows how to compare three or more shares.

Many kinds of shared life

Unseen work looks a little different in each kind of relationship. A few starting points:

- **Couples of every kind:** same-sex, mixed-sex, married or not. Some research suggests same-sex couples often share housework more evenly,

partly because they can't fall back on old gender habits and have to talk it through. That talking is exactly what this book offers.

- **More than two partners:** each person writes their own side, and you read all the lists together. More than two partners at home.
- **Friends:** the plan-making and keeping in touch. Friends.
- **Parents, children and teens:** teens do more than adults often see. For teens · When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids).
- **Grandparents and grown-up children:** childcare help, and the planning that comes with it. Grandparents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents) · For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children).
- **Adult siblings and family rifts:** caring for a parent, or sorting things out after a loss. Family rifts.
- **Separated co-parents:** two homes, one child, and a lot of handover work. Co-parenting.
- **Foster, adoptive and kinship carers:** Foster, adoptive and kinship families.
- **Housemates and dorm roommates:** Sharing a room.
- **Coworkers and business partners:** the meeting notes, the follow-ups, the invoices. At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **When one of you is ill or disabled:** share by energy, not hours. When one of you is ill (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill).
- **Long distance and different hours:** Long distance (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance) · Different hours · Coming home.
- **Two faiths or cultures:** Two faiths, one family · Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out).
- **People on their own:** your unseen work is real too. On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).

See every relationship in one place: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship). If you lead a group or work with families, For counsellors, coaches and group leaders (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors) shows how to use the book with others.

Your situation, in this part of the book

Some situations get a full section of their own in Part Two:

- **Faith, culture, elders and in-laws:** Chapter I (page 71)
- **Small children or a new baby:** Chapter II (page 105)
- **Two homes after a split, and step-parents:** Chapter III (page 140)
- **Money between you:** Chapter IV (page 174)
- **A couple and a housemate:** Chapter IV (page 177)
- **New together, or about to move in:** Chapter V (page 206)
- **Grandparents raising a grandchild:** Chapter V (page 209)

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“This is a couples’ book.”** The examples often use couples, but every tool works for any shared load.
- **“With three or more of us, it’s too complicated.”** Keep the one rule: each person writes only their own side. Then look for jobs that nobody owns.
- **“At work, this isn’t my place.”** You can still make your own unseen work visible, and suggest one owner for each recurring task.

Research notes

Psychologist Lawrence Kurdek’s studies of gay and lesbian couples found they tended to divide household work more evenly than many mixed-sex couples, often by agreement rather than habit. Research on “diffusion of responsibility” (John Darley and Bibb Latané, 1968) found that people are less likely to step in when they think someone else might, which helps explain why shared jobs in groups slip. *This book’s idea:* applying both to homes of every shape, with one owner per job.

An example week

Here is how a first week might go for two people, Bram and Laila, who share a flat.

Each of them keeps a Who did what log for seven days. Bram’s list has 24 rows. Laila’s has 19. When they swap, each finds things they never knew

about. Laila didn't know Bram had been paying the electric bill each month. Bram didn't know Laila had been setting up the landlord's repair visits by email for months.

Nobody had been lazy, and nobody had been hiding anything. Each of them had simply been working out of the other's sight. They end the evening with two thank-yous and one change: the electric bill goes on the shared calendar.

That's a good first week. Nothing got settled or judged. Two people just saw more of the same picture.

Two more first weeks

A father and his grown-up son, living together: Since Aarav moved back home after university, he and his father, Sanjay, have bickered about "helping out." Each logs a week. Sanjay is surprised by how much cooking Aarav does on his late-shift days. Aarav is surprised that his father spends an hour a week on the bills and the boiler. They agree that Aarav owns Tuesday and Thursday dinners, and Sanjay stops reminding him. See [For grown-up children](#).

A couple where one partner is ill: Mia has long COVID. Ellis does most of the visible housework. When they log a week, Ellis sees that Mia does all the online shopping, appointment booking and family messages from bed. They stop counting hours and start counting energy: Mia keeps the jobs she can do lying down; Ellis keeps the lifting and carrying. See [When one of you is ill](#).

In all three weeks, the first result is the same: surprise, then a thank-you, then one small change.



TIDBIT

Tidbit's tip: short on time? The two-minute snapshot is a speedy first look before a whole week of logging. Zoom!

TOOL

Who does what? Not sure where to start · spreadloveandacceptance.com/snapshot

Your part, and only your part

You can't make anyone see the unseen work, and you can't write their side of the ledger. You can write your own side honestly, say it once, kindly, and then match what you take on to what comes back. If you keep carrying more than your share with nothing in return, stepping back towards your share isn't a punishment. It protects the energy you need to stay kind.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what's in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy, giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when someone can't. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).

On your own: your own unseen work

You don't need anyone else to start seeing the unseen. For one week, notice the jobs only you remember: the appointments, the restocking, the smoothing-over. Write them down for yourself, not as a bill.

- Count it, don't charge it. The point is to see your real load, so you can plan your energy.
- Notice which jobs are yours by choice and which just landed on you.
- Pick one job you could hand back, drop or do less often, and say so kindly.

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:

Step 1: check your battery (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · Step 6: kind ways to say no · Part One: your circle of control The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on sharing the load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-share-the-load)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

Christian, who wrote this book, worked as a government auditor and is a polymath: someone who studied thirteen fields (spreadloveandacceptance.com/

about) deeply and looked for the places where they meet. The thirteen are psychology, philosophy, behavioural science, neurobiology, economics, business, finance, holistic therapies, aromatherapy, the art of debating, politics, music and the healing power of laughter. This chapter, on unbilled debt, draws on 7 of them. Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves. (Music and the healing power of laughter are part of the thirteen too, though they do not meet the preface’s idea directly.)

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Finance	The idea of an unbilled hour: work that was done and logged, but never invoiced, so the client never sees it. It gives the book its ledger.	See the whole load
Economics	Attention is limited: you can only keep track of so much at once. Every reminder you hold in your head takes up some of that room.	See the whole load
Psychology	We remember our own effort best. In a well-known 1979 study, married couples each estimated their own share of household jobs, and for most couples the two estimates added up to more than 100 percent.	See the whole load
Philosophy	Telling what we actually know from how things look. In Plato’s Cave, people mistake shadows for the real thing, which is why you compare two views instead of trusting one.	See the whole load
Business	Work that belongs to everyone belongs to no one, and it quietly lands on whoever notices first.	Notice the quiet incentives
Politics	How a group decides: who has a voice, and what counts. Putting both lists on one shared page is a small act of fair rules, so nobody has to argue about whose work “counts.”	Notice the quiet incentives
The art of debating	Separate the claim from the person, and hear the strongest version of the other side before you answer. It is why the lists are shared as information, not as a bill, and read with curiosity before anyone replies.	Tune how you send and receive

How they connect

The fields don’t just sit side by side. They meet, and each meeting point is where a tool comes from. From the most obvious connection to the most

abstract:

The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath) explains all seven.

- **Obvious: Finance + Economics** (*limited capacity*). An unbilled hour, from finance, meets limited attention, from economics, and together they make unbilled debt: real work that never reached the books. Seeing it is the first job of the whole program. This holds up “See the whole load”.
- **Hidden: Business + Economics** (*quiet incentives*). Nobody decides that one person will carry the noticing. The setup decides it, by rewarding whoever spots the job first. That quiet drift is why the book names the jobs before it splits them. This holds up “Notice the quiet incentives”.
- **Abstract: Finance + Psychology** (*balance*). In double-entry bookkeeping, every amount is recorded in two places, and the two must agree. The book borrows that habit: each person keeps their own record, and the two records are read side by side. Because we each remember our own effort best, one record alone can’t show the whole week. That’s why a ledger only one person can read is “a grudge with neater handwriting,” and why every tool has your side and their side. This holds up “See the whole load”.

Seven of the thirteen fields meet in the preface, and all of them point at the same quiet fact: the work was real, it just never made it onto the page.

The four newest fields are the art of debating, politics, music and the healing power of laughter. Read the polymath way · see all 78 pairs

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, one person keeps a private list for months and brings it out in the middle of an argument. The other feels ambushed, argues with the list, and nothing changes except that both feel worse.

When it goes right, both people write their own lists in the same week, on purpose. They read them on a calm evening. Each says what surprised them. They thank each other for something specific. Then they decide one small thing to change and when they’ll look again.

Questions people often ask

What if the other person doesn't want to do this?

You can still start with your own list. Share it as information, not as a bill: "I wrote down my week because I was curious. Would you look at it with me?" Invite them, and let the answer be theirs. If they say no, that's an answer too. Don't bring the list up in a disagreement; keep it for your own clarity.

Do we have to write everything down forever?

No. One week is enough to start. If you use the monthly look-back later, a few lines a week is all it needs. If writing things down isn't your style, a ten-minute talk over a cup of coffee with the same questions works too.

What if our lists show a big gap?

That's useful to know, and it doesn't need fixing tonight. Chapter II and One owner per job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job) are there to help you rebalance calmly.

Does this only count chores?

No. Planning, remembering, keeping in touch and calming things down all count. Put them on the list with a rough number of minutes.

What if there are more than two of us?

Each person writes only their own side, and you read all the lists together. Look especially for jobs nobody claims, because those drift to whoever notices first. More than two partners at home and Sharing a room have fill-ins for groups.

What if one of us can't do much right now?

That's a season, not a failing. Illness, a new baby, grief or a hard job can all shrink what someone can give. Share by energy, not hours, and agree when you'll look again. When one of you is ill and Grief (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief) go further.

Can I use this with my teenager?

Yes, gently. Let them write their own side, including school and the work of looking after siblings or pets. Thank them for something specific before you ask for anything new. For teens is written for them.

Where can I ask my own question?

Professor Puddles, the site's friendly chat host, can talk any part of the book through with you.

Limits and cautions

- This book offers ways to see and talk about shared work. It isn't therapy, and it can't tell you whether a relationship is right for you.
- These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. They are never a way for one person to build a case against the other.
- If talking about the split ever feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can't say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn't advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Running a home takes unseen work:** the noticing, remembering and planning that many people call the mental load.
- ✓ **The other person usually just hasn't seen it.** This work hides by nature. It isn't a sign that they don't care.
- ✓ **Each of you writes only your own side** of one ordinary week, and you read the two lists together.
- ✓ **The list is for seeing, not for billing.** Thank each other for the past, and plan next week.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Two · Chapter II · Is the split working?

Putting the unseen work into numbers you both trust

page 80

Part Three · Chapter 3 · How we see each other

Why each person sees their own work first

read online

Part Three · Chapter 12 · Helping others well

Care work and how not to burn out

read online

Part Two · Chapter IV · Two kinds of fair

What fair means to each of you, before you talk

page 151

PUT IT TO USE



**Six-week program, week 1:
see the work that's already
happening**

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
prog-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01)



Who did what

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
workpapers/wp-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-01)

I

PART TWO • CHAPTER I

Why we get out of tune: communication at home

Why two kind, reasonable people can end up in a tangle neither of them started, and how to get back in step.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Where this fits: the five big ideas | 10. Staying in tune: small and often |
| 2. The radio whistle | 11. Faith, culture and family voices |
| 3. Why being nearly in step is the noisy part | 12. Your part, and only your part |
| 4. What sets the frequency | 13. On your own: your side of the tuning |
| 5. How stress changes your frequency | 14. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter |
| 6. Nobody has to be wrong | 15. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right |
| 7. Retuning, step by step | 16. Questions people often ask |
| 8. A worked example: the bins, replayed | 17. Limits and cautions |
| 9. Going back in: say it so it lands | |

TUESDAY, 6:40PM

"I said I'd do it." "I know, I'm just asking when." Four sentences later, nobody is talking about the bins any more, and neither of you can point to the moment it turned.

A picture, not a measurement. Nothing in this chapter records, analyses or scores anyone's real voice. It borrows an image from radio to explain why calm, kind people can sound harsh to each other when they're under stress.

This chapter looks at everyday clashes in a different way: not as one person attacking the other, but as two signals that are slightly out of tune, like two radios on nearly the same station.

IN SHORT:

- **A clash often isn't about the words.** Pace, tone and urgency can be out of step even when both of you mean well.
- **Nobody has to be wrong.** Name it (“we’re out of tune”), pause with a time to come back, and slow down.
- **Go back in with one clear sentence:** a fact, a feeling and an ask.
- **A 90-second daily check-in** keeps small drifts small.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This chapter mostly teaches “Tune how you send and receive”, with help from “Read your state first”.

(Drawn from psychology and neurobiology, with a picture borrowed from radio.)

- **In you:** Know your own pace, your usual tone and what “soon” means to you. Notice when stress speeds you up or slows you down.
- **Between you and others:** When a clash starts, treat it as a tuning problem, not a moral failing. Retune together, then translate what you meant into words the other person can hear.

The radio whistle

Tune two radios to stations that are close but not the same, and you don't get silence. You get a whistle. The two signals overlap just enough to interfere, and they make a third, uglier sound that neither radio was sending.

Engineers call this a **heterodyne**, or a “beat”: the extra tone that appears when two signals are almost, but not quite, in step.

This book borrows that picture for a familiar moment. Two people each say something reasonable. Each one's tone is shaped by their own tiredness, hurry or stress. Together they get an argument that neither of them meant to start. The words weren't the problem. The mismatch was.

THE REASONING. If you think the other person attacked you, you defend. If you think two signals crossed, you check. The picture of a whistle gives you a third option between “you started it” and “I started it”: it started, between us.

Worked examples

- **Two mums at breakfast:** “Have you seen my keys?” (rushed) meets “Where you left them, I expect” (tired). Neither line is cruel, but together they sound like a row. A laugh and “Sorry, that came out wrong” clears it.
- **A coworker pair:** “Can you send that over?” in a team chat, with no greeting, lands as cold. The sender was typing on a phone in a lift. See *At work* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“The words were fine, so it’s their problem.”** The words may be fine. The clash lives in the mix, so both of you can help clear it.
- **Arguing about the exact words.** “I said ‘can you,’ not ‘you should’” rarely helps. Talk about how it came across instead.

If only one of you is on board: You can still notice the whistle and lower your own pace and volume. One radio moving closer to the other already cuts the static.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“That came out sharper than I meant.” “I think we just crossed wires.”

Research notes

The whistle is real physics: two close frequencies combine into a “beat” at the difference between them. Using it for people is *this book’s idea*, a picture, not a measurement. Psychologists Thomas Gilovich, Kenneth Savitsky and Victoria Medvec (1998) described the “illusion of transparency”: we tend to think our inner states and intentions are more obvious to others than they really are. So the sender often assumes the kindness was clear.

The radio whistle

Two reasonable signals, nearly in step.

Your pace and tone



Their pace and tone



together make...



a whistle neither one sent

Not “you started it” or “I started it”.

It started, between us.

Illustration. The picture is borrowed from radio (a “beat” between two close frequencies). Using it for people is this book’s idea.

FIGURE 5 The radio whistle. Two reasonable signals, nearly in step, can make a clash that neither person started: it started between you.

Why being nearly in step is the noisy part

The pitch of that radio whistle depends on the gap between the two stations. When the gap shrinks to nothing, the whistle disappears. When two stations are very far apart, the two signals don’t mix into anything you can hear.

People can work the same way. Strangers who barely interact rarely clash. People who share a home, a family or a job are close enough to overlap all day. That closeness is a good thing, and it also means small differences in pace or tone rub against each other again and again. A clash between two close people usually doesn't mean they are badly matched. Often it means they are nearly matched, and just slightly off. Research also suggests we check our meaning less with people we know well, because we assume they already understand us.

THE REASONING. This flips a painful thought. "We clash, so we must be wrong for each other" becomes "We clash because we are close, and we skip the checking." The fix isn't distance. It's a little more checking.

Worked examples

- **Best friends since school:** They finish each other's sentences, so they never check. One says "Let's do something for your birthday," meaning a meal; the other expects a weekend away. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **A grandparent and a grown-up child:** A father says, "I'll have the kids Saturday, as usual." His daughter had planned a family day and feels her plans were taken over. They are so used to each other that nobody asked. See For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children).
- **A couple together for decades:** With the children gone, they are home together more, and small differences in pace rub more often. See Empty nest (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest) and Retired together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/retired-together).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"If they really knew me, I wouldn't have to explain."** Knowing someone well makes us explain less, which is exactly when misreadings creep in. Explaining is care, not a sign of distance.
- **"We used to be in sync, so something is broken."** Lives change: new jobs, new babies, new hours. Drift is normal. Retune to the new life.

If only one of you is on board: Check your own meaning out loud more often, especially with the people closest to you. It costs a sentence and saves an evening.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I know we usually just get each other, but let me check: did you mean...?”

Research notes

Kenneth Savitsky, Boaz Keysar, Nicholas Epley and colleagues (2011) found what they called the “closeness-communication bias”: people overestimated how well they communicated with friends and spouses, in some tests not doing better than with strangers. That is the finding behind this section.

What sets the frequency

Three things tend to shift how someone comes across, often without them noticing:

- **Pace.** How fast you talk, how quickly you reply, and how long a pause feels. Someone who is tense may talk faster, jump in sooner, and read an ordinary pause as the silent treatment.
- **Tone.** A comment meant as a simple update (“the sink’s full again”) can be sent, or heard, as a complaint. It depends on the tone underneath it.
- **Urgency.** One person’s “when you get a chance” can mean tonight. Another person’s can mean next week. Neither is wrong, but they aren’t the same.

Here is how the same sentence can be sent one way and heard another:

WHAT WAS SAID	WHAT WAS MEANT	WHAT WAS HEARD	WHICH ONE SLIPPED
“The sink’s full again.”	A simple update	“You never do the dishes.”	Tone
“Can we talk about the holiday?”	Some time this week	Right now	Urgency

WHAT WAS SAID	WHAT WAS MEANT	WHAT WAS HEARD	WHICH ONE SLIPPED
"Mm." (after a pause)	"I'm thinking."	"I don't care."	Pace
"I'll do it later."	This evening	Maybe never	Urgency

The Frequency Framework (spreadloveandacceptance.com/frequency-framework) takes this further, into the longer rhythms each of you runs on: money, rest, decisions, talking and values.

THE REASONING. Pace, tone and urgency are the parts of a message that aren't in the words, so they're the parts most likely to differ. Naming them gives you three quick questions to check, instead of one big, vague "Why are you being like this?"

Worked examples

- **Interfaith or cross-cultural families:** In Amal's family, people talk over each other to show they care. In Lukas's family, interrupting is rude. At Sunday lunch, Lukas hears a fight and Amal hears a lively chat. Neither family is wrong; their pace is set differently. See [Two faiths, one family](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).
- **Gaming and screen time:** "Coming!" from a teenager in the middle of an online match means "when the round ends," which might be ten minutes. To the parent at the table, it meant now. Agreeing what "coming" means ends a nightly fight. See [Gaming and time together](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together).
- **Shift workers:** A text sent at 3am by a night-shift nurse ("Can we sort the bins?") arrives to a partner just waking up, and feels urgent. It wasn't. A rule helps: "Non-urgent texts go in one morning message." See [Different hours](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"My tone was fine."** Maybe it was, to you. Ask how it landed rather than defending how it was sent.
- **"When you get a chance" is obvious.** It isn't. Add a time.
- **"Texting is safer."** Texts are calmer to send but easier to misread. For anything tender, add a feeling word, or call.

If only one of you is on board: Fix your own sending first. Add a time to your requests, say “this is just an update” before updates, and slow your own pace. One clearer signal already cuts the noise.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Is this a now thing, a today thing, or a this-week thing?” “I’m not upset, I’m just in a hurry.”

Research notes

Justin Kruger, Nicholas Epley and colleagues (2005) found that people sending emails were too confident their tone (such as sarcasm or seriousness) would be read correctly. Anthropologist Edward T. Hall described “high-context” and “low-context” communication styles (1976): in some families and cultures, much of the meaning is in tone and setting; in others, it is in the exact words. *This book’s idea:* the three dials of pace, tone and urgency.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Pace is one of the quiet causes of static. This workpaper lets each of you write down your own pace, then compare notes without blame.

WORKPAPER WP-12

Same moment, different speeds ·

spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-12

How stress changes your frequency

How your body feels changes how you sound and how you hear. The site describes three everyday states, on what it calls the Nervous System Ladder (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks), a thirty-second self-check. It gives you a best guess, not a reading:

- **Calm and connected.** Breathing is easy. You can hear something hard without getting defensive.
- **Revved up.** You feel tense and fast. Your heart is quicker and thoughts move fast. Small things feel urgent or personal. Pace speeds up, and tone gets sharper.

- **Running on empty.** You feel tired and flat, and words are harder to find. Replies get slower and shorter, which the other person may read as not caring.

These labels come from polyvagal theory, whose main claims are still debated by scientists. Here they are only everyday words, not a medical model.

“Running on empty” just means ordinary, everyday tiredness. The point is simple: when you are revved up or running on empty, you are more likely to send and hear signals off-key. Chapter III (page 119) goes deeper into how much stress you bring into a conversation from elsewhere.

THE REASONING. The same words can be easy on a calm day and impossible on a tired one. If you check your state first, you can choose to wait, to warn (“I’m low, so I’ll be brief”), or to go ahead. If you skip it, your state chooses for you.

Worked examples

- **A partner with a long-term illness:** On high-pain days, Lorna’s replies get short. Her partner learned to read short replies as “pain,” not “cross,” and to ask, “Is this a low day?” See *When one of you is ill* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill).
- **A foster carer and a child:** A child who has been through a lot may jump straight to “revved up” at a raised voice. The carer lowers their own voice and slows down first, before any talk about the broken plate. See *Foster, adoptive and kinship families* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).
- **A parent and a child with ADHD:** At 5pm, after a long school day, both are running on empty. They move homework talk to after a snack and ten minutes outside. See *When a child has ADHD* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“You’re revved up” as a put-down.** The ladder is for checking yourself. Don’t use it to label someone else.
- **“I’m always running on empty, so I can never talk.”** If that’s true for weeks, it’s a sign to rest and get support, not to stop talking forever. Talk briefly, at your best time of day.

- **“Calm means I’m not allowed to be upset.”** Calm and connected doesn’t mean happy. You can be calm and sad, or calm and firm.

If only one of you is on board: Check your own state and say it out loud. “I’m running on empty, so I’ll keep this short” changes how your words land, even if the other person never uses the ladder.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I’m revved up right now. Give me ten minutes and I’ll be easier to talk to.”

A note on safety: If you are tense because you are afraid of how someone will react, that is not just stress. Your body may be warning you. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) has free, private help.

Research notes

Sleep researchers in Matthew Walker’s lab (2007) found that after a night without sleep, the brain’s alarm centre (the amygdala) reacted much more strongly to upsetting pictures. John Gottman’s research on couples described “flooding”: feeling so overwhelmed in a conflict that listening becomes very hard. As noted above, the three labels here are everyday words, not a medical model.

Nobody has to be wrong

None of this needs either person to be at fault. Two radios that both work perfectly will still whistle if they are slightly off. No amount of arguing about who’s “really” to blame fixes the interference. Retuning does.

Zhuangzi’s Empty Boat (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth) makes the same point. A man in a boat is angry when another boat bumps into his, until he sees that it is empty. With no one to blame, his anger goes. Much of the time, the bump was no one’s plan. That doesn’t mean a bump never matters. It means starting with curiosity instead of blame.

People are also wired differently. Some notice every shift in tone. Others take words very literally. *Wired Differently* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wired-differently) explains how a mix-up between two differently wired people usually runs both ways.

THE REASONING. Blame narrows attention to one person. “No fault” widens it to the setup: the time of day, the tiredness, the unclear words. Once the setup is in view, there is usually something easy to change.

Worked examples

- **A neurodivergent and a neurotypical partner:** One partner says exactly what they mean. The other listens for hints. “It’s fine” means “it’s fine” to one, and “it’s not fine” to the other. Both are reading carefully, just in different ways. See *Wired Differently*.
- **Separated co-parents:** A message about pickup times turns into a row about the past. They agree that pickup messages are facts only, and feelings go in a separate monthly call. See *Co-parenting* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).
- **Someone coming out to family:** After Leah comes out, her mother asks, “Are you sure?” Leah hears doubt; her mother meant fear for her. Naming that both were scared helps them start again. See *Coming out as an adult* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“No fault means nothing matters.”** It means start with curiosity. If something hurtful keeps happening after it’s been named, that matters, and it is fair to say so.
- **“If I don’t blame them, I must blame me.”** No. Neither. Look at the setup.

If only one of you is on board: You can drop blame on your side, even if the other person doesn’t. “I don’t think you meant that the way I heard it” often softens things quickly.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I don’t think you meant that the way I heard it. Can you tell me what you meant?”

A note on safety: “Nobody has to be wrong” is for ordinary clashes. It never means excusing threats, put-downs or fear. If someone frightens you, it is not a tuning problem. Not safe at home?

Research notes

Psychologist Lee Ross named the “fundamental attribution error” (1977): we tend to blame someone’s character for what was really caused by their situation. Damian Milton (2012) described the “double empathy problem”: when autistic and non-autistic people misunderstand each other, the gap runs both ways. Zhuangzi’s Empty Boat is a story, not a study.



TIDBIT

Ooh, Tidbit loves this one: compare your daily rhythms and see whose engine runs fast in the morning and whose at night. Different speeds aren’t wrong, just different!

TOOL

Rhythms side by side · spreadloveandacceptance.com/tools/frequency-calibration

Retuning, step by step

Before you carry on with a conversation that has started to whistle:

1. **Name the mismatch out loud, without blame.** “*I think we’re on different wavelengths right now.*” This turns “you against me” into “us against the static.”
2. **Check your own state on the Nervous System Ladder.** It’s hard to retune while you are revved up or running on empty. If you are, the Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11), a simple plan for heated moments, comes first. Either of you can call a pause, and the person who paused names a time to come back.

3. **Slow the pace on purpose.** Take shorter turns. Leave more pauses. Lower your voice. Keep going like this until the static clears.
4. **Only then, go back to the topic.** The topic still matters. You are just coming back to it when you can both hear properly.

THE REASONING. Each step does one job. Naming it stops the spiral. Checking your state tells you whether you can go on. Slowing down lowers the heat. Going back to the topic keeps retuning from turning into avoiding.

Worked examples

- **Housemates:** A row about noise at midnight. One says, “We’re both tired. Can we talk about this at breakfast?” At breakfast, it takes five minutes. See *Sharing a room* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room).
- **Three partners:** When a talk gets heated, the third partner gently says, “Static,” and all three take a pause. They agreed the word on a calm day, and anyone can use it. See *More than two partners at home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).
- **Long-distance partners:** A video call drops mid-argument and each assumes the other hung up. Now they have a rule: if the line drops in a hard talk, text “line dropped, still here” and call back after ten minutes. See *Long distance* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **Pausing without a time to return.** That feels like being shut out. Always name a time.
- **Coming back too soon.** If you’re still revved up, take longer. A few minutes is often not enough.
- **Retuning only when you are losing.** Use the pause early, when you notice the static, not as an escape hatch.

If only one of you is on board: You can still pause yourself: “I need a few minutes so I can listen properly. I’ll be back at eight.” Then come back at eight.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I want to hear you properly, and I can’t right now. Can we pick this up at eight?”

A note on safety: Anyone can call a pause, and nobody should be blocked from leaving the room. If you are followed, blocked or punished for pausing, that is a safety issue, not a tuning one. Signs to look out for.

Research notes

John Gottman’s work on couples suggests taking a real break when flooded, often at least twenty minutes, and doing something soothing rather than rehearsing the argument. Matthew Lieberman and colleagues (2007) found that putting feelings into words (“affect labelling”) can lower the brain’s alarm response, which may be part of why naming the mismatch helps. *This book’s idea:* the four steps in this order.

Retuning, step by step

Before you carry on with a talk that has started to whistle.

- 1 Name the mismatch, without blame**
“I think we’re on different wavelengths.”
- ↓
- 2 Check your own state**
Revved up or running on empty? Pause, and name a time to come back.
- ↓
- 3 Slow the pace on purpose**
Shorter turns, more pauses, a lower voice.
- ↓
- 4 Then go back to the topic**
It still matters. Now you can both hear it.

This book’s four steps. Anyone can call a pause, and nobody should be blocked from leaving the room.

FIGURE 6 Retuning, step by step, before you carry on with a talk that has started to whistle.

A worked example: the bins, replayed

Here’s the Tuesday scene again, slowed down.

Alex is tired and has a late shift tonight. Sam is tired and worried because the bins go out first thing tomorrow. Sam asks, “Are you putting the bins out?” The words are fine. But Sam’s urgency is set to “tonight,” and Alex’s is set to “before bed.” Sam is revved up, so the question comes out quickly. Alex hears the speed as nagging and says, “I said I’d do it.” Sam hears the snap and says, “I’m just asking when.” Now both are defending themselves, and the bins are forgotten.

Now the retuned version. After Alex’s snap, Sam pauses and says, “I think we’re out of tune. I’m a bit tense about tomorrow.” Alex takes a breath: “Me too, long day.” They slow down. Sam goes back in with one clear sentence: “The bins need to be out by 7am tomorrow. I’ll feel calmer if I know it’s out tonight. Could you take it out before bed?” Alex says yes, and names a time. The whole thing takes under a minute.

Two more replays

Adult siblings planning a parent’s birthday: Anjali messages her brother, “We need to decide about Mum’s party.” Arun, who lives far away and feels left out of decisions, hears “you’re late again.” He replies, “Do whatever you want.” Retuned: Anjali calls instead. “I think the message came out wrong. I really want your ideas. Could we decide by Sunday?” Arun says he’d love to do the cake. See Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).

Two dads and a toddler at bedtime: Rob (revved up, late for a call) says, “Can you just do bath tonight?” Malik (running on empty) hears “you never do bath.” Malik snaps. Retuned: Rob says, “Sorry, I’m rushing. I’ve got a call at seven. Could you do bath, and I’ll do the morning?” A fact, a reason, an offer. Malik says yes.

Going back in: say it so it lands

When you return to the topic, it helps to have one clear sentence ready. Say it so it lands (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-09-say-it-so-it-lands) sorts what you want to say into three parts:

- **The fact:** one sentence, with no blame words. “The bins weren’t out before collection.”

- **The feeling:** what's underneath. "I felt a bit on my own with it."
- **The ask:** what you would like to happen next. "Could we pick a fixed night for it?"

If your sentence starts with "you always" or "you never," pause and swap it for one fact and one ask. The Chat analyzer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator) can show you how a sentence might land before you say it.

THE REASONING. After a clash, both people are still a bit raw. A clear sentence gives them something solid to hold: one fact to agree on, one feeling to understand, one ask to say yes or no to.

Worked examples

- **Business partners:** "The invoice to Patel & Co went out three weeks late. I felt worried about cash flow. Could we set a reminder for the 1st of each month?"
- **A teen to a parent:** "You read my messages on Tuesday. I felt really embarrassed. Could you ask me first next time?" See *For teens* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).
- **A grown-up child to a parent:** "You gave the baby sweets after I said no. I felt overruled. Could you check with me about food?" See *For grown-up children*.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **Packing in three facts and two asks.** One of each. Save the rest for another day.
- **A feeling that is really a blame ("I feel you don't care").** Use a feeling word about you: worried, alone, rushed, hurt.
- **An ask that is really a rule ("You will...").** An ask can get a no. If it can't, it isn't an ask.

If only one of you is on board: A clear sentence works even if the other person doesn't know the method. You don't have to explain it. Just say it.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Here’s what happened, how I felt, and what would help.”

Research notes

Sybil Carrère and John Gottman (1999) found that the first few minutes of a couple’s conflict conversation, gentle or harsh, predicted a lot about how things went for them later. The fact, feeling, ask pattern is close to well-known methods such as “I-statements” (from Thomas Gordon’s work in the 1970s) and Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication, which uses observation, feeling, need and request.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot’s tip: if a talk has already gone wrong, that’s all right. Take a slow breath first, then try Rewind the talk together.

TOOL

Rewind the talk · spreadloveandacceptance.com/carrier-wave-decoder

Staying in tune: small and often

Radios drift. So do people. Habit research suggests that small routines tied to a regular cue, like the same time each day, are easier to keep than big efforts made rarely. That hasn’t been proven for couples, but it is a sensible way to stay in tune: tiny corrections often, instead of one big correction after weeks of drift.

The quiet stretches drift most. When things have been fine for a long time, nobody listens for the whistle, and a small offset can grow for months without a sound. That is complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency): nothing breaks on the day the checking stops. A tiny, regular correction is the cure, and it works best when each of you can add a little context about your own signal (how the day went for you), so a flat reply is read as “tired,” not “cold.”

That’s the idea behind the 90-second daily check-in (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-13-daily-check-in). The idea comes from electronics, where a small circuit keeps one signal in step with another by making tiny, constant corrections. Once a day, each of you says how much

you were carrying today, one thing you appreciated, and, if you like, one small thing from your day that didn't feel great (about the day, not about each other) and one thing that would help tomorrow. Either of you can pass, any day. You just listen. Nothing gets solved there.

If you want to see whether retuning is becoming a habit, the full chore-split calculator (spreadloveandacceptance.com/is-the-setup-working) has a “retuning frequency”: the number of moments that got retuned, divided by the number of moments that landed badly. For example, if five things landed badly this week and you retuned three of them before answering, that's $3 \div 5 = 0.60$. It isn't a grade. It only shows whether repair is happening more often over time. If nothing landed badly this week, leave it blank. With numbers this small, watch the trend over several weeks, not any one week.

THE REASONING. Big talks are hard to schedule and easy to dread. A tiny daily one costs almost nothing, and it catches drift while it's still small enough to fix with one sentence.

Worked examples

- **Parents on opposite shifts:** They leave a 90-second voice note at handover: how full their tank is, and one thing the other should know. See *Different hours*.
- **Friends who live far apart:** A Sunday “rose and thorn” message: one good thing, one hard thing from the week.
- **Someone returning home after time away:** For the first two weeks back, a short evening check-in helps them learn the new rhythm of the house. See *Coming home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **Turning the check-in into a problem-solving session.** Just listen. Save fixes for the weekly catch-up.
- **Dropping it when things are good.** The good stretches are when drift starts. Keep it tiny so it survives.
- **Making it a duty.** Either person can pass, any day, no questions asked.

If only one of you is on board: Do a check-in with yourself: how full is my tank, what did I appreciate, what would help tomorrow. You can also simply share your own line each day and let the other person join in if they like.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Quick check-in? Mine: medium tank today, and I liked that you made coffee.”

Research notes

A 2010 study led by Phillippa Lally found that new daily habits took, on average, around two months to feel automatic, with a wide range from person to person, and that missing a single day didn't undo progress. Gottman's research on “bids” (small moments of reaching out) and turning towards them is linked to how couples stay close. See Turning towards (spreadloveandacceptance.com/turning-toward).

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 2

The 90-second daily check-in

Priya and Dev, a couple on different shifts

The 90-second daily check-in

Person A

Priya

Person B

Dev

Week beginning

5 October 2026

Each day

Day	Person	Load	One thing I appreciated today	One small thing that didn't feel great	One thing that would help tomorrow
Mon	Priya	High	You left soup in the fridge before my night shift	Woke up to the washing still in the machine	A text when you're leaving work
Mon	Dev	Medium	Your note on the kettle		Bins out before I go at six
Tue	Priya	High	You kept the house quiet till noon		Ten minutes together at the shift change
Tue	Dev	Low	You booked the car in	Missed you at dinner again	
Wed	Priya	Medium	Breakfast together at 8		Early night
Wed	Dev	Medium	You remembered my mum's call		

LOAD THIS WEEK

Priya

2 high, 1 medium, 0 low

Dev

0 high, 2 medium, 1 low

The weekly catch-up

Sore spot that keeps coming up	Times this week	Move to
<i>Washing left in the machine</i>	2	<i>One owner per job</i>
<i>Missing each other at dinner</i>	2	<i>Keep watching</i>

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. One sentence each, then just listen: no debating, no solving.

Fill in your own: The 90-second daily check-in
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-13)

Faith, culture and family voices

This chapter borrows its pictures from radio. For many readers, though, the oldest words about getting back in tune come from their faith. If you share a faith, the tools here can sit inside it, not against it. And whatever you believe, culture shapes how you speak: how fast, how directly, and who may say what to whom.

If you share a faith

- **Prayer or worship as a shared rhythm.** A few minutes of prayer together at night, or the walk home after worship, can do the job of the daily check-in: a small, steady moment to say how the day was and one thing you're thankful for.
- **A pause with a purpose.** Retuning asks you to pause and name a time to come back. Some couples spend the pause in prayer, each on their own, and come back softer. The pause still needs a time: "Let's pray on it and talk at eight."

- **Your own tradition's words about speech.** Many faiths say a lot about how to speak. Proverbs says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath." The Qur'an asks believers to "say that which is best." Jewish families speak of *shalom bayit*, peace in the home. Words you already hold dear can make a fact, feeling and ask sentence feel like your own.
- **Your community and its leaders.** A pastor, imam, rabbi, priest or trusted elder often knows you both and can be a good first person to talk to. Some offer marriage preparation or a couples group. For problems that need more, many faith communities can suggest a trained counsellor who shares or respects your faith.

THE REASONING. Tools work best when they fit the life you already live. A habit tied to something you already do every week, like worship or a family meal, is easier to keep than a brand-new one.

Worked examples

- **A same-faith married couple (made up):** Emeka and Ngozi are Nigerian-British Christians, married 26 years. Their youngest has just left home, and the house is quiet in a new way. They start doing their monthly look-back on a Sunday after church, over lunch. When a talk about money gets heated, Ngozi says, "Let's pray on it and come back at eight." Each prays alone, and at eight Emeka starts with one clear sentence. Their pastor runs a marriage group, and they join it for a term. See Empty nest.
- **A Muslim couple (made up):** Bilal and Samira pray Maghrib together, then sit for ten minutes with tea. That is their daily check-in. When Bilal's family suggests they talk to the imam about an old disagreement, they go together, and later choose a Muslim counsellor the imam recommends.

Elders, in-laws and family far away

In many families and cultures, respect for elders is a deep value, and it shapes who can speak plainly to whom. A son may be able to say no to his mother in a way his wife can't without causing hurt. The southern African word *ubuntu*, often put as "I am because we are," says it well: in many families, a couple's choices are never only their own.

That closeness is a strength, and it brings work, much of it unseen: the calls home, keeping both families up to date, remembering who expects what at a festival, deciding how much money to send to family abroad. Put that work on your list like any other job.

- **Speak to your own family.** Many couples find this helps: each of you speaks to your own parents and relatives, after you've agreed the message together. Neither of you has to carry a hard message to the other's family.
- **Agree before you answer.** When an elder asks for something big (a visit, a long stay, money, a say in a decision), say, "Let us talk about it and come back to you," and then decide together.
- **Money for family is a shared decision.** Sending money to parents or relatives is common, and often a duty of love. Decide together how much and how often, and put it in your money plan (Chapter IV (page 174)), so it doesn't become a quiet worry for one of you.
- **A no can be respectful.** Thank them, give the reason in one sentence, offer what you can, and keep the door open.

For example (made up): Ngozi's mother, in Enugu, would like the couple to fly home for Christmas and to send money for her roof. Ngozi phones her, after she and Emeka have agreed what they can do: "Mama, we love you. We can't come at Christmas this year, but we'll come in the summer. We'll send half for the roof now and half in March." Emeka talks to his own brothers about their father's care. Neither of them carries the other's family alone.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"Using a book like this means our faith isn't enough."** It doesn't. Many people use practical tools alongside prayer, the way they'd see a doctor and also pray for healing.
- **"A faith leader can sort out anything."** They are often a wonderful first support. For some problems, like long-running conflict, depression or a crisis, also see someone trained in that, and ask your faith leader to help you find them.
- **"Respecting elders means never saying no."** Respect lives in how you say it. A clear, kind no, with an offer, is respectful.

If only one of you is on board: You can still bring your faith to your own part: pray before a hard talk, ask your community for support, and go back in with one gentle sentence.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Can we pray about this and talk again tonight?” “Let us talk about it together and come back to you.” “We love you, and this year we can’t. Here’s what we can do.”

If you come from two different faiths or cultures, Two faiths or cultures, one family has more, including a way to plan the festival year together.

Research notes

Annette Mahoney (2010) reviewed ten years of studies on religion in family life, “for better and worse”: faith can strengthen a marriage, for example through shared practices and seeing the marriage as sacred, and it can also be a source of strain. Nathaniel Lambert, Frank Fincham and colleagues (2010) found, in small studies of students, that people asked to pray for a partner or a friend became more willing to forgive them. Chalandra Bryant, Rand Conger and Jennifer Meehan (2001) found that conflict with in-laws predicted later declines in how well marriages went, which is one reason the in-law work deserves a place on the list. *This book’s idea:* treating prayer as a pause with a time to come back, and “speak to your own family” as a shared job.

Your part, and only your part

You control what you send, whether you check how it landed, and whether you step out to retune. You don’t control how it’s heard or how fast the other person settles. Matching energy here means matching care and effort, never volume: if someone gets louder, you don’t have to follow. Stay at your level, and give the conversation the energy it gives back.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what’s in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy, giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when

someone can't. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The smallest habit in this chapter often does the most: three short questions, once a day. The daily check-in keeps them in one place.

WORKPAPER WP-13

The 90-second daily check-in ·

spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-13

On your own: your side of the tuning

Getting out of tune takes two, but retuning can start with one. You can learn your own pace, tone and urgency, so you notice when you're the one running fast or slow.

- Learn your early signs of drifting: a tight chest, a clipped reply, wanting to win.
- Learn how you take words in best, and say it once: "I hear things better in writing."
- When you drift, step out, settle and come back. You don't need anyone's permission to retune yourself.

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:

Step 2: get to know your wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) ·

Step 4: plan what settles you · Part One: who you are today

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now) The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on talking it through

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-talk-it-through)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

This chapter draws on 5 of the author's thirteen fields

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/about) (see the Preface (page 18) or the About page). Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves.

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Psychology	The gap between intent and impact: why a clear, kind sentence can still land as an attack, once pace, tone or urgency slips.	Tune how you send and receive
Neurobiology	How stress changes your frequency. Calm, revved up and running on empty are everyday labels for how you feel, and each one changes how you sound and how you hear.	Read your state first
Philosophy	Nobody has to be wrong. Zhuangzi's Empty Boat: a man is angry at the boat that bumped him, until he sees it is empty. Much of the time, the bump was no one's plan.	Fix the setup, not the person
Behavioural science	Small and often. Habit research suggests a small routine tied to a regular cue is easier to keep than a big one done rarely. The 90-second daily check-in is built to be too small to skip.	Tune how you send and receive
Holistic therapies	Body first, argument second. When you're very tense, clear thinking gets harder, so retuning starts with settling your own state, often with the Calm-Down Kit.	Read your state first

How they connect

The fields don't just sit side by side. They meet, and each meeting point is where a tool comes from. The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath) explains all seven. From the most obvious connection to the most abstract:

- **Obvious: Psychology + Neurobiology** (*state and setting*). The same four words can be heard three ways, depending on the state the listener's body is in. That's why the chapter checks your state before it fixes your sentence: read your state first, then tune the signal. This holds up "Read your state first".
- **Hidden: Philosophy + Psychology** (*signal and noise*). If two working radios can still whistle, then a clash doesn't prove anyone is to blame. The Empty Boat adds a habit: before deciding someone steered into you, check whether you've imagined someone in the boat. Naming it as "us against the static" moves the problem from the person to the setup. This holds up "Fix the setup, not the person".

- **Abstract: Behavioural science + Psychology** (*feedback loops*). In electronics, a small circuit keeps one signal in step with another through tiny, constant corrections. A short daily habit can do the same for two people: a little listening each day, before small misreadings pile up. Together they become the 90-second daily check-in. This holds up “Tune how you send and receive”.

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, both people push on. Each tries to be understood before trying to understand. Voices rise, the topic changes three times, and later neither can remember how it started. The next time the same topic comes up, both already feel tense.

When it goes right, one person notices the static early and names it kindly. Both slow down. The topic comes back a few minutes later, or at a time you agree on, with one clear sentence. Next time, the phrase “we’re out of tune” works a little faster, because you both know what it means.

Questions people often ask

Isn’t “we’re out of sync” just a way of avoiding the subject?

It can be, if it’s used to end every hard talk. That’s why the retuning steps always finish by going back to the topic, and why a pause always comes with a time to return.

What if only one of us wants to retune?

You can still retune yourself. Slow your own pace, lower your own voice, and say your own sentence clearly. One radio moving closer to the other already cuts the static.

What if we keep getting out of tune about the same thing?

Then it’s probably not just a tuning problem. Repeated clashes about one job often mean it has no clear owner: one person who does it, start to finish.

Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4) and One owner per

job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job) help with that, and Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5) shows how to spot the pattern.

Does this work over text?

Partly. Text strips out tone, so it is easy to drift. Keep texts for facts and times, add a feeling word if something is tender, and move to a call or a face-to-face talk if two messages in a row land badly.

What about with my teenager, or a child?

Children and teens drift faster when they're tired, hungry or worried, and they rely on you to settle first. Lower your own voice, shorten your sentences, and come back to the topic after a snack or some sleep. For teens and When a child has ADHD have more.

What if we speak different first languages?

Then pace and tone differ even more, and so do words like “soon.” Check meanings often and kindly, and assume good intent first. Two faiths, one family has ideas for mixed families.

Can I talk it through with someone first?

Yes. Professor Puddles, the site's friendly chat host, can help you find a calm sentence to go back in with.

Limits and cautions

- This is a picture to think with. It doesn't measure anyone's voice, and it can't prove who said what.
- Retuning helps with ordinary clashes. It isn't meant to hide a real disagreement. Once you're back in tune, the disagreement still deserves a proper talk.
- Use it on yourself first. “You're out of tune” said as an accusation is just another off-key signal. “I think *we're* out of tune” works better.
- These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. If talking things through ever

feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can't say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn't advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

To practise, walk through one conversation with Rewind the talk (spreadloveandacceptance.com/carrier-wave-decoder), a guide to one moment that went off-key, and use Say it so it lands for the sentence you go back in with.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **A clash often isn't about the words.** Pace, tone and urgency can be out of step even when both of you mean well.
- ✓ **Nobody has to be wrong.** Name it ("we're out of tune"), pause with a time to come back, and slow down.
- ✓ **Go back in with one clear sentence:** a fact, a feeling and an ask.
- ✓ **A 90-second daily check-in** keeps small drifts small.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 4 · How communication works

How meaning, tone and listening work

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress and the nervous system

Why stress speeds people up or shuts them down

[read online](#)

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words

How you like to be spoken to

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 9 · Minds that work differently

When pace and tone are a wiring difference

[read online](#)

PUT IT TO USE



Six-week program, week 1
[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
prog-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01)



**The 90-second daily
check-in**
[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
workpapers/
wp-13-daily-check-in](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-13-daily-check-in)

II

PART TWO • CHAPTER II

Is the split working? A fair look at chores at home

One gentle question: can the way you share the work keep going, or is one of you quietly running on empty?

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Where this fits: the five big ideas
2. Where the idea comes from
3. What the check is for
4. The three inputs
5. What counts as work: the parts nobody sees
6. Workload balance
7. Ownership clarity
8. Leftover stress (how full your tank is)
9. The formula, in plain language
10. A worked example
11. Reading your result: start with the shortfall
12. The wider view: the overall score
13. One reading is a snapshot. A month of readings is a trend
14. Small children and a new baby
15. Your part, and only your part
16. On your own: is your own load working?
17. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter
18. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right
19. Questions people often ask
20. What this number is not
21. More for your situation

ANY GIVEN WEEK

One of you is quietly doing eleven small things a day that the other has never had to think about. When the other one says it feels even, they mean it. From inside each person's own week, it does.

Before anything else: this chapter describes a rough self-reflection tool, not a scientific instrument. Its number, the setup score, is not a proven statistical model, and it never judges either person or the worth of the relationship. It scores one narrow thing: whether the way you currently share the household

work looks like it can last, based on what you wrote down. Think of a small shop asking whether it can keep paying its bills, month after month, not whether it had a good Saturday. The answer is about the shop, not about whether the owners are good people.

IN SHORT:

- **Look at the month, not last night.** Use what you both wrote down, not memory.
- **Three things go in:** balance (how the hours split), ownership (does each job have a name?) and stress (how full each tank is).
- **One number comes out, from 0 to 1.** Start with whichever part pulled it down most.
- **It judges the setup, never a person.** It's where a talk starts, not how one ends.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This chapter mostly teaches “See the whole load” and “Fix the setup, not the person”, with help from “Read your state first”. (Borrowed from ledger accounting, systems thinking and nervous-system science.)

- **In you:** See your own share honestly, from what you wrote down rather than from memory. See the way you share work as a setup you can redesign, not a flaw in you.
- **Between you and others:** Put both people's numbers on one page, and read the result as a note about the setup, never a verdict on a person. Clear owners leave less room for blame.

Where the idea comes from

- The check uses only what you both wrote down (your logs and your own self-ratings), not what either of you remembers in the heat of the

moment. Whatever it shows is about the setup, never about either of you.

- The idea is borrowed from accounting, where people ask whether a business can keep going on what comes in. Here, a setup that can last is one where the work gets done without one person quietly running out of energy.
- The result is a simple weighted sum we call the **setup score**. It isn't a probability, and it doesn't predict anything.

What the check is for

Sooner or later, everyone who shares a home asks some version of “Is this actually working?” Usually the answer comes from whatever happened most recently: last night's dishes, this morning's tone. That answers the question at the wrong scale.

The check asks a narrower, calmer question: **based on what's actually written down this month, does the way we share the work look like it can last, or is it quietly running down its reserves?** “Written down” means three things: the hours logged in the “Who does what?” page

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand) (where each person lists their hours) or in Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-01), the jobs with named owners in the One owner per job

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job) list, and each person's own stress score from How much are you carrying?

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-02-how-much-are-you-carrying).

You'll meet the stress meter and the job list properly in Chapters III and IV; rough numbers are fine for now.

Why written down, not remembered. Memory is not a neutral record. You remember your own effort in detail, because you were there for all of it. You mostly hear about the other person's effort second-hand, or not at all. So almost everyone sincerely feels they do a bit more than their share. Writing down one ordinary week is the simplest fix anyone has found.

RESEARCH NOTE. In a well-known 1979 study, psychologists Michael Ross and Fiore Sicoly asked married partners, separately, how much of each everyday task they were responsible for. Added together, the two answers usually came to more than 100%. Nobody was lying. Each person simply remembered their own part more easily. Later studies found the same pattern in work teams and group projects.

The same question in different homes:

- **Housemates in a shared flat:** “Is this working?” usually arrives as a note on the fridge after a bad weekend. A month of logs turns the note into a conversation. See *Sharing a room* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room).
- **A long-distance couple:** They don’t share a kitchen, but they share the work of staying close: planning visits, booking travel, starting the calls. That work can be logged too. See *Long distance* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance).
- **A grandfather raising his granddaughter:** His “household” includes her school, her social worker and her other grandparents. The check helps him see whether his load can last, and what to ask the wider family for. See *Foster and kinship families* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).

A common mix-up: “We only need this when things are bad.” The checks you take in calm months are the ones that make a bad month easier to read, because you have something to compare it with.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I don’t think either of us is keeping count on purpose. Can we each write down one normal week, so we’re looking at the same picture?”

The three inputs

The setup score combines three readings, each one covered elsewhere in the book:

INPUT	WHERE IT COMES FROM	WHAT IT SHOWS
Workload balance	The “Who does what?” page, or Who did what	How evenly the logged hours are shared
Ownership clarity	An owner and a backstop for each job, One owner per job	How many regular jobs have an owner (a backstop is a good habit, but not part of the count)
Leftover stress (how full your tank is)	How much are you carrying?, explained in Chapter III (page 119)	How full each person’s stress tank already is from other things

Each input is a number from 0 to 1, worked out from the worksheets, not from what anyone recalls in the middle of an argument.

What counts as work: the parts nobody sees

A log only helps if it catches the whole job. Many jobs have a part you can see (doing it) and a part you can’t (noticing it needs doing, planning it, deciding how, and checking it got done). The hidden part is easy to miss from the outside, and it often settles on one person by habit.

- **Thinking work:** meal planning, the shopping list, school forms, remembering appointments, knowing when the car needs a service.
- **Keeping-in-touch work:** birthdays, cards, calls to older relatives, arranging get-togethers, smoothing things over in the wider family.
- **Care work:** medicines, appointments and comfort for a child, an older parent or a partner who is ill. See *When one of you is ill* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) and *Caregivers* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).
- **Money admin:** paying bills, tracking spending, sorting tax and benefits. See *Money together* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together).
- **Faith and culture work:** getting ready for festivals, keeping traditions, teaching children two sets of customs. See *Two faiths, one family* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).
- **Carer paperwork:** for foster and kinship carers, reviews, meetings and contact arrangements.

Log these in minutes. Five minutes of remembering, ten times a week, is close to an hour.

RESEARCH NOTE. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild’s book *The Second Shift* (1989) described working parents, mostly mothers, coming home to a second job of housework and childcare. Sociologist Allison Daminger (2019) later described the “cognitive” part of household work: anticipating needs, identifying options, deciding and monitoring. In the couples she studied, that part was often less evenly shared than the physical tasks. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo (1987) used the term “kin work” for the work of keeping a wider family connected. Most of this research looked at mother-and-father households, but the same jobs exist in every kind of home.

A common mix-up: “Thinking isn’t really work.” If it takes time and attention, and the house would notice if it stopped, it counts.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
“Can we add the remembering and planning to the list? I think a lot of my week is in that part, and I’d like us both to see it.”



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The check only works if the hidden jobs are counted too. A one-week log, with the planning and remembering written in, gives you honest numbers to start from.

WORKPAPER WP-01

Who did what · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-01

Workload balance

Take the week’s logged hours and work out each person’s share as a percentage. Then:

$$\text{workload_balance} = 1 - (\text{difference between the two percentages} \div 100)$$

A perfectly even week (50% and 50%) scores 1.00. A week where one person did everything (100% and 0%) scores 0.00. A 70/30 week scores $1 - 40 \div 100 = 0.60$.

The score is the same whichever person is doing more. The arithmetic doesn't care who is carrying the load, only whether it is shared. Rough hours are fine. Counting to the minute would only look more precise than it is.

Balance doesn't look at the total. A 50/50 split of a very long week can still wear you both out, which is one reason stress is in the formula too.

If you agreed an uneven split. If you both agreed an uneven split that suits you (say, one of you works longer hours outside the home), compare against the agreed split instead of 50/50. The full calculator has a setting for this.

Three or more of you. Compare each person's share with an even share ($100 \div$ number of people), or with a split you agreed. The "Who does what?" page does the arithmetic for you.

THE REASONING. An uneven load keeps building, whether anyone notices it or not. A person can carry more than their share for a season, for a new baby, an exam or an illness. A setup that needs one person to carry more for ever is, almost by definition, one that can't last.

Three or more, worked through. Three partners in a triad log 15, 9 and 6 hours: 30 in all, so their shares are 50%, 30% and 20%. An even share is a third each. The full calculator works out how much of the week would have to change hands to make it even (about 0.17, a sixth of the week), and compares it with the most that could ever need to move (0.67, if one person did everything). Balance = $1 - 0.17 \div 0.67 = 0.75$. With two people, this gives exactly the same answer as the simple formula above. See More than two partners at home (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).

In different homes:

- **Shift workers:** Kemi works nights and Stuart works days. Their home hours split 50/50, but Kemi does her half on four hours' sleep. Balance looks perfect. The stress input tells the rest. They move the jobs that need a clear head to whoever is rested, not just to whoever has time. See Different hours (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).
- **When one partner is ill:** Two women, one with a long-term illness, agree an 80/20 split by energy for now. Against an even split, balance is $1 - 60 \div 100 = 0.40$. Against their agreed split, it's 1.00. The agreed number is the

honest one, as long as the agreement is real and they look at it again every few months. See *When one of you is ill*.

- **A parent and a teenager:** 50/50 isn't the goal here. They agree something like 85/15, which grows as the teen does. Logging still helps, because it shows the teen what the house takes. See *Teens* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **"We're 50/50, so we're fine."** Balance ignores the total. Two people evenly sharing a very heavy week can both be worn out. Fix: read balance next to stress, never alone.
- **"The agreed split is whatever the main earner says."** An agreed split has to be agreed by everyone it affects. Fix: write it down with the date, and a date to look at it again.
- **"Paid work cancels out home work."** The split counts home jobs. Paid work sits beside it. If one of you works longer hours outside, that's exactly what an agreed split is for.

If only one of you is on board: You can't work out balance alone, but you can log your own hours. Share your total as information, not as a charge: "I spent about 14 hours on the house this week. I didn't know it was that many."

A note on safety: An "agreed" uneven split is only agreed if each person could have said no. If one person sets the split, controls the money that could pay for help, or makes the other afraid to raise it, the number isn't the problem, and no formula will fix it. Money together explains the difference between normal limits and control, and *Not safe at home?* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private hotlines.

RESEARCH NOTE . Large time-use surveys in many countries (such as the American Time Use Survey) have found for decades that, on average, women in mixed-sex couples do more unpaid housework and care than men, though the gap has narrowed. Psychologist Lawrence Kurdek’s studies of gay and lesbian couples found they were more likely to divide housework in a balanced way, often by negotiating rather than by default. Across many studies, whether the split *feels fair* to each person matters more for how happy they are than whether it is exactly equal. None of these averages describe your home. That’s why the check uses your own log.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I want our split to be one we both chose, not one that just happened.”

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 3

Who does what? Quick look

Wren, Josh and Mei, housemates (Wren’s view)

Quick look: who does what at home

Mark who mostly does each job. The picture builds as you go, the thinking work too.

Your name

Wren

Their name

Josh

Person 3

Mei

Job	Who mostly does it
Dishes	Shared
Laundry	Shared
Cleaning the bathroom	Josh
Cooking dinner	Mei
Grocery shopping	Wren
Paying bills	Wren
Noticing what’s running low	Wren
Planning the week	Mei

Job	Who mostly does it
Remembering dates and appointments	Wren
HOW IT LOOKS Here's how it looks from your side, 9 jobs so far. Everyday jobs: mostly shared. 6 jobs: Wren 2 · Josh 1 · Mei 1 · Shared 2. Planning and remembering: mostly Wren. 3 jobs: Wren 2 · Mei 1. The thinking work is easy to miss, because nobody sees it happen. Saying it out loud is a good start. Does this match how it feels to the three of you? <i>A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Pets and booking appointments were taken off the list: they don't happen in this house.</i> Fill in your own: Who does what? Quick look (spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand)	

Ownership clarity

In One owner per job, every regular job gets two names. The **owner** is the person who does the job, start to finish. The second name is a backstop who notices if it slipped and gently checks in, never a supervisor. They can be the same person, though a second name gives the job a gentle check: if one person is both names, nobody else will notice a slip. (The idea is borrowed from project work. The doer-and-backstop pairing also borrows the “maker and checker” habit from internal controls, where one person does a task and another looks it over.)

$$\text{ownership_clarity} = \text{jobs with an owner} \div \text{all jobs on the list}$$

So if you list 10 jobs and 8 have an owner, the score is 0.80. The count needs only the owner's name, the same way the job list and the calculator count it. A backstop is a good habit on top, and the job list has a column for one.

One exception: decisions. On the job list you can mark a row “Both (decide together).” Use it for *decisions* that need both voices, like a school choice or a big purchase, and it counts as owned. Don’t use it for *jobs* that need doing, like packing the bag or homework help. A job marked “Both” tends to belong to nobody, which is the problem the list is there to solve. Even for a shared decision, it helps if one name owns putting it on the agenda.

One warning: don’t improve this score by shortening the list. Deleting the jobs nobody owns raises the number and changes nothing at home. If a job is real and unowned, it belongs on the list as an unowned row. That’s exactly the row the score is there to show.

THE REASONING. Work that anyone could do tends to be done by no one. When a job belongs to everyone, each person feels a little less responsible for it, and assumes someone else has it. Naming one owner is the cheapest fix there is. The backstop solves a second problem: when the owner is ill, away or overloaded, somebody already knows the job exists.

RESEARCH NOTE. In the “bystander” studies by John Darley and Bibb Latané (1968), people were slower to help when they believed others were also there to help: responsibility spread thin across the group. Project managers use responsibility charts (one well-known kind is called RACI) that name exactly one person accountable for each task. The owner-and-backstop pair is a home-sized version of that habit. *This book’s idea*: the backstop’s job is to notice and ask kindly, never to inspect.

In different homes:

- **Dorm roommates:** Four students, one bathroom, nobody’s job. They write a room agreement with one owner each week, rotating, and a backstop who is next on the list. See *Sharing a room*.
- **Adult siblings and a parent:** After their mother’s stroke, the sister who lived nearby became the owner of everything by default. Listing the jobs let her brother, three hundred miles away, own the bills and the insurance calls. If siblings are barely speaking, the list can be shared in writing, or through a cousin both trust. See *Adult siblings and family rifts* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).
- **Foster carers:** Two carers split the agency paperwork, school meetings and the drive to contact visits. Each job gets an owner, and the backstop

covers when the owner is at work. See Foster and kinship families.

- **Business partners:** Two partners in a small firm both “keep an eye on” the shared inbox, so customers wait for days. One owner per weekday ends it. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **“The owner just does the visible part.”** Then the remembering stays with the old owner. Fix: the owner owns the whole job, including noticing, planning and remembering.
- **“The backstop checks the owner’s work.”** Fix: the backstop doesn’t inspect, redo or grade. They notice a slip and ask once, kindly.
- **“I’ll just own everything, to be safe.”** Ownership goes up and balance goes down. The score catches this, because balance carries more weight.
- **“We handed it over, so it’s done.”** A job handed over without the know-how comes back. Fix: write a two-line note: when it’s due, and where things are.

If only one of you is on board: List the jobs you own now, including the thinking part. Then offer to hand over one whole job, with its note. A specific offer is easier to say yes to than “you need to do more.”

A note on safety: A backstop who checks constantly, criticises, or punishes a slip is not a backstop. If “checking” feels like being watched or tested, or you feel afraid of getting a job wrong, that’s not a setup problem. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I’ll own the bins from now on, including remembering bin night. Can you be the backstop, and just text me if you see they’re still out?”

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 4

Our room agreement

Kayla and Bea, first-year roommates

Our room agreement

Your name

Kayla

Their name

Bea

Quiet hours

11 pm to 7 am on weeknights, midnight on Fridays and Saturdays. Headphones after that.

Guests (daytime)

Fine with a quick text first. Not during the other one's study or sleep time.

Overnight guests

Up to 2 nights a week, agreed the day before. A guest doesn't stay in the room when their host isn't there.

Cleaning

Kayla: floor and bins, Sunday. Bea: desk area and the fridge, Wednesday. Our own laundry, our own job.

Borrowing

Ask first, every time. Food on the shared shelf is for both of us.

Lights and alarms

Big light off by 11:30 on weeknights; a desk lamp is fine. One alarm, one snooze at most.

How we bring up problems

Text first if that's easier, then talk within a few days, one topic at a time. If we're stuck, we ask our RA to help.

YOUR AGREEMENT, READY TO SEND

Our room agreement (Kayla and Bea), with every line above, ending: “We’ll look at it again together in a month.”

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. They kept most of the site’s starting point and changed two lines.

Fill in your own: Our room agreement (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room)

Leftover stress (how full your tank is)

Each of you fills in your own How much are you carrying?, about yourself only. It measures how full your stress tank is: a higher score means more stress in the tank. You score five things from 0 to 4: sleep, workload elsewhere, any unresolved conflict, how your body feels, and time pressure today. Add them up and divide by 20. Under 0.30 is low, 0.30 up to 0.60 is moderate, and 0.60 or more is high. Then take the average of your two scores.

Look at each person’s own score too. The setup score uses the average, so it can read “working well” while one of you is struggling. That’s why there is a second rule: if either person is at 0.60 or more, talk about that first, whatever the score says. The score is about the setup; the high tank is about a person’s week, and it comes first in the conversation.

This is the only input that counts *against* the result. The formula uses 1 – stress, so more stress means a lower score. That’s on purpose: a way of sharing work that only holds up when both people are well rested isn’t one that can last.

Never estimate the other person’s score for them. If one column is missing, the full calculator won’t work it out, and that’s the right answer.

Why only you can score you. Stress is felt from the inside. A guess about someone else’s tank, however kind, quietly overrules their own account of their life. And the scores only mean something if both were made the same way, by the person who lives with them.

In different homes:

- **A carer and a partner who is ill:** The carer scores 0.75 for three months running. The split may be as fair as it can be, and still not last. The fix is outside help, not a better split. See Caregivers.
- **A parent and a teenager in exam season:** The teen scores 0.65. They agree to lighten the teen's jobs for three weeks, with an end date. That is an agreed uneven split, chosen on purpose.
- **New parents:** Both score over 0.60. That is the headline. Big changes to the setup can wait, and small ones (one owner for night feeds on weekends) can't. See New parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **"Your score is low, so you've got no excuse."** A score describes a tank. It never sets what someone owes. Fix: read it as information, not as a ruling.
- **"I'm more stressed than you."** It isn't a contest. Both scores are true. Fix: plan around the higher one.
- **"My body score is always high."** With a long-term illness or disability, the body item may be high every day. Fix: score honestly, and compare with your own usual, not with anyone else's.

If only one of you is on board: Score your own tank and share the band, not the details: "I'm in the high band this week." That alone can change how a conversation goes.

A note on safety: If you feel pressured to report a lower score than you feel, or your score is used against you, stop using the tool. And if the stress in your tank is fear of someone at home, that isn't leftover stress. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

RESEARCH NOTE. Researchers study stress with tested questionnaires, such as Sheldon Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (1983). How much are you carrying? is not one of them. *This book's idea*: it is a short reflection prompt made for this book, and it can't tell you anything about your health. The everyday idea that stress adds up over time does have research behind it: the neuroscientist Bruce McEwen called that build-up "allostatic load." The worksheet borrows only the everyday idea.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"My tank is about 0.6 this week. It's not about you. It's work and sleep. Can we keep tonight light?"



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: the stress input is just five quick questions about how full your tank is. No wrong answers, promise!

WORKPAPER WP-02

wp-02

How much are you carrying? · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

The formula, in plain language

Rather than a mystery score, the setup score is a simple weighted sum:

```
setup_score = (workload_balance_score * 0.4)
              + (ownership_clarity_score * 0.35)
              + (1 - average_leftover_stress) * 0.25
```

The weights add up to 1, so the result is always between 0 and 1. Read it as a **snapshot**, not a sentence. The calculator *Is the setup working for everyone?* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/calculators/is-the-setup-working-quick) does the arithmetic for you:

- **0.70 or above ("working well")**: The current setup is holding. Keep the same rhythm of check-ins (spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins) (short, regular talks about how things are going).
- **0.40 up to 0.70 ("needs a look")**: Something in the three inputs is drifting, often ownership first. Start with the biggest shortfall (see below).
- **Below 0.40 ("needs a rethink, together")**: The work, as it is currently shared, doesn't look like it can last. That's a statement about the *setup*, not

about either person's love, effort or worth. Setups get renegotiated all the time.

Why these weights?

The weights are a judgment, not a result from research. They say that uneven hours matter a little more than unclear ownership, and that both matter more than everyday stress. Unclear ownership comes a close second because it's what turns a fixable imbalance into a repeating one: work with no owner falls to whoever notices first, every time. If you change the weights in the full calculator, write the change down, because your old results won't compare with your new ones.

This book's idea. The formula, the weights and the three bands were made for this book. They have not been tested in research studies, and they shouldn't be quoted as findings. They are a clear, open way for two or more people to look at the same thing, and you are free to disagree with them.

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **"0.40 means a 40% chance we'll make it."** No. It isn't a probability, and it doesn't predict anything about the relationship.
- **"Let's change the weights until the number looks better."** Fix: choose weights before you see the result, and keep them for at least a few months.
- **"The calculator decides what we do."** It points at a shortfall. You decide what to do about it, together.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 5

Is the setup working for everyone?

Rosemary and Ken, retired, married 41 years

Is the setup working for everyone?

Person 1 (optional)

Rosemary

Person 2 (optional)

Ken

1. How the hours split

From Who did what or the “Who does what?” page: each person’s total hours for the week.

Rosemary, hours

14

Ken, hours

10

2. Does each job have a name?

From One owner per job.

Jobs on the list

12

Jobs with an owner

9

3. How much each person is carrying

Each person’s own score from How much are you carrying? Everyone fills in their own.

Rosemary, load (0 to 1)

0.45

Ken, load (0 to 1)

0.30

HOW THE SETUP IS WORKING

Working well

0.75 of 1. The setup is carrying its own weight.

Next: nothing in the setup needs changing this week. Keep the same rhythm of check-ins.

If you want to nudge it higher one day (optional, not urgent): hand about 2 hours a week from Rosemary to Ken, and balance would go from 0.83 to 1.00. Give one more job an owner (the person who does it and sees it through), and ownership would go from 0.75 to 0.83.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. It scores the setup, never a person, and never the relationship as a whole.

Fill in your own: Is the setup working for everyone?

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/calculators/
is-the-setup-working-quick)

A worked example

Sam and Alex each log one ordinary week.

- **Balance:** Sam logged 14 hours and Alex logged 6. That's 70% and 30%, so balance = $1 - 40 \div 100 = 0.60$.
- **Ownership:** They list 10 regular jobs. 8 have an owner. Ownership = $8 \div 10 = 0.80$.
- **Stress:** Sam's stress check adds up to 11, so $11 \div 20 = 0.55$ (moderate). Alex's adds up to 5, so $5 \div 20 = 0.25$ (low). The average is **0.40**. Neither score is 0.60 or more, so the average tells the story.

$$\begin{aligned} & (0.60 \times 0.4) + (0.80 \times 0.35) + ((1 - 0.40) \times 0.25) \\ = & 0.24 + 0.28 + 0.15 \\ = & 0.67 \end{aligned}$$

0.67 is in the middle band: something is drifting. Now watch what small changes do:

- If Alex takes over 3 of Sam's hours a week, the split becomes 11 and 9 hours (55% and 45%). Balance rises to 0.90, and the result becomes $0.36 + 0.28 + 0.15 = \mathbf{0.79}$.
- If they also give owners to the 2 unowned jobs, ownership rises to 1.00, and the result becomes $0.36 + 0.35 + 0.15 = \mathbf{0.86}$.

For contrast, a household where the split is 90/10 (balance 0.20), only 4 of 10 jobs are owned (0.40), and average stress is 0.70 scores $0.08 + 0.14 + 0.075 = \mathbf{\text{about } 0.30}$. That's the "kind rethink" band. It doesn't mean anyone failed. It means the setup is asking too much of someone, and it's time to redesign it together.

Two more worked examples, from different homes

A triad. Three partners log 15, 9 and 6 hours, so balance is **0.75** (worked through in the balance section above). They list 12 regular jobs, and 7 have an owner: ownership = $7 \div 12 = \mathbf{0.58}$. Their three stress scores are 0.55, 0.40 and 0.25, so the average is **0.40**, and nobody is at 0.60 or more.

$$\begin{aligned} & (0.75 \times 0.4) + (0.58 \times 0.35) + ((1 - 0.40) \times 0.25) \\ = & \quad 0.30 \quad + \quad 0.20 \quad + \quad 0.15 \\ = & \quad 0.65 \end{aligned}$$

That's the middle band. The shortfalls are 0.10 for balance, 0.15 for ownership and 0.10 for stress, so ownership comes first. In a home of three, "someone will do it" is especially easy to believe. If they give owners to the five unowned jobs, ownership becomes 1.00 and the result becomes $0.30 + 0.35 + 0.15 = \mathbf{0.80}$.

Separated co-parents. Shreya has the children four nights a week and Marek has them three, and they agreed a 60/40 split of the parenting jobs. They log 12 and 8 hours: exactly 60/40, so balance against the agreed split is **1.00**. 9 of 12 jobs have an owner: **0.75**. Shreya's tank is 0.65 and Marek's is 0.30, so the average is about **0.48**.

$$\begin{aligned} & (1.00 \times 0.4) + (0.75 \times 0.35) + ((1 - 0.475) \times 0.25) \\ = & \quad 0.40 \quad + \quad 0.26 \quad + \quad 0.13 \\ = & \quad 0.79 \end{aligned}$$

0.79 reads “working well.” But Shreya is at 0.65, in the high band, and that is the headline. The number is right about the setup and silent about her week. So they move one whole job to Marek for a month (school shoes and the dentist, including remembering them), whatever the score says. See Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).

Reading your result: start with the shortfall

Each part can earn up to its weight: 0.40 for balance, 0.35 for ownership, and 0.25 for stress. The gap between what a part earned and what it could have earned is the **shortfall**. The shortfall, not the total, is the part you can act on.

In Sam and Alex’s first week:

PART	COULD EARN	EARNED	SHORTFALL
Balance	0.40	0.24	0.16
Ownership	0.35	0.28	0.07
Stress	0.25	0.15	0.10

Start with the biggest shortfall. In the middle band that is often ownership, which is why the calculator suggests One owner per job first. For Sam and Alex it is balance, and the two are often linked: giving a job a clear owner is often how some of the hours move. Once you’ve both seen it, what you do next is a choice you make together.

What to try, by shortfall:

- **Balance is biggest:** move one whole job, with its thinking part, from the fuller person to the other. Moving “help” rarely moves hours. Moving a job does.
- **Ownership is biggest:** sit down with the job list and give every unowned row an owner and a backstop, even for a trial month.
- **Stress is biggest:** the setup may be fine and life is heavy. Lower the load for a while: drop, delay, buy help if you can, or ask the wider family. Pick the timing of hard talks with care (Chapter III (page 129)).

In different homes: housemates often find ownership is the gap (nobody owns the shared spaces). Couples after a new baby often find balance is the gap. Carers often find stress is the gap, even when the split is as fair as it can be. Adult children who have moved back home often find the gap is in the thinking work: the parent still remembers everything. See For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children).

A common mix-up: fixing all three at once. Fix: one change, one month, then look again. You'll learn what actually moved the number.

If only one of you is on board: pick the shortfall that sits in your own circle of control. If your own tank is the gap, the change can be yours alone.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"The biggest gap is ownership. Can we try owners for every job, just for this month, and see how it feels?"

Is the split working?

Three readings go in. One snapshot, from 0 to 1, comes out.

Sam and Alex's first week (a made-up example)

Workload balance

short 0.16

0.24 of 0.40

how the hours split

Ownership clarity

short 0.07

0.28 of 0.35

a name on every job

Leftover stress

short 0.10

0.15 of 0.25

how full each tank is

Add them up: $0.24 + 0.28 + 0.15 = 0.67$



Start with the biggest shortfall.
It judges the setup, never a person.

The weights and bands are this book's own choice,
not research findings. A snapshot, not a sentence.

FIGURE 7 Is the split working? Three readings go in and one snapshot comes out. Start with the biggest shortfall. It judges the setup, never a person.

The wider view: the overall score

The full calculator (spreadloveandacceptance.com/is-the-setup-working) also shows a second number, the **overall score**. It adds a fourth input, *retuning frequency*: of the moments this week that landed badly, how many did you retune before answering (see Chapter I (page 67))? Its weights are 0.35 for balance, 0.30 for ownership, 0.20 for stress and 0.15 for retuning. Stress enters as (1 – stress) here too, and the same bands apply. If Sam and Alex retuned 3 of 5 rough moments (0.60), their overall score is $0.21 + 0.24 + 0.12 + 0.09 = 0.66$. If nothing landed badly this week, leave retuning blank; the calculator works the overall score out from the other three. And five moments is a small number, so watch the trend, not one week.

The two numbers answer different questions. The setup score asks, “Can this workload last as it’s set up?” The overall score asks, “Is the whole system working, including how we repair after friction?” They can disagree, and that difference is useful. A home can share the work well and still be struggling to repair after clashes.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The score judges the setup, never a person. Let the calculator do the sums, and save your energy for the talk afterwards. Even a professor would rather not do long division at the kitchen table.

TOOL Fair split check: this week · spreadloveandacceptance.com/is-the-setup-working

One reading is a snapshot. A month of readings is a trend.

A split that was fair once can go stale. Hours, jobs and energy change with a new baby, a new job, an illness or a move, and a setup nobody has re-checked keeps running on the old numbers. Take a fresh reading when life changes, and every few months even if nothing seems wrong. “It has always worked” is an assumption, not a result (see Complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency)). When you read the number together, let each person say what sits behind their own figures. The same hours can mean a calm week for one person and a very heavy one for the other.

A single reading tells you about one week. The trend over several weeks tells you whether anything is really changing. The progress report (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/report-01) helps you keep the numbers week by week. The monthly look-back in Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5) feeds back into this chapter. Fixing a gap it finds keeps the ownership score true, or raises it, because the list now names who really does each job. If the gap was a blank row, filling it in raises the score. If the names were filled in but wrong, the score won't move; only the look-back catches that kind of gap.

Life changes that are worth a fresh reading:

- A new baby, a new child joining the family through fostering or adoption, or a grandchild coming to live with you. See *New parents and Foster and kinship families*.
- Someone coming home after time away, such as deployment, work away or a long hospital stay. The setup changed while they were gone. See *Coming home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).
- The children growing up and leaving. Jobs disappear, but the old split often stays. See *Empty nest* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest).
- Retirement, a new job, new shifts, or one of you becoming ill. See *Retired together* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/retired-together), *Different hours* and *When one of you is ill*.
- A new person moving in: a partner, a housemate, a parent. See *More than two*.

RESEARCH NOTE. Many studies of the “transition to parenthood” have found that after a first baby, couples’ split of housework often becomes more traditional than either partner expected, and that satisfaction with the relationship, on average, dips for a while. Averages hide a lot of variety, but the pattern is a good reason to take a fresh reading after any big change, rather than wait for it to feel wrong.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Our split was set up for a life we don’t have any more. Can we look at it as if we were starting fresh?”

Small children and a new baby

Small children multiply the work, and most of what they add is thinking work. Somebody has to know the nursery's spare-clothes rule, when the next jabs are due, which party is on Saturday and who's buying the present, that the toddler has grown out of his shoes again, and where the Calpol is at 3am. On a list these look small. In a head, they never switch off.

That is part of why the gap described in the Preface (page 26) so often opens after a first baby. One parent is home more in the early months, becomes the one who knows, and stays the one who knows long after both are back at work. Nobody decides it. It's a quiet incentive: whoever notices first ends up owning it.

Logging a week with small children

- **Put the kid jobs on the list:** the nursery or school bag, forms and photo money, the GP and jabs, party replies and presents, outgrown clothes, bath and bedtime, night wakings, the childcare rota.
- **Log the thinking time.** In Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-01), use "Thinking and planning" for minutes spent fitting the week around shifts, comparing nurseries or keeping the family calendar.
- **Nights count.** Log night wakings in minutes, and note who was on shift.
- **Look at two numbers, not one.** The minutes can be even while the noticing isn't. Who did the work nobody asked for?
- **Keep it light.** With a baby, rough minutes in a notes app or on the fridge are plenty. Three or four days can be enough to see the pattern.

Before the baby comes, and the first months

1. **Before the birth, write the new job list together:** feeds, nappies, washing, nights, visitors, registering the birth, the health visitor, the baby's appointments. Give each job an owner before anyone is too tired to decide.
2. **Plan the nights.** Whatever feeding looks like, agree who covers which part of the night, and protect one stretch of sleep for each of you where you

can. The parent who isn't feeding can own the nappy, the settling or the early morning.

3. **Don't let the parent on leave become the only one who knows.** From early on, give the other parent whole jobs they own end to end, like bath time, the baby's washing or the health visitor appointments, and let them do it their way. That's the gate-opening from the Preface.
4. **In the first weeks, share by energy, not hours.** Hours stop meaning much when nobody sleeps. Ask, "Who has the most left in the tank today?"
5. **Look again at set points:** at six weeks, at three months, and before either of you goes back to work. A split that worked at two weeks rarely works at six months.
6. **Let people help, with an owner.** When grandparents and friends offer help, one of you owns saying yes and giving them a clear job.

Feeling further apart after a baby is common. Long-term studies have found that couples' satisfaction, on average, dips after a first baby (Doss and colleagues, 2009). It doesn't mean you chose wrong. It means you're tired and the setup needs redesigning, which is what this chapter is for. If either of you feels low most days for more than a couple of weeks after the birth, or can't enjoy anything, tell your GP, midwife or health visitor. Low mood after a baby is common in mothers and in fathers, and help works.

When one of you works shifts

Shift work makes the doing uneven from week to week, and the thinking work drifts to whoever keeps regular hours. Two habits help. Leave a short note at the shift change: what happened, what's coming up, what's running low. And choose owners who can do their jobs across shifts, like online orders, the nursery bag packed the night before, or GP calls on days off. Compare a whole month, not one week, because shift patterns rarely repeat neatly. See *Different hours*.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"I do the night feeds, so I don't need to do the remembering."** Nights are real work, and they count. The remembering still needs owners, or it lands on one head by default.

- **“Just tell me what needs doing.”** It’s kindly meant, and it keeps one person as the manager. Take a whole job instead.
- **“We’ll sort it out when things calm down.”** With small children, things don’t calm down for years. A rough list now beats a perfect one later.

If only one of you is on board: Log your own few days, including the night-time and thinking minutes, and hand over just one whole job, kindly.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Can we each write down a few days, including the night stuff and the remembering? I think the doing is pretty even. I’m not sure the noticing is.” “Could you own the nursery bag from now on, including noticing when we’re low on nappies? I won’t check it.”

Research notes

Yavorsky, Kamp Dush and Schoppe-Sullivan (2015) found, using time diaries, that mothers took on most of the added childcare after a first baby. Doss and colleagues (2009) found sudden average declines in relationship quality after a first birth, and Cowan and Cowan (1992) describe how strain commonly rises as partners become parents. In a randomised trial, Mark Feinberg and Marni Kan (2008) found that Family Foundations, classes for couples expecting a first baby that focus on teamwork as parents, improved co-parenting and some parts of parent and baby wellbeing. *This book’s idea:* the set points for looking again, and logging the noticing apart from the doing.

A worked example: Hollie and Gareth

Made up. Hollie works four days a week as a pharmacist. Gareth is a paramedic on twelve-hour shifts, and this week he did three nights. Alfie is 3 and goes to nursery; Poppy is 8 months. Each of them logs their own side for a week. Here is what came out:

- The minutes are close: Hollie 290, Gareth 240. The balance score is 0.91.
- The noticing isn’t. Hollie did 72% of the work that was noticed and handled without anyone asking, including all of the thinking and planning.

- Gareth is surprised, and a little hurt: he cooks, does bath and bedtime, and fixed the stair gate. All true, and all on the list. They agree the doing is well shared.

So they don't move minutes. They move one whole job: Gareth now owns the children's clothes and sizes, noticing included, with Hollie as backstop only if something will actually go wrong. They'll look again in a month. Their log is below.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 6

Who did what, with small children

Hollie and Gareth, parents of a toddler and a baby; Gareth works shifts

Who did what

Person A

Hollie

Person B

Gareth

Week beginning

12 October 2026

Part A: Who did what, this week

Day	Task noticed or done	Who did it	Minutes (rough)	How it came up: asked for, noticed, or thinking time?
Mon	<i>Pack the nursery bag: spare clothes, nappies, named milk</i>	<i>Hollie</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Noticed and handled</i>
Tue	<i>Book Poppy's one-year jabs at the GP</i>	<i>Hollie</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Noticed and handled</i>
Tue	<i>Bath and bedtime, both children</i>	<i>Gareth</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>Asked for</i>
Wed	<i>Reply to a party invite and buy the present</i>	<i>Hollie</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Noticed and handled</i>
Wed	<i>Sort outgrown clothes and order the next size</i>	<i>Hollie</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>Noticed and handled</i>

Day	Task noticed or done	Who did it	Minutes (rough)	How it came up: asked for, noticed, or thinking time?
Thu	Plan the week's meals around Gareth's nights	Hollie	20	Thinking and planning
Thu	Cook dinner and batch-cook for the weekend	Gareth	75	Noticed and handled
Fri	Remember the nursery photo money and form	Hollie	10	Thinking and planning
Fri	Night wakings with Poppy	Hollie	60	Noticed and handled
Sat	Swimming lesson with Alfie	Gareth	60	Asked for
Sat	Big food shop and nappies	Both	80	Asked for
Sun	Washing for both children, to put away	Hollie	50	Noticed and handled
Sun	Fix the stair gate	Gareth	20	Noticed and handled
Sun	Update the family calendar and the childcare rota	Hollie	20	Thinking and planning

THIS WEEK'S TOTALS

Hollie

290 minutes (55%), of which 250 noticed and handled without being asked (50 of them thinking and planning)

Gareth

240 minutes (45%), of which 95 noticed and handled without being asked

Workload balance score

0.91. It describes how the logged work was split this week, not anyone in it.

Unasked-for work

Hollie did 72% of the work that was noticed and handled without anyone asking. This is the work that is easiest to miss. Say it out loud, and give the jobs that repeat a named owner.

Part B (optional): Kind ways to say no

Left blank this week.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Gareth worked three night shifts this week, so his rows are fewer; the minutes are close, and the noticing is the part to talk about.

Fill in your own: Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-01)

Your part, and only your part

The score describes the setup you share, but your levers are your own: your jobs, your hours and what you agree to take on. You can propose a fix; you can't make the other person accept it. If the balance stays one-sided, step your load back towards your share on purpose, and say so kindly. Matching effort with effort protects your stress tank, and your tank is part of the score too.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what's in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy,

giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when someone can't. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).

When only one of you is on board

Often one person is keen and the other is wary. That's understandable: numbers can feel like a trap. You don't need the other person's agreement to start on your own side.

1. **Log only your own week.** Never log theirs.
2. **Share one finding**, as information, not as a charge: "I didn't realise I spend four hours a week on lifts."
3. **Make one specific offer:** hand over one whole job, or ask for one. Specific requests are easier to say yes to.
4. **Adjust your side** if nothing changes. Step back towards your share on purpose, and say so kindly.

This works for friends too, where one person always does the planning. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends). And it works across generations, where a grown-up child does all the arranging for a parent. See Grandparents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"You don't have to fill anything in. I just wanted to tell you what I noticed about my own week."

If raising the split leads to threats, punishment, or a fear of what will happen, stop. That's a safety question, not a setup question. Not safe at home? can help.

On your own: is your own load working?

This chapter asks whether a shared setup can last. You can ask the same about your own week: are you spending more energy than comes back in?

- Add up what you carry: jobs, people and worries.
- Set it beside what refills you: rest, help, and people who give back.

- If it runs in the red, change your side: drop, delay, ask or say no kindly. A limit is a statement about supply, not about your worth.

For example: After a divorce, Neil lives alone and has his kids on alternate weeks. On kid weeks he is the owner of everything. On the other weeks he says yes to every favour at work. Adding it up showed him he never had a week that refilled him. He kept one evening a week free on purpose. See On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
“I can’t take that on this week. Ask me again next month.”

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:
Step 1: check your battery (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · Step 6: kind ways to say no · Part One: matching energy The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on sharing the load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-share-the-load)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

This chapter draws on 6 of the author’s thirteen fields (spreadloveandacceptance.com/about) (see the Preface or the About page). Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves.

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Finance	Whether a setup can keep going on what comes in, month after month. The chapter reads the setup that way, never as a verdict on the people.	See the whole load
Business	Ownership clarity: one owner per job, borrowed from project work, and the maker-and-checker habit from internal controls. Every regular job gets a person who does it and a backstop who notices if it slipped.	Fix the setup, not the person
Neurobiology	Leftover stress: a quick self-rating of the stress you’re already carrying. It borrows the idea that stress builds up in the body, but it doesn’t measure your body.	Read your state first

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Economics	Limited capacity and the safety margin. The weights are an open judgment about what matters most, not a hidden law.	See the whole load
Philosophy	How we know what we know. The check uses only what you both wrote down (your logs and your own self-ratings), not what either of you remembers in the heat of the moment.	Fix the setup, not the person
Behavioural science	One reading is a snapshot; a month of readings is a trend. And a score you can raise by shortening the list measures the wrong thing.	Notice the quiet incentives

How they connect

The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath) explains all seven. From the most obvious connection to the most abstract:

- **Obvious: Business + Economics** (*ownership and structure*). Unowned work falls to whoever notices first, every time. That's what turns a fixable imbalance into a repeating one, and it's why ownership carries almost as much weight as the hours. This holds up "Fix the setup, not the person".
- **Hidden: Behavioural science + Business** (*quiet incentives*). If you can raise the ownership score by deleting the jobs nobody owns, the score is rewarding the wrong thing. (This is sometimes called Goodhart's law: once a number becomes the goal, it stops measuring well.) Keeping the unowned rows on the list keeps the number honest. This holds up "Notice the quiet incentives".
- **Abstract: Philosophy + Finance** (*balance*). The setup score says whether an arrangement can last. It can never say whether the people in it are worthwhile. Aristotle's kinds of friendship and Buber's I and Thou sit behind that line: the number describes the setup, never the person. This holds up "Fix the setup, not the person".

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, one person guesses both sets of numbers, gets a low score, and says, “See? The number proves it.” The other person argues with the number instead of talking about the week. Now the tool has become a weapon.

When it goes right, each person brings their own log and their own stress score. They work out the number together, look at the biggest shortfall, and choose one small change. A month later, they check again and see whether it moved.

Going right, in a different home: Two grown-up brothers share their father’s care after years of not speaking much. They each log a month of calls, visits and paperwork, and swap logs by email rather than in person. Neither number is used as proof. They each pick one job to own, and agree to swap logs again in three months. See Adult siblings and family rifts.

Questions people often ask

Our score is 0.69. Should we worry?

No. The bands are rough guides, not cliffs. 0.69 and 0.71 describe almost the same week. Watch the trend and the shortfalls, not the exact border.

What if our hours are even but it still feels unfair?

That’s important information. Hours don’t capture everything, such as who does the planning or who covers the gaps. Try adding the planning and noticing to your logs, in minutes. Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4) is about the different kinds of fair.

Does our score mean we’re a good or bad match?

No. It says nothing about compatibility. It only describes how the work is shared right now.

Can I ask someone to walk me through it?

Yes. Professor Puddles, the site's friendly chat host, can explain any part of the calculation.

We're three or more. Does this still work?

Yes. Each person logs their own hours and scores their own tank. The "Who does what?" page and the full calculator handle any number of people. See [More than two partners at home](#).

We don't live together. Can we still use it?

Yes, for any shared job: co-parents across two homes, siblings caring for a parent, a long-distance couple sharing the planning, coworkers sharing a role. Count the shared jobs, not the house.

My partner says logging is controlling.

Logging your own week is not control. Logging someone else's, checking it, or demanding their numbers would be. Say that clearly, offer to log only your own, and let them choose. If the subject can't be raised at all without fear, see [Not safe at home?](#)

Can a counsellor or group leader use this with people?

Yes, as a reflection exercise, with the same rules: each person fills in only their own, and anyone can stop. See [For counsellors and group leaders](#) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors).

We have different faiths or cultures, and different ideas of who does what.

Then the agreed split matters even more. Talk about what each of you grew up with before you set a target. See [Two faiths, one family](#) and Chapter IV.

What this number is not

It is not a relationship-compatibility score. It is not a fairness verdict about who's the better person. It never uses anyone's tone of voice, private thoughts or way of talking as an input. It only uses the three worksheets above, which each person fills in for themselves and both then read together.

If the number is ever used to end a conversation (“well, the number says...”) instead of starting one, it’s being misused. A low score doesn’t assign blame, and a high score doesn’t silence anyone. The number’s only job is to give two people a shared, low-drama place to start the month’s review together, which Chapter V (page 185) describes at the monthly scale.

Aristotle’s Three Kinds of Friendship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth) and Buber’s I and Thou explain why the number must never stand in for the person. Aristotle noticed that arguments about fairness come up most in friendships built on being useful to each other. Buber said we all need to treat some things as an “It,” but a life lived only that way is missing something. This number is an It. Use it, then put it down and turn back to the person.

These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. If talking about the split ever feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can’t say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn’t advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

More for your situation

- Money together: saver and spender styles, moving in, and the difference between normal limits and control.
- Gaming, phones and time together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together): when free time, not chores, feels uneven.
- More than two partners at home: sharing a home among three or more.
- Sharing a room: a room agreement for dorms and flats.
- Foster and kinship families and When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids): when the care load is bigger than most.
- Adult siblings and family rifts and For grown-up children: sharing care across a family.

- When one of you is ill and Different hours: sharing by energy and by the clock.
- Coming home, Empty nest and On my own: when life changes the setup.
- Two faiths, one family and Coming out (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out): when family expectations shape who does what.
- For counsellors and group leaders: using this chapter with others.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Look at the month, not last night.** Use what you both wrote down, not memory.
- ✓ **Three things go in:** balance (how the hours split), ownership (does each job have a name?) and stress (how full each tank is).
- ✓ **One number comes out, from 0 to 1.** Start with whichever part pulled it down most.
- ✓ **It judges the setup, never a person.** It's where a talk starts, not how one ends.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Preface to Part Two · The work nobody sees

The unseen work the check counts

page 18

Part Two · Chapter III · Full tanks and different angles

The stress input, explained

page 118

Part Three · Chapter 6 · Habits and change

Fixing the setup with small, kind changes

read online

Part Three · Chapter 12 · Helping others well

When one person carries the care

read online

PUT IT TO USE



**Six-week program, week 2:
give every job one owner**
[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
prog-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01)



One owner per job
[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
workpapers/
wp-03-one-owner-per-job](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job)

III

PART TWO • CHAPTER III

Full tanks and different angles: stress and perspective

Why some reactions are bigger than what caused them, and why two people can see the same moment so differently.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Where this fits: the five big ideas
2. Leftover stress (how full your tank is)
3. Leftover stress and this-moment stress
4. The three everyday states
5. The stress-tank score, step by step
6. How it feeds the Chapter II check
7. When “full” has become normal
8. What a high reading asks of you
9. Seven angles on the same moment
10. Two true views of the same thing
11. Using both together
12. A worked example: the dentist, replayed
13. A second worked example: after a contact visit
14. Two homes: co-parenting after a split
15. Your part, and only your part
16. On your own: reading your own tank
17. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter
18. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right
19. Questions people often ask
20. Limits and cautions
21. More for your situation

THURSDAY, 5:15PM

They ask, perfectly pleasantly, whether you remembered to call the dentist. Your reaction is much bigger than the question deserved, and you can hear it happening while it happens.

Both tools in this chapter are self-report tools. That means each person fills them in about themselves. Neither one measures anything automatically, and neither should ever be filled in by one person about the other. That would turn a reflection tool into a way of watching someone, which is exactly what this book is trying to avoid.

IN SHORT:

- **A full tank overflows.** Stress left over from earlier makes small things feel big.
- **Check your tank in a minute,** and say the tank out loud instead of making others guess.
- **Two people can see one moment from different angles,** and both views can be true.
- **A full tank means “later,” not “never”:** pause, name a time, and come back.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This chapter mostly teaches “Read your state first”, with help from “Tune how you send and receive”.

(Borrowed from neurobiology and psychology.)

- **In you:** Know how full your stress tank is, and which angle you are seeing from, before you judge a moment.
- **Between you and others:** Choose the timing, pause and come back. Your state shapes how the other person’s words land, so say it out loud, and ask which angle they are seeing from.

Leftover stress (how full your tank is)

Part of your nervous system runs things without you deciding: heart rate, breathing (though you can also slow it on purpose), and how alert or braced your body feels. Stress from the day collects there, like water in a sponge that can’t take any more.

So the first question in this chapter is simply: *how full is your stress tank already*, before this conversation even starts? When it’s nearly full, a small drop makes it overflow. That’s why a pleasant question about the dentist can get a reaction much bigger than the question deserved.

A short version lives on the site as the Nervous System Ladder (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks), a thirty-second self-check. The fuller version is *How much are you carrying?* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-02-how-much-are-you-carrying), which measures how full your stress tank is. A higher score means more stress in the tank.

Leftover stress and this-moment stress

Any strong reaction is made of two parts:

- **This-moment stress:** the part caused by the thing in front of you right now.
- **Leftover stress:** the part you carried in from somewhere else, such as a poor night's sleep, a hard day at work, a worry about money, or an argument that never got settled.

From the outside, the two look the same. From the inside, they need very different things. “I’m upset about the dishes” is a problem about dishes. “I’m exhausted, and the dishes are what I noticed” is a problem about exhaustion. If you treat the second one as the first, you can sort out the dishes perfectly and still feel just as bad.

The Buddha’s Second Arrow (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth) fits here. The first arrow is what happened. The second is the extra hurt we add to it: the story we tell ourselves, replayed. A full tank makes that second arrow easier to add, which is one more reason to notice what you brought in with you.

RESEARCH NOTE. Researchers call stress that travels from one part of life into another “spillover.” Studies of couples by psychologists Lisa Neff and Benjamin Karney found that when people were under more stress outside the relationship (work, money, health), they tended to react more strongly to everyday problems inside it. The everyday lesson matches this chapter: some of what you feel at home was carried in from outside.

In different homes:

- **A night-shift worker and a day worker:** Leon gets in at 7am after a night shift, just as his husband is leaving for work. Every small question at that

hour lands on a full tank. They agree that 7am is for “hello” and “sleep well,” and plans wait for the evening. See *Different hours* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).

- **A dad and a 16-year-old:** She comes home and snaps at his “How was your day?” Much of it is a hard day with friends, not him. A snack and twenty minutes before any questions changes the evening. See *Teens* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).
- **Coworkers:** A manager carries a tense budget meeting into a one-to-one, and a small question about a deadline gets a sharp answer. Saying “I’ve just come out of a hard meeting” first would have changed how it landed. See *At work* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **“If it’s leftover, it isn’t real.”** It’s real. It just needs a different fix: rest, food, a walk, or help with the outside problem.
- **“My leftover stress means you have to tiptoe around me.”** No. It means you name it, and you own the repair.
- **“It’s all leftover, so the dishes don’t matter.”** Once you’ve rested, check again. Often a smaller version of the issue is still there, and it deserves a calm talk too.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Some of this is about today, and some of it I carried in. Give me a minute to work out which.”



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Before a hard talk, check how full your own tank is. Five quick questions, about two minutes, and you’ll know whether now is the time.

WORKPAPER WP-02

How much are you carrying? ·

spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-02

The three everyday states

The Nervous System Ladder describes three states that most people will recognise:

STATE	WHAT IT CAN FEEL LIKE	WHAT IT'S GOOD FOR
Calm and connected	Easy breathing. You can hear something hard without getting defensive.	Hard conversations, planning, making agreements
Revved up	Quick heartbeat, fast thoughts. Small things feel urgent or personal.	Getting things done. Not a good time to settle a disagreement.
Running on empty	Flat, foggy or far away. Words are hard to find.	Rest. Big decisions can wait.

These labels come from polyvagal theory (ventral vagal, sympathetic and dorsal vagal), whose main claims are still debated by scientists. Here they are only everyday words, not a medical model. You never need the terms. “Running on empty” just means everyday tiredness. Any self-check is a best guess, not a reading. My weather today, a one-minute self-check, offers the same check in weather words: “clear” (calm), “gusty” (revved up) and “fogged in” (running on empty).

THE REASONING. When your body is revved up, it is getting ready to deal with a threat, not to listen. Hard conversations need listening. So the state you are in shapes how the talk will go before anyone says a word. That’s why this book asks you to read your state first.

RESEARCH NOTE. Psychologist John Gottman, who studied couples in conflict for decades, described “flooding”: some people’s heart rate and stress rise so far during an argument that they can no longer take in what is being said. His advice was a real break of at least about twenty minutes, spent doing something calming rather than rehearsing the argument. This is a separate idea from polyvagal theory, and it fits the “revved up” row above.

In different homes:

- **A kinship carer and a 9-year-old:** After a contact visit with his mum, a boy is either wound up or very flat. His grandmother saves homework

and questions for later, and starts with a quiet routine. See Foster and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).

- **A parent and a child with ADHD:** A meltdown is the revved-up row in full. Teaching and consequences go better later, once the child is calm. See When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids).
- **A grown-up daughter and her father:** He calls at the end of her long day with advice about the baby. Running on empty, she hears criticism. She asks to call back on Saturday morning. See For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **“I can tell which state you’re in.”** You can notice signs. Only they can say. Ask, don’t tell.
- **“Calm means not upset.”** You can be sad or angry and still calm enough to talk. Calm is about being able to listen.
- **“Running on empty means lazy.”** It’s a low-power mode, not a choice. Rest is the fix, not pressure.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I think I’m revved up. I want to hear you, and I can’t yet. Can I have twenty minutes?”

The stress-tank score, step by step

In How much are you carrying?, you score five things from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very true), thinking about the last day or two:

1. Sleep debt: I’m less rested than usual.
2. Workload elsewhere: work, study or caring for someone.
3. Unresolved conflict: from any part of life.
4. Physical state: hungry, unwell or in pain.
5. Time pressure: today in particular.

Add the five scores and divide by 20. That gives a number from 0 to 1:

- **Under 0.30, low load:** Whatever comes up is probably about the thing itself.
- **0.30 up to 0.60, moderate:** Say it out loud before a hard conversation: “Heads up, I’m carrying more than usual today.”
- **0.60 or more, high:** Be gentle with yourself, and put off anything that doesn’t need deciding in the next hour.

Example. Sam slept badly (3), had a heavy week at work (3), has a small unsettled disagreement with a friend (1), feels fine physically (0), and has a lot on today (4). That’s $11 \div 20 = 0.55$, the moderate band. Alex slept okay (1), has an ordinary work week (2), no unsettled conflict (0), feels fine (0), and has a fairly normal day (2). That’s $5 \div 20 = 0.25$, the low band.

So before they talk about the dentist, Sam says, “Heads up, I’m carrying more than usual today.” That one sentence can change how Alex hears everything that follows.

In different homes:

- **A partner with a long-term illness:** The body item may be 3 or 4 every day. A 0.55 might be a good week. Compare with your own usual, and say so: “0.55, which is good for me.” See [When one of you is ill](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill).
- **New parents:** The sleep item may sit at 4 for months. Add the context, so the reading isn’t heard as a complaint about the baby or each other. See [New parents](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent).
- **Coming home after time away:** After deployment or months working away, the score can be high even in happy weeks. A homecoming is a big change too. See [Coming home](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **“They never do it, so I’ll score them.”** Never. Invite them once, and score only yourself.
- **“0.59 is fine and 0.61 is a crisis.”** The bands are rough guides. Read the trend, not the border.
- **“A high score shows whose fault it is.”** It shows how full a tank is. It says nothing about blame.

If only one of you is on board: Score yourself and share only the band. You don’t need the other person to join in for this to change a conversation.

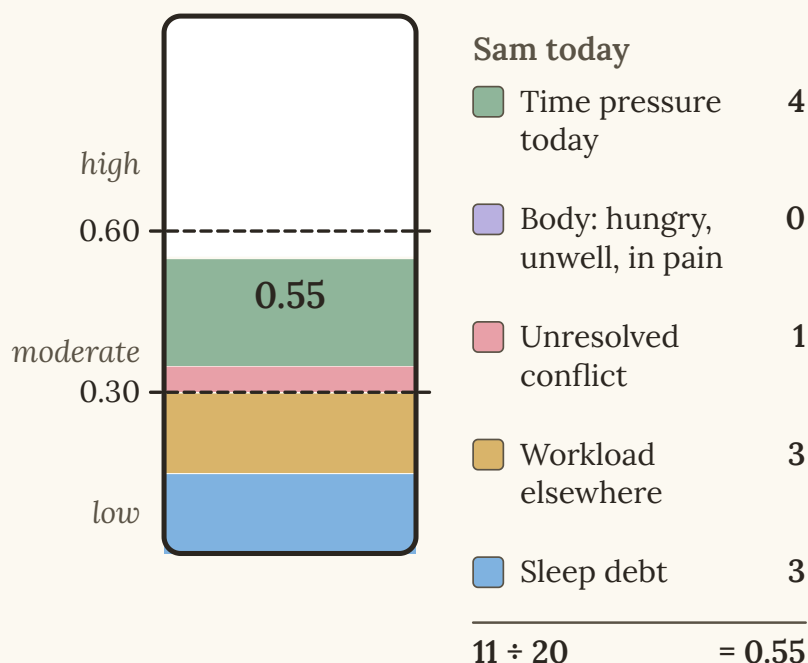
RESEARCH NOTE. *This book’s idea:* the five items and the three bands were chosen for this book. They are not a tested questionnaire, like the Perceived Stress Scale that researchers use. Sleep is the first item for a reason: sleep studies have found that after a short night, people tend to react more strongly to upsetting events and find it harder to read other people’s feelings.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I scored 0.55 today, mostly sleep. Just so you know, it’s not about you.”

How full is your stress tank?

Score five things from 0 to 4. Add them up, divide by 20.



Moderate: say it before a hard talk.

“Heads up, I’m carrying more than usual today.”

Made-up example from this chapter. The five items and bands are this book’s, not a tested questionnaire.

FIGURE 8 How full is your stress tank? Five things scored 0 to 4, added up and divided by 20. Made-up example; the items and bands are this book’s.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 7

How much are you carrying?

Rosa, who shares her mum's care with her brother

How much are you carrying?

Fill this in on your own, about yourself only. Never fill it in for someone else.

Your name

Rosa

Date

7 October 2026

The checklist

0 = Not at all · 4 = Very true

Sleep debt (less rested than usual)

0 1 2 **3** 4

Workload elsewhere (job, school, caregiving)

0 1 2 3 **4**

Recent unresolved conflict (any source)

0 **1** 2 3 4

Physical state (hungry, sick, in pain)

0 1 **2** 3 4

Time pressure today specifically

0 1 2 **3** 4

YOUR LOAD SCORE

Your load today

High load (13 out of 20 points)

What to do

Put off anything that doesn't need deciding in the next hour. If you need to settle first, the Calm-Down Kit is made for this.

If it can't wait

If what you're carrying can't wait, like caring for someone who is ill, that's a sign to get more help, not to try harder: ask one person for one specific thing this week, and look into respite care.

Filled most by

sleep debt, workload elsewhere, time pressure today. Conditions, not character.

Load score

0.65 out of 1.00

Optional

☒ Some of what I'm carrying is caring for someone

Anything you want to name before talking

Mum's hospital appointment moved to Thursday, and I'm the one driving.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Higher means more load. Rosa scores only herself; her brother fills in his own.

Fill in your own: How much are you carrying?

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-02)

How it feeds the Chapter II check

The average of both people's stress-tank scores is the stress input in Chapter II's setup score (page 93). In the example above, the average is $(0.55 + 0.25) \div 2 = 0.40$. It counts *against* the result, as $1 - 0.40 = 0.60$, which is then weighted at 25%. A way of sharing the work that only holds up when everyone is rested isn't one that can last.

When “full” has become normal

A tank that stays full for months can start to feel like how things are. “I’m fine” may then mean “I stopped noticing.” Minds get used to whatever stays the same, including a heavy load, so a reading each week, rather than only on a bad day, can show a baseline you have adapted to. It is a quiet form of complacency with yourself (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency). When you share a reading, add a line of context (“this has been building since March”) so the other person can tell a bad day from a long stretch.

RESEARCH NOTE. Psychologists call getting used to a steady situation “adaptation.” It helps people cope, but it also means a heavy load can stop *feeling* heavy, even while it wears you down. That is why this book suggests a reading each week, not only on bad days.

In different homes:

- **A long-term carer:** After three years of caring for his mother, a man says “I’m fine” and means it. His weekly readings sit around 0.60 for months. See *Caregivers* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).
- **An empty nest:** When the children leave, a couple find the tension they blamed on the busy house is still there, or that the quiet itself feels heavy. See *Empty nest* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest).
- **A family rift:** For someone who no longer sees a parent or sibling, the holidays fill the tank every year, as reliably as the calendar. Knowing that helps you plan. See *Adult siblings and family rifts* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“This isn’t a bad day. It’s been building since spring, and I’ve only just noticed.”

What a high reading asks of you

A high reading isn’t an excuse, and it isn’t a diagnosis. It’s a note to both people: *whatever gets decided in the next ten minutes should probably be looked at again later, when the tank is less full.*

It means “later,” never “never.” The Calm-Down Kit

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11) helps you step away well. Say how you feel, how long you need and when you’ll be back. Use your calming steps. Then check your stress tank again. The kit’s guide is simple: under 0.50, go back at the time you said. From 0.50 to 0.59, if you still feel hot, take another round. Still 0.60 or more after two rounds? That’s okay. Pick a new time, and say when. (The 0.50 is a come-back line inside the moderate band, which runs from 0.30 to 0.60: you don’t need a light tank to come back, just one that is less than half full. The 0.60 is the same high line this book uses everywhere else.)

Why naming a time matters. The person left behind needs to know it’s a pause, not a door closing. Without a time, a pause can feel like rejection, and the one who wants to talk now tends to follow, which fills both tanks. When one of you chases and one withdraws (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw) covers that pattern.

In different homes:

- **Separated co-parents:** They agree no hard talks at the handover, in front of the children. Anything tricky waits for a set call on Wednesday evening. See Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).
- **Business partners:** A heated disagreement about hiring. “Let’s sleep on it and decide at ten tomorrow” saves the decision from two full tanks.
- **Friends:** A text exchange turns sharp. “I want to answer this properly. Can I call you Saturday?” beats a reply typed while revved up. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

- **“A pause is the same as the silent treatment.”** A pause has a reason, a time and a return. The silent treatment has none of them.
- **“When we come back, we pick up exactly where we left off.”** Start instead with what each of you understood, and what you want now.
- **“It’s always the same one of us who needs the pause.”** Either person can ask. If one always does, that is worth a calm talk on its own.

If only one of you is on board: You can still pause and come back on time. If the other person follows you, say the time again, calmly, and step outside if you need to.

A note on safety: If you are afraid of what will happen when you come back, or you aren't allowed to pause (you are blocked from leaving, followed, or punished for it), this isn't about timing. Leaving to stay safe never needs a time to return. Not safe at home?

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private hotlines.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I want to get this right, and I can't right now. Can we talk at eight? I'll come and find you."



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: a full tank means "later", not "never". If you're both upset right now, take five minutes to settle, then pick a time to come back.

TOOL Cool-down corner: Upset right now? · spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now

Seven angles on the same moment

The second idea in this chapter is the **angle** you might be looking at a moment from. Many arguments happen because two people are each looking at the same event from a different angle, and each assumes the other sees what they see.

Here are the seven, each with a question to ask yourself. The "See their side" step of Rewind the talk (spreadloveandacceptance.com/perspective-shifter), built on these seven angles, helps you picture how the same moment might look from the other side, with questions to ask instead of guesses. To learn your own usual angle, and someone else's, the style quiz in How you connect (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength) gives each of you a four-letter Wave Code you can compare.

1. **Physical tiredness.** How rested am I, really, right now?

2. **Time pressure.** Whose week is genuinely fuller? Am I seeing this through a lack of time?
3. **History.** Has this exact friction come up before? Am I reacting to today, or to the last five times?
4. **Family script.** What did “normal” look like in the home I grew up in? Who did this job there?
5. **Sense of fairness.** Does the *split* feel fair to me, whatever the hours say?
6. **Communication style.** Do I say things directly, or do I hint and expect the other person to pick it up? Some people say exactly what they mean. Others lean on tone and context. Neither is wrong, but they often miss each other.
7. **Outside stress.** Is money, work, health or anything outside this relationship shaping how I see this?

RESEARCH NOTE. Psychologists Lee Ross and Andrew Ward described “naive realism”: most of us feel we see the world as it really is, so people who disagree must be missing something. Edward Jones and Richard Nisbett (1971) described how we tend to explain our own actions by the situation (“I was tired”) and other people’s by their character (“they’re careless”). Naming your angle works gently against both habits.

The angles in different homes:

- **Family script, two faiths:** One partner grew up with a big religious festival at home; the other didn’t. The same week is a joy to one and a pressure to the other. See *Two faiths, one family* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).
- **Fairness and outside stress, money:** One person sees a purchase from the angle of security, the other from fairness. See *Money together* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together).
- **Time pressure, gaming:** An evening of gaming is rest to one person and absence to the other. See *Gaming, phones and time together* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together).
- **Family script, coming out:** A parent’s first reaction often comes from the home they grew up in, not from who you are. See *Coming out* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out).

Mix-ups, and how to fix them:

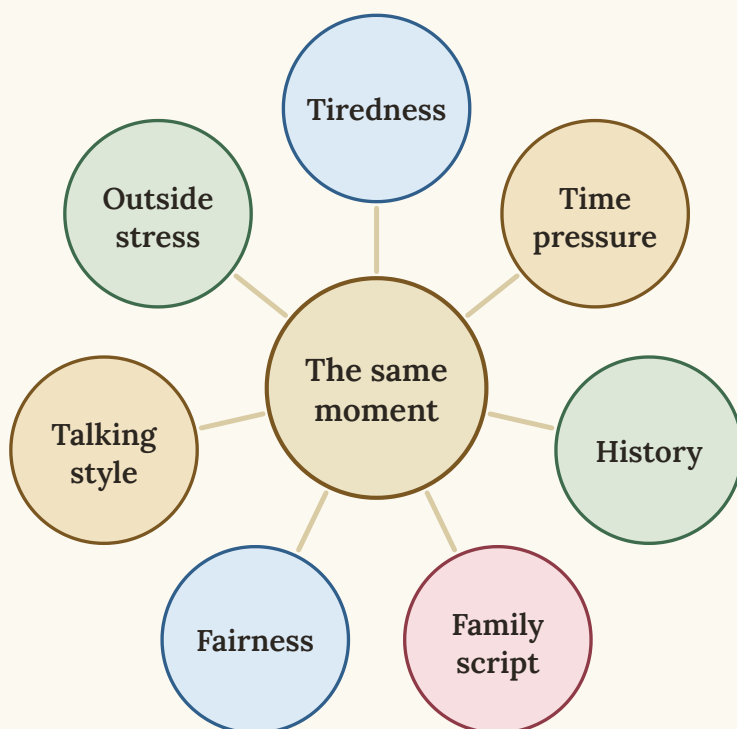
- **“My angle is the right one.”** An angle is a place to stand, not a verdict.
- **“You’re just seeing it from your family script.”** Naming someone else’s angle for them often sounds like a put-down. Fix: name your own, and ask about theirs.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I think I’m seeing this from the history angle. It’s come up before. What angle are you seeing it from?”

Seven angles on the same moment

Which one are you looking from right now?



An angle is a place to stand, not a verdict.

Name your own. Ask about theirs.

Illustration. The seven angles are this book's; the Rewind the talk's "See their side" uses them.

FIGURE 9 Seven angles on the same moment. An angle is a place to stand, not a verdict: name your own, and ask about theirs.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 8

Rewind the talk: see their side

Hana, about her friend Lou

See their side

1. What happened?

I asked Lou if she was still coming to my birthday dinner, and she just replied "maybe".

2. Who are they to you?

Partner Family Roommate **Friend** Coworker Co-parent
My teen or child Someone else

3. What state might they have been in?

Calm and connected Revved up **Running on empty** I'm not sure

4. What might have been going on around them?

A long or hard day **Little sleep** Rushed or late Money worries
Caring for someone Not feeling their best A noisy or crowded place
Other people were there **It was a text or message** It was late at night

5. How are they wired?

They notice tone a lot They take words literally **They need time to process**
They think out loud They're very direct They hint rather than say
They like a plan Noise, light or crowds get to them
Their language or culture differs

6. What history might they carry?

This has come up before They grew up with it done differently
It's a sore topic for them They may feel it's unfair

7. What could each of you see? They may have seen or known things you didn't

their whole day and workload **a message, call or news you didn't see**
something they had already planned or done how it looked from where they stood
a promise someone else made them how they were feeling inside

You may have seen or known things they didn't

the planning you had already done *the reason behind your timing*

what you actually meant how tired or stretched you were the part already done
a deadline only you knew about

Neither of you could fully see

each other's tone, in writing what was going on in the other's head

what would happen next what other people had said to each of you

THROUGH THEIR EYES

Running on empty: If they were running on empty, short replies and slow answers are what a tired body does. It can look like not caring when it's only having nothing left.

Caring for someone: Caring for someone else uses up attention you can't see. They may have had less to give than usual.

Questions to check, instead of guessing: "How was your day, before this came up?" "Would it help to think about it and come back to it later?"

A sentence to bridge the gap: "I think we may have been seeing this from different places. On my side, I knew about the reason behind my timing, and I'm not sure that came across. I'm wondering whether, for you, you were running on empty. Could we compare notes? I'd like to understand how it looked to you."

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. These are possibilities to check, not facts about Lou.

Fill in your own: Rewind the talk: see their side
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/perspective-shifter)

Two true views of the same thing

In the old story of the Blind Men and the Elephant, each man touches one part of an elephant and describes it honestly. One says it's like a pillar, another like a rope. They argue, because each thinks his part is the whole animal. In one old telling, a king who can see watches the whole elephant.

Each man is right about his part and wrong about the whole, and there is still only one elephant. Putting your two views side by side is how you get closer to the king's view.

Take a pile of unopened mail on the kitchen table. One person is looking from the angle of time pressure: "This is a to-do list, and I don't have time." The other is looking from the angle of history and fairness: "I'm always the one who opens it." Both are right about what they see. Naming the angles turns an argument about who is right into a talk about two real concerns.

Where "both true" stops. Both views can be true when they are two honest views of the same thing. It doesn't apply to facts you can check (the bill was paid or it wasn't). And it never means that harm is just a point of view. If one person is hurting or frightening another, that isn't two angles. Not safe at home? can help.

In different homes:

- **Adult siblings after a will:** One sees the money from the angle of fairness. The other sees it as recognition for years of care. Both are describing something real. See *Adult siblings and family rifts*.
- **A grandmother and her son, about the new baby:** She sees helping. He sees his choices as a parent being second-guessed. See *Grandparents* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents) and *For grown-up children*.
- **Two friends:** "You never call" comes from hurt. "I'm drowning with a newborn" comes from exhaustion. Neither cancels the other. See *Friends*.

A common mix-up: "If both views are true, we can never decide." You still decide. You just decide with both concerns on the table.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"You're right about the part you can see. Here's the part I can see. What would cover both?"



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

When two angles both feel true, try writing out the other person's side in their words. Rewind the talk has a "See their side" step for exactly that.

TOOL Rewind the talk · spreadloveandacceptance.com/carrier-wave-decoder

Using both together

The stress-tank check asks, *how full is each person's stress tank?* The seven angles ask, *what does each person think this is really about?*

Used before a conversation, not during one, they replace two people guessing at each other's inner state with two people simply saying it. A two-minute opening might sound like this:

"Before we start: my stress tank's at about 0.55 today, so I'm carrying more than usual, and I think I'm mostly seeing this from the time-pressure angle."

"Thanks. I'm at about 0.25. For me it's more the history angle. This has come up a few times."

Now both people know that one of them is stretched and the other is tired of a repeating pattern. The conversation that follows is about both of those things, not about who raised their voice.

In different homes:

- **More than two partners:** A short round where each person says their tank and angle, and nobody answers until everyone has spoken. It stops two people guessing about the third. See *More than two partners at home* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).
- **A parent and a teenager:** Keep it simple: a number from 1 to 10 and one word. "Seven. School." See *Teens*.
- **Coworkers:** Green, yellow or red at the start of a meeting works as well as a number, and keeps private details private.
- **A long-distance couple:** Start the call with tanks, because you can't see each other's day. See *Long distance* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/)

long-distance).

If only one of you is on board: Say yours anyway, and don't ask for theirs. One person saying it out loud already replaces some of the guessing.

A worked example: the dentist, replayed

Back to Thursday at 5:15pm. Alex asks whether Sam called the dentist. Sam snaps.

Without the tools: Alex hears the snap and thinks, "All I did was ask." Sam feels guilty and defensive. The dentist, the snap and an old argument about who remembers things all get tangled together.

With the tools: Sam notices the reaction was too big and says, "Sorry, that was more than the question deserved. I'm carrying more than usual today." Alex says, "Okay. Is now a bad time?" Sam says, "Can we talk at eight? I'll have eaten by then." At eight, Sam explains the angle: time pressure. The dentist call gets a named owner and a day. It takes five minutes.

A second worked example: after a contact visit

Jen is a foster carer. Jayden, who is 13, comes back from a visit with his birth family and slams his bedroom door.

Without the tools: Jen, tired after a long day, shouts up the stairs: "Not in this house, you don't." Jayden shouts back. Both tanks overflow, and the evening is about the door.

With the tools: Jen checks her own tank first: about 0.50, a long day. She doesn't score Jayden, but she knows contact days are heavy. She knocks and says, "Rough day. I'm making toast. Come down when you're ready." An hour later Jayden comes down and says, "I'm like a nine out of ten." They talk about the door at the weekend, briefly, and about the visit when he's ready. See Foster and kinship families.

Two homes: co-parenting after a split

When parents live apart, children carry two homes, and the adults carry a new kind of shared work: handovers, school, health, money and a lot of messages. This section covers the everyday side for parents who are both safe to deal with, including when the other parent is hard work. If you are afraid of your ex, a shared list or a joint plan isn't the right tool: see Not safe at home?

Transition days, from the child's side

Changeover day is a big day for a child, even a happy one. They leave one parent and one bedroom, and arrive at another set of rules and routines. Many children are quiet, clingy, cross or tearful for a few hours, or a day, after a handover. That usually isn't a sign that something is wrong in the other home. It's the stress of the switch: a tank filling up, the idea at the heart of this chapter.

- **Give landing time.** A snack, a familiar programme, and no questions about the other home for the first hour.
- **Keep a few things in both homes** (toothbrush, pyjamas, a charger, a spare school jumper), so the bag carries only what has to travel.
- **The child isn't the messenger.** Adult information goes adult to adult, never "Tell your dad..."
- **Let them love both homes.** Being glad to see the other parent isn't disloyalty to you. Say so out loud.
- **Give age-sized jobs.** A five-year-old can own putting the comfort toy in the bag. An eight-year-old can own the reading folder and PE kit, with a checklist taped inside the bag.
- **Different rules in each home are okay.** Children manage different rules at school and at Grandma's. What hurts most is adults running each other down or arguing in front of them, not a different bedtime.

Money between homes

Children cost money in both homes, and the extras (school trips, shoes, clubs, presents for friends' parties) are where many money rows start.

- **Keep formal arrangements separate.** If you have a child maintenance arrangement or a court order, follow it. What follows is for the extras on top.
- **Agree a ratio for the extras,** such as half each, or in line with your incomes (say 60/40). Write it down once.
- **Keep one shared list of costs,** with a photo of each receipt, and settle up once a month. Not after every purchase, and never at handover.
- **Agree a “check first” amount:** “Anything over £50 for the children, we ask before buying.” Under that, each home just buys what’s needed.
- **Decide about clothes.** Do clothes travel, or does each home keep its own? Who replaces school uniform? Clothes are a known trouble spot.

For example (made up): Harriet and Dylan split the children’s extras 60/40, with Dylan paying the larger share because he earns more. In October, Harriet paid £84 (a school trip and shoes) and Dylan paid £36 (swimming). The extras came to £120, so Dylan’s 60% share is £72, and he sends Harriet £36. One line, once a month, by message.

What to share with an ex, and what to keep

This book often asks you to share how full your tank is, and your context. With an ex, keep the sharing to what the children’s care needs.

- **Share:** the children’s health, school, sleep, worries and plans; changes to times; anything the other home needs to know to look after them well.
- **Share the band, not the story:** “I’m in a heavy week. Could we swap Wednesday?” is enough. You don’t owe the reasons.
- **Keep:** your new relationship, your money beyond the children’s costs, your feelings about the split and old arguments. Those are yours.

When your ex won’t cooperate, but isn’t dangerous

Some ex-partners are slow to reply, cold, or say no to everything. That is hard, and it isn’t the same as being unsafe. For this middle ground, many families move from close co-parenting to **parallel parenting**: each home runs its own way, with only as much contact as the children’s care needs.

- **Written contact only**, through one channel (a shared email, a co-parenting app or a shared calendar), at set times, and not late at night.
- **Business-like messages**: short, factual, friendly and firm. One topic per message. No history, and no opinions about their parenting.
- **Wait before you answer a sharp message**. Unless it's urgent for the children, reply the next day, and answer only the part about the children.
- **Hand over somewhere neutral**, like school or nursery, so you don't need to meet.
- **Keep your own list for your own home**. If they won't share a job list, keep one for your weeks. You can only own your side.

WORDS YOU COULD USE (A BUSINESS-LIKE MESSAGE):

"Hi Dylan. Freya's school trip is on 6 November and costs £24. I've paid it and put it on the extras list for this month. Thanks, Harriet."

New partners and step-parents

When a new partner joins one home, there is a third adult on the list, and feelings on all sides.

- **The parent stays the owner** of the jobs that involve the other home: messages, decisions and handovers. The new partner can be a helper or a backstop, never the messenger.
- **Step-parents go slowly**. Closeness in stepfamilies usually builds slowly. A step-parent tends to do best starting as a friendly adult and leaving discipline to the parent at first.
- **Tell the other home about big changes** that affect the children, such as someone moving in, in a short, plain message.
- **Children may feel torn**. Liking a step-parent can feel like betraying the other parent. Tell them they don't have to choose.

See Blended families and stepfamilies (spreadloveandacceptance.com/stepfamily) and Co-parenting for much more.

A worked example: Harriet and Dylan

Made up. Harriet and Dylan separated two years ago. Freya, 8, and Arlo, 5, spend weekdays with Harriet, and alternate weekends plus Wednesday nights with Dylan. Dylan's partner, Imogen, has just moved in with him.

Sunday evenings were the hard part. Arlo came back tearful and wouldn't eat; Freya was snappy. Harriet used to ask, "What happened at Dad's?", which made it worse. Now she gives them an hour of landing time: toast, their own blankets, one familiar programme. By bath time they're usually themselves again.

Dylan doesn't answer most messages for days, so Harriet stopped trying to plan everything together. They now use one shared calendar and a monthly email for the extras list, and Harriet keeps her own job list for her weeks. When Imogen started doing the Wednesday pick-ups, Dylan sent a two-line message to say so, and Harriet told the school. Imogen doesn't tell the children off. She plays board games with them, and Arlo has started asking if she's coming.

Harriet's stress tank on changeover Sundays used to sit around 0.65. After two months of the new routine, it's nearer 0.40. She hasn't changed Dylan. She has changed her side.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"If the children are upset after a handover, something is wrong at the other house."** Usually it's the change itself. Watch the pattern over weeks, not one Sunday, and ask gently later, not at the door.
- **"Parallel parenting means giving up."** It's a calmer way to share the children when working closely together keeps going badly. Many parents move back towards working together later.
- **"Being open with my ex means sharing everything"** Share what the children need. The rest is yours.

If only one of you is on board: Run your own home well: landing time, your own job list, business-like messages and one money list. Children feel that steadiness.

Research notes

Robert Emery (1982) reviewed evidence that conflict between parents, married or divorced, is linked to children's problems, and that the amount and kind of conflict matter. Paul Amato's (2001) meta-analysis found that children of divorced parents did a little worse on average than children of continuously married parents, with small differences, and Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly (2002) found that most children of divorce turned out reasonably well. Eleanor Maccoby and Robert Mnookin (1992), following more than a thousand separating families, described three patterns of co-parenting: cooperative, conflicted and disengaged. Patricia Papernow (2013) describes how closeness in stepfamilies builds slowly. *This book's idea*: landing time, the extras list with a monthly settle-up, and "share the band, not the story."



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: children love it when their favourite things make the trip too! A handoff-bag checklist keeps track between two homes.

TOOL

Plan it once: handoff bag for two homes ·

spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting

Your part, and only your part

Your stress tank is the only one you can empty. You can't calm someone else's tank for them, and pouring yours into theirs leaves two empty tanks. Protect yours: rest, say "later," and give energy where it's met. When both tanks are full, the kindest thing you control is the timing.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what's in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy, giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when someone can't. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).

When only one of you is on board

Everything in this chapter works from one side:

1. **Read your own tank** before a hard talk.
2. **Name your own angle**, and ask about theirs without guessing.
3. **Pause with a time**, and come back when you said.
4. **Repair your own part** when your reaction was bigger than the moment.

Often, once one person starts saying it out loud, the other picks it up without being asked.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I’ve started telling you how my day was before we talk about hard things. You don’t have to do it too.”

On your own: reading your own tank

A full tank makes small things feel big. On your own, the most useful habit is a one-minute reading of your battery before you react.

- Check your battery for a few mornings in a row and look for a pattern.
- Before a hard moment, ask yourself how much of this is leftover from earlier.
- Decide on a calm day what settles you, so it’s ready when you need it.

For example: Living alone after a breakup, Bryony noticed she snapped at her sister on the phone every Monday. A week of morning readings showed why: Sunday nights were her worst sleep. She moved their calls to Tuesday. See *On my own* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Mondays are hard for me. Can we talk on Tuesday instead?”

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:

Step 1: check your battery (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · Step 4: plan what settles you · Part One: what settles you The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on staying calm (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-calm)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

This chapter draws on 6 of the author's thirteen fields (see the Preface (page 18) or the About page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/about)). Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves.

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Neurobiology	The autonomic nervous system runs stress and rest without asking you. Its three everyday states are a handy way to describe a reaction that's much bigger than the question deserved.	Read your state first
Psychology	Leftover stress versus this-moment stress, family scripts and communication styles: the angles you see a moment from.	Tune how you send and receive
Philosophy	Two true views of the same thing. The Blind Men and the Elephant, and the Buddha's Second Arrow: the first arrow is what happened, and the second is the extra hurt we add with the story we tell ourselves.	Tune how you send and receive
Holistic therapies	Body first, argument second. A full tank means "later," and the Calm-Down Kit helps you come back.	Read your state first
Behavioural science	Self-report, said before the talk, with a named time to return. When we're stressed, we tend to fall back on habits, so it helps to practise small routines on calm days.	Read your state first
Economics	Capacity again: a tank that's nearly full has no room to spare, so a small drop overflows.	See the whole load

How they connect

The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page explains all seven. From the most obvious connection to the most abstract:

- **Obvious: Neurobiology + Psychology** (*state and setting*). Any strong reaction is part this moment and part leftover. From the outside they look the same; from the inside they need different things. Naming which is which is reading your state first. This holds up "Read your state first".
- **Hidden: Philosophy + Psychology** (*signal and noise*). Each person describes honestly the part of the elephant they're touching. Naming

your angle turns “who’s right?” into two real concerns you can both hear. This holds up “Tune how you send and receive”.

- **Abstract: Philosophy + Neurobiology** (*state and setting*). The first arrow is what happened. The second is the extra hurt we add with the story we tell ourselves. A full tank makes that second arrow easier to add. Noticing it is part of reading your state first. This holds up “Read your state first”.

The body tells you how much stress is in the room, and the mind tells you what each person thinks this is really about.

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, one person says, “You’re obviously stressed,” as a way of dismissing what the other said. Or someone uses a high score every time a hard subject comes up, so the subject never gets talked about.

When it goes right, each person names their own tank and their own angle. High scores lead to a named time to come back, and that time is kept. Over a few weeks, you both learn which angles you tend to see from, and you start to allow for them.

Questions people often ask

Isn’t this just making excuses for bad behaviour?

No. A full tank explains a reaction. It doesn’t excuse it. A kind repair, such as “That was more than the question deserved,” is still part of the job.

What if my score is high every day?

Then the load itself may need to change, which is what Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2) and One owner per job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job) help with. If you feel run down most days for weeks, or often feel numb, far away or panicky, it’s also worth talking to a doctor or counsellor.

Can I guess which angle the other person is using?

You can ask, gently: “Which angle are you seeing this from?” But let them answer. A guess about someone else’s angle often turns into a judgment of them.

Where can I talk this through?

Professor Puddles, the site’s friendly chat host, can help you work out your own tank and angle before a talk.

Does this work with children?

Yes, in simpler words. Young children can use weather words (“stormy,” “foggy,” “sunny”) or a number from 1 to 10. You score yourself out loud, which shows them how. See [When a child has ADHD and Teens](#).

What if one of us is neurodivergent?

States and angles may show differently on the outside, and faces can be hard to read either way. That’s one more reason to say your tank out loud rather than guess. See [Neurodivergent relationships](#) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships).

Can a counsellor use this with a group?

Yes, as long as each person scores only themselves and can pass. See [For counsellors and group leaders](#) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors).

Limits and cautions

- The stress-tank score is a quick gut-check, not a medical test. It can’t tell you anything about your health.
- Fill it in about yourself only. Never score the other person, and never use a score to win a point.
- A high reading is a reason to pause, not a reason to end a conversation for good. Always name a time to come back.
- The seven angles are a helpful list, not a complete one. If you’re seeing something from an angle that isn’t on the list, name it anyway.

- These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. If sharing how you feel ever feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can't say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn't advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.
- The research notes in this chapter describe well-known findings in plain words. Where an idea is this book's own, it says so. None of it is a diagnosis.

More for your situation

- Different hours and Long distance: when your tanks fill at different times of day.
- When one of you is ill and Caregivers: when one tank stays full for a long time.
- Foster and kinship families and When a child has ADHD: reading a child's state, and your own.
- Friends, Adult siblings and family rifts and For grown-up children: two true views across a family or a friendship.
- More than two partners at home and Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room): saying your tank in a group.
- Two faiths, one family, Coming out and Money together: when the angle is family, faith or money.
- Coming home, Empty nest and On my own: when a life change fills the tank.
- For counsellors and group leaders: using this chapter with others.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **A full tank overflows.** Stress left over from earlier makes small things feel big.
- ✓ **Check your tank in a minute,** and say the band out loud instead of making others guess.
- ✓ **Two people can see one moment from different angles,** and both views can be true.
- ✓ **A full tank means “later,” not “never”:** pause, name a time, and come back.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress and the nervous system

The ladder, flooding and rest

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 3 · How we see each other

The angles and stories behind a reaction

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 13 · Anger

What to do in the hot minutes

[read online](#)

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words

Checking your own weather first

[read online](#)

PUT IT TO USE



Six-week program, week 3: notice how much each of you is carrying

spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01



How much are you carrying?

spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-02-how-much-are-you-carrying

IV

PART TWO • CHAPTER IV

Two kinds of fair: equal vs fair at home

Agree on what “fair” means before you argue about it, and give a comment a moment to land before you answer it.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Where this fits: the five big ideas | 12. A worked example: the flat thank-you |
| 2. The two kinds of fair | 13. Money between you |
| 3. Judging by results | 14. A couple and a housemate |
| 4. Judging by promises | 15. Your part, and only your part |
| 5. The agreement: look to the owner | 16. On your own: your own kind of fair |
| 6. Choosing your kind of fair | 17. More for your situation |
| 7. Covering without resentment | 18. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter |
| 8. A worked example: the bins, three weeks running | 19. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right |
| 9. Letting a comment land before you react | 20. Questions people often ask |
| 10. The three steps: notice, name, decide | 21. Limits and cautions |
| 11. Keep the two questions apart | |

THE SAME ARGUMENT, TWICE A MONTH

One of you counts hours. The other counts who noticed the job needed doing. You're both counting honestly, in two different currencies, and then arguing about the exchange rate.

This chapter has two halves. The first is about agreeing what “fair” means in your home. The second is about the few seconds after a comment lands, before you reply. They belong together, because many arguments about chores mix up both: a question about a job, and a reaction to how it was said.

IN SHORT:

- **There are two kinds of fair:** by results (did it all get done?) and by promises (did each of us do what we agreed?). Agree which one you're using.
- **Once a job has an owner, look to the owner.** Covering for someone is kind when you say it out loud.
- **Let a comment land before you react:** notice it, name it, then decide what to say.
- **Keep the two questions apart:** "Was the job done?" is about a fact; "Did that comment hurt?" is about a feeling.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This chapter mostly teaches "Fix the setup, not the person" and "Notice the quiet incentives", with help from "Read your state first". (Borrowed from business, economics and neurobiology.)

- **In you:** Notice which kind of fair comes naturally to you, and notice the quiet habit of covering for others without saying so. When a comment stings, check your own state before you answer.
- **Between you and others:** Give each job one clear owner instead of blaming. Watch how unowned jobs slide towards one person, and keep things steady by mentioning help out loud and saying thank you.

The two kinds of fair

Many arguments about what fairness means come dressed up as an argument about chores. Philosophers have argued about this for centuries, and two of their big ideas are useful here:

- **Fair by results.** Philosophers call this *consequentialist*, from "consequences": you judge by outcomes, by how things turned out. It asks: did the right things get done, by whoever had the time or energy? Done carefully, it counts the cost to whoever covered, too.

- **Fair by promises.** Philosophers call this *deontological*, from the Greek word for “duty.” It asks: did each person do the specific things they agreed to own, whatever kind of week it was?

Both are reasonable. The friction starts when one person is judging the week by results (“It all got done, so we’re fine”) and the other is judging it by promises (“You said you’d handle the bins, and you didn’t, again”). Neither view is wrong. But a household needs to agree which one it is using, just as a contract needs to say which state’s laws apply.

Why the two kinds clash

Each kind of fair answers a different worry. Fair by results answers “Will the home keep running?” Fair by promises answers “Can I rely on you?” Both worries are real. When one person’s worry is met and the other’s isn’t, the first feels things are fine and the second feels let down, in the same week, about the same jobs. Naming which worry you each carry turns a fight about the bins into a conversation about trust and flexibility.

Three homes, one clash

- **Two mums, two kids.** Maya judges the week by results: the kids were fed, school forms went in, so it was a good week. Lin judges by promises: Maya said she’d book the dentist and didn’t. When they name it (“You’re counting the week, I’m counting the dentist”), the argument shrinks to one booking and one owner.
- **Three adult siblings and their mum.** One says, “Mum’s fine, isn’t she?” (results). Another keeps a rota and feels it’s ignored (promises). The third lives far away and pays for a cleaner, in a different currency again. A short call that names all three kinds of help stops each one feeling unseen. See *Family rifts* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts) when old hurts are part of it.
- **Four housemates.** The group chat fills with “who left the bins?” Two of them want a rota. Two want “whoever’s around.” They agree: a rota for bins and bathroom, results for everything else. See *Sharing a room* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room) for a written agreement.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“Results people are lazy, promise people are controlling.”** Neither is true. Fix: talk about the kind of fair, never the kind of person. “You lean results, I lean promises” is a description, not a charge.
- **“We have to pick one kind forever.”** Most homes use both. Fix: decide by type of job, as in Choosing your kind of fair below.
- **“Fair means fifty-fifty.”** Equal hours are one way to be fair, not the only one. Fix: ask whether the split feels fair to both of you, given work hours, health and season.

If only one of you is on board

You can still name your own ruler: “I’ve realised I count promises. That’s why a missed job gets to me, even when it all works out.” This often lowers the heat on its own, because the other person now knows what the upset is about. You can’t make them choose a kind of fair. You can choose to say yours once, kindly, and see what comes back.

Honest research notes

- **Research:** Researchers who study fairness describe several rules people use: equality (the same for each), equity (in proportion to what each puts in) and need (according to what each requires). Disagreements often come from using different rules without saying so.
- **Research:** Studies of couples and housework keep finding that whether both people feel the split is fair matters more for satisfaction than an exact fifty-fifty.
- **Research:** When partners each estimate their share of household work, their estimates often add up to more than 100 percent. We remember our own effort more easily than other people’s (Ross and Sicol, 1979).
- **This book’s idea:** Calling the two kinds “results” and “promises,” after two old schools of philosophy, is a teaching picture. Researchers don’t sort households this way.

Two kinds of fair

Both are reasonable. Trouble starts when you use different ones without saying so.

Fair by results

Asks: Did it all get done?

Guards: Will the home keep running?

Good: flexible. Watch: it can hide who always steps in.

Bins ✓

Dentist ✓

Forms ✓

Fair by promises

Asks: Did each of us do what we agreed?

Guards: Can I rely on you?

Good: clear. Watch: it can feel rigid in a hard week.

Bins · Sam ✓

Dentist · Maya ✗

Forms · Lin ✓

The agreement: look to the owner

○ Bins · owner: Sam

second name: Alex, who notices and asks once

Once a job has a named owner, judge it by whether the owner did their part (swapping or asking ahead counts), not by whether someone quietly covered. Made-up examples.

FIGURE 10 Two kinds of fair. Both are reasonable; trouble starts when people use different ones without saying so. Once a job has an owner, look to the owner.

Judging by results

What it's good at: it's flexible. In a week when one person is sick or away, the other simply picks things up, and nobody has to negotiate.

Where it goes wrong: it can hide a pattern. If the same person always steps in, the results look fine, and the stepping-in becomes invisible. Over time, that is how unbilled debt (page 20) builds up.

Fair by results, in three homes

- **Separated co-parents.** “Whoever is nearer picks her up when she's sick” works well, until one parent works from home and is always nearer. Results-fair has quietly made them the default. See Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).
- **A home with three partners.** “Whoever's free cooks” sounds relaxed. After two months, the partner on the shortest hours has cooked almost every night. See More than two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).
- **Coming home after time away.** While one partner was deployed, the other did everything by results, because there was no one else. When the first comes home, “whoever can” means the one who already knows how. See Coming home (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).

The fix in each case is the same: keep the flexibility, and add a quick monthly look at who stepped in. If it's nearly always one person, that job moves onto the owned list.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I like how flexible we are. I just noticed it's nearly always me who's free. Can we look at that?”

If only one of you is on board: keep your own simple tally of unplanned jobs for two weeks. Facts on paper are easier to share than a feeling, and gentler than a list of complaints.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 9

Who does what? The Money tab

Grace and Ruth, a couple with different incomes

Money (optional)

One line per cost. Put what each person actually paid.

Currency

£ (pounds)

Bill	Grace paid (£)	Ruth paid (£)	How it's shared
Rent	1,100	700	Shared, split
Power and water	160	0	Shared, split
Internet and phones	0	90	Shared, split
Groceries	300	250	Shared, split
	Grace brings in (£)	Ruth brings in (£)	How it's shared
Pay	4,200	2,800	Money coming in

THE SUMMARY

Each person's total: Grace £1,560; Ruth £1,040.

Coming in: £7,000 (Grace £4,200, Ruth £2,800). After shared bills: £4,400 left.

Two ways to split the shared bills. Split evenly: Ruth would put in £260 more · Split by income (60/40): it already comes out even. Pick whichever feels fair to you.

Even isn't always the fair answer (incomes and rooms differ), so treat this as a starting point, not a verdict.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Money is a fair topic only where nobody controls the other's money.

Fill in your own: Who does what? (Money tab)
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand)

Judging by promises

What it's good at: it's clear. Everyone knows what they own, so nobody has to keep deciding who does what, and nobody gets left with jobs by default.

Where it goes wrong: it can feel rigid. Life doesn't always cooperate. Holding someone to the letter of an agreement in a week when their parent was in the hospital isn't fairness. It's missing the point. Even thinkers who put promises first allow that some promises give way.

Fair by promises, in three homes

- **Business partners.** One owns invoices, one owns suppliers. When invoices run late, nobody argues about who works harder. They ask the invoice owner what got in the way.
- **A teen and a parent.** A 15-year-old owns his laundry. One week he has exams. Fair by promises doesn't mean "tough luck." It means he asks ahead: "Can you do my wash this week? I'll do the dishes all weekend."
- **A couple when one is ill.** A partner with a long-term illness owns the online shopping and bills, which can be done from bed. On a bad day,

the agreement already says who covers. See [When one of you is ill](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill).

Common mix-up: “A promise is a promise, whatever happens.” Fix: build the exceptions in. Illness, grief, exams and work crunches are reasons to swap or pause a job, said ahead of time where you can.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I can’t keep this one this week. Can we swap, and I’ll take it back on Monday?”

A note on safety: Fair by promises is about promises both people chose, and either can ask to change. A list of rules one person sets for the other, with checking, punishment, or money and freedom held back, is not a promise. It is control. If that sounds like your home, it isn’t your fault, and the tools in this book are not the right place to start. See [Not safe at home?](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) and [normal limits and control](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together) (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together).

The agreement: look to the owner

This book calls the agreement being **fair by promises**, and it’s simple: once a job has a named owner in the job list (One owner per job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job)), you judge it by whether the owner did their part. You don’t judge it by whether things happened to work out because someone else quietly covered.

In this book, the **owner** is the person who does the job, start to finish. The job list has room for a second name: a backstop who notices if it slipped and gently checks in, never a supervisor. They can be the same person, though a second name gives the job a gentle check. Older kids can own age-sized jobs too, like feeding the cat or packing their own lunch, with a parent as the second name.

This protects the person who keeps filling the gaps. Without it, their help gets used as proof that the gap doesn’t matter: “Well, it got done, didn’t it?”

It doesn't mean the owner has to do everything personally. Swapping, asking for help or saying "not this week" in advance all count as looking after your job. The Who-did-what log (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-01) also has kind scripts for saying "not right now": you're already carrying a lot, someone else is better placed, or you'll do it later at a named time. What this rules out is the job silently falling to someone else.

Why one name works better than "we"

A job that belongs to everyone tends to belong to no one. Each person assumes someone else will notice, and the one who notices first ends up doing it, every time. A single name ends the guessing. It also changes the conversation when a job slips: instead of "Why does nobody ever...?", you can ask one person one question, kindly.

What about "Both (decide together)"? The job list lets you mark a row that way. Keep it for *decisions* that need both voices, like a school choice or a big purchase; the list counts those as owned, because a decision made together is a real arrangement. For a *job* that needs doing, write one name. In the filled-in example below, Dee owns the reviews and meetings, and Mark comes to the big ones as her second name.

One owner, in three homes

- **Foster carers.** Two carers and a social worker can all assume someone else phoned the school. The carers agree one of them owns school contact and the other is the second name. Some decisions belong to the agency or the care plan, and that goes on the list too. See Foster, adoptive and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).
- **A parent and a child with ADHD.** Owning "clean your room" is too big. Owning "put the dirty clothes in the basket before bed," with a picture on the door, is something a child can really own. See When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids).
- **Coworkers with a shared inbox.** Customer emails sat for days because four people could answer them. One owner per weekday fixed it in a week.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“The owner has to do it alone.”** Owning a job means making sure it happens. Asking for help or swapping counts.
- **“The second name is the supervisor.”** The second name notices and asks once. They don’t inspect, redo or comment on how.
- **“My way is the right way.”** If the old owner redoes the new owner’s work, the new owner soon stops trying. Researchers call this gatekeeping. Fix: agree what “done” means, then let the owner do it their way. More on gatekeeping.

If only one of you is on board

Own your own jobs clearly and out loud: “I own the bins and the car. Which ones would you like?” Offering a choice is easier to say yes to than being handed a list. If nothing comes back, keep owning yours, and stop silently picking up the rest. That is where your part ends.

Honest research notes

- **Research:** When responsibility is shared among several people, each feels less responsible. John Darley and Bibb Latané called this diffusion of responsibility.
- **Research:** Studies of workplaces link unclear roles (role ambiguity) with stress and conflict. Whether it works the same at home is less studied, but it seems likely.
- **This book’s idea:** The owner and second name are a home-sized version of the charts project managers use to show who does a task and who is kept in the loop.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 10

One owner per job

Dee and Mark, foster carers

One owner per job: caring for a child in care

Person A
Dee

Person B
Mark

Date of this list
4 October 2026

The split you agreed (optional)
Dee works three days; Mark works full time

Who owns each job

Job	How often	Roughly how long?	Owner	Helper or backup	Notes
Social worker visits	Monthly	1.5	Dee	Mark	Mark joins by video when he can
Reviews and meetings	As needed	2	Dee	Mark	Dee books and preps; Mark comes to the big ones
Daily log and placement paperwork	Daily	0.5	Dee	Mark	Mark writes it on Dee's work days
Contact visits and calls with their family	Weekly	1.5	Mark	Dee	Saturday mornings
School liaison (designated teacher, plans)	As needed	1	Dee		
Being there after contact	As needed	1	Mark	Dee	Quiet tea, no questions
Health and therapy appointments	As needed	1.5	Dee		
Training and support group	Monthly	2	Mark		Mark's turn this term

DOES EVERY JOB HAVE AN OWNER?

Jobs with an owner

8 of 8. Every job has an owner.

How the jobs are spread

Counted by how often each job comes round, and by size or time where you gave it: Dee 61% · Mark 39%. You wrote down the split you agreed: “Dee works three days; Mark works full time”. Does this match it? It’s a starting point for a talk, not a scorecard.

☒ We’re agreed on this

Who agreed (optional)

Dee and Mark

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. “Being there after contact” is on the list because hidden work counts.

Fill in your own: One owner per job (caring for a child in care)
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-03)

Choosing your kind of fair

Most homes end up with a mix, and that’s fine, as long as it’s agreed. One simple way:

- **Owned jobs** (on the One owner per job list, with names) are judged by promises.
- **Shared or one-off jobs** (a flat tyre, a sick child, a surprise visitor) are judged by results. Whoever can, does.
- **If a shared job keeps coming up**, it moves onto the owned list at the next weekly catch-up.

Agree on this on a calm, easy day, not in the middle of a disagreement. Write it at the top of your One owner per job sheet so you can both see it.

A third disagreement: what counts. Sometimes the argument isn’t results against promises at all. One of you counts doing, and the other counts noticing and planning. Go back to the Preface (page 18): put the planning and noticing on the list too, in minutes, so both currencies are counted.

Fair also needs re-agreeing. What counted as fair last year (before a new job, a baby or an illness) may not be fair now, and an old agreement nobody has revisited slowly stops being an agreement and becomes a habit. Put a review date on it. At the review, each person says what has changed for them, then you decide together. See *Complacency* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency).

Agreeing, in three homes

- **Two faiths, one family.** Two festival seasons, two sets of relatives. They agree each person owns the preparations for their own tradition, and the other is the second name and a willing helper. See *Two faiths* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).
- **Different hours.** One partner works nights. They agree that daytime sleep counts as work, so day jobs aren't judged by who is "home." See *Different hours* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).
- **Long distance.** A couple in two cities share planning, not chores. They agree that the person who suggests a visit owns booking it. See *Long distance* (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance).

Common mix-up: "Once we've agreed, it's settled." Fix: call it a trial. A month is long enough to learn something and short enough that nobody feels trapped.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Can we try this for a month and then look again? Nothing has to be forever."

If only one of you is on board: suggest one small trial, about one job, not a whole system. A small yes is still a yes.

- **Research:** People accept decisions more readily when the process felt fair: they had a say, the same rules applied to everyone, and they could see how the decision was made. This is often called procedural justice.
- **Research:** Trying a small change, looking at what happened and adjusting comes from quality improvement (the plan-do-study-act

cycle linked with W. Edwards Deming).



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Whichever kind of fair you choose, write the owners down. Keep the list short: one name per job, and a backup for the busy weeks.

WORKPAPER WP-03

One owner per job · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-03

Covering without resentment

Stepping in for someone is kind. It only turns sour when it's silent. Four habits keep it kind:

1. **Say it simply, without a sting.** "I put the bins out this week, since you were away." Not a complaint, just a note.
2. **Log it.** In your week's Who did what log, write the job under your name, with a note that you covered it.
3. **Let the cover be thanked, and asked about.** Covering that nobody mentions gradually becomes expected, which is how complacency starts. Thank the person who covered, and let them say what it has been like for them. Their context is part of the picture.
4. **Watch for repeats.** Covering once is kindness. Covering every week is a sign the job needs a new owner or a conversation about capacity. The monthly look-back in Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5) is built to catch this.

Why silent covering goes sour

Silent covering sends two wrong messages at once. To the person covered for, it says "there was no gap." To the person covering, it says "nobody noticed." The first person carries on as before, and the second starts to keep a quiet list. Saying it out loud fixes both messages in one sentence.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: “I’ll take the bins this week, can you take them next week?” is a great sentence. Turning a grumble into a request is a whole tool!

TOOL Chat analyzer: Help me write it (ask for a change) ·
spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins

Covering, in three relationships

- **Friends.** One friend always hosts and plans. Nobody asked, so nobody thinks to thank. One honest line (“I love hosting, and I’d love someone else to pick the place next time”) changes the pattern. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **A grown-up child and parents.** One adult son quietly handles his parents’ paperwork because his sister lives far away. Saying it to her, without blame, lets her offer what she can from a distance. See Grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children).
- **Coworkers.** One person fixes everyone’s slides before meetings. Once they mention it at a team check-in, the team adds a slide checklist, and the fixing stops being invisible.

Common mix-up: “If I mention it, it sounds like I want a medal.” Fix: say it as information, the same day, in one sentence. A same-day note sounds like news. A list a month later sounds like a bill.

If only one of you is on board: if you mention covering and nothing changes, cover less, and say so kindly: “I’m going to leave the recycling this week, since it’s yours.” That isn’t punishment. It’s letting the job go back to its owner.

A note on safety: If you cover jobs because you’re afraid of what will happen if they aren’t done, that isn’t covering by choice. See Not safe at home? for free, private support.

- **Research:** Equity theory, from J. Stacy Adams in the 1960s, suggests that feeling under-benefited tends to bring resentment, and feeling over-

benefited can bring guilt.

- **Research:** Feeling that your contributions are seen is closely linked with feeling that things are fair, and specific thanks tends to land better than general praise.

A worked example: the bins, three weeks running

On the job list, Alex owns the bins. For three weeks, Alex has been working late on Tuesdays, and Sam has put the bins out each time without saying anything.

Judged by results: the bins went out every week. No problem. Except Sam is getting quietly resentful, and Alex has no idea.

Judged by promises: the bins are Alex's job, and Alex didn't do it. That isn't a judgment of Alex as a person. It's a fact about the job. And it points to a real question: can Alex still own the bins with the new work hours?

At the weekly catch-up, Sam says, "I've put the bins out the last three weeks. Is Tuesday night still working for you?" Alex says, "Honestly, no. Tuesday nights aren't realistic with the late shifts. Could we try a swap for the rest of the month? You take the bins, and I'll take the recycling and the weekly grocery order." They write the trial into the job list and agree to settle it at the monthly look-back in Chapter V (page 185). Nobody had to be the bad guy.

Letting a comment land before you react

The idea is borrowed loosely from brain science, which describes how the brain turns down repeated or unimportant sounds and sensations, so they don't all demand attention at once. In the brain that happens automatically, in a fraction of a second. This book's pause is different: a few seconds you choose to take on purpose. It's a practical habit, not a medical claim: **not every comment needs your full reaction the moment it's said.**

When you're tense or running on empty (see the Nervous System Ladder (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks), a quick check of how calm or stirred up you feel, and Chapter III (page 119)), even a neutral comment can

arrive at full volume and seem to demand an instant reply. The pause gives it a moment to settle first.

A comment landing hard, in three relationships

- **Long distance.** A one-word text, “fine,” arrives at midnight. It reads as cold. A pause, then “Fine good or fine tired?” saves a whole evening. See Long distance.
- **A grandparent and a grown-up child.** “Is she still not sleeping through?” sounds like criticism of the parenting. A breath, and the parent hears a worried grandmother instead. See Grandparents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents).
- **A carer and a partner in pain.** A sharp word on a bad pain day is often about the pain. The pause lets the carer answer the day, not the words. See Caregivers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).

Common mix-up: “If I pause, I’m letting them get away with it.” Fix: the pause is about timing. You can still raise it later, calmly, if it still matters.

A note on safety: The pause is for ordinary stings between people who mean each other well. It is not a way to absorb put-downs, threats or insults that keep happening. If what you keep pausing over is someone frightening you, see Not safe at home?

- **Research:** Under stress, people are more likely to read an unclear remark as hostile. Psychologists call this hostile attribution.
- **Research:** Studies of email found that writers tend to overestimate how clearly their tone, such as sarcasm or humour, comes across (Kruger and colleagues, 2005). Text messages have the same problem.
- **Research:** Sensory gating, where the brain filters repeated sounds, is a real and studied process. Using it here is only a picture. The pause in this chapter is a habit, not a brain treatment.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Before you reply to a comment that stung, give it a minute to land. The worksheet is a short check for your reply, and the Chat analyzer can help you read a message that has just come in.

WORKPAPER WP-09

Say it so it lands · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-09

TOOL

Chat analyzer · spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator

The three steps: notice, name, decide

1. **Notice** that the comment landed harder than its words probably deserved. Often you feel it in your body first: a hot face, a tight chest, a sharp breath.
2. **Name it out loud**, instead of reacting from the spike: *“I heard that as bigger than it probably was. Give me a second.”*
3. **Decide**, once you’ve settled, whether it needs a reply now, later or not at all. Asking yourself whether a kinder meaning could fit is what psychologists call reappraisal, and it has some good research behind it.

This isn’t hiding your feelings. The aim isn’t to shut everything out for good. It’s timing: letting the spike pass before deciding how much weight a comment really deserves. The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11) helps the spike pass, and Say it so it lands (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-09-say-it-so-it-lands) helps with the reply once it has.

The Say it so it lands worksheet also offers four quick questions for weighing what you heard. Was it about a specific task? Would it sound the same if you weren’t already stretched? Could a neutral meaning fit? Are you answering their words, or an old argument?

If only one of you is on board

You can use all three steps alone. Noticing and naming lower your own temperature, even if the other person never learns the words. Saying “Give me a second” still works when they don’t know the plan, as long as you come back.

Common mix-up: “Naming it means saying what they meant.” Fix: name your reaction, not their intent. “That landed hard for me” invites a reply. “You’re being nasty” invites a fight.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“That landed harder than you probably meant. Give me a second.” “I needed a minute. I’m back. Can I ask what you meant?”

- **Research:** Putting a feeling into words, such as “I’m feeling stung,” can reduce its intensity a little. Researchers call this affect labelling (Lieberman and colleagues, 2007).
- **Research:** Changing how you read a situation (reappraisal) is generally linked with better outcomes than hiding a feeling (suppression), in work by James Gross and others.
- **Research:** John Gottman’s research on couples describes “flooding,” when the body is too stirred up to listen. He suggests breaks of at least twenty minutes.

Let a comment land

Timing, not hiding: let the spike pass before you decide.

- 1 Notice**
It landed harder than its words. Hot face, tight chest, a sharp breath.



- 2 Name it out loud**
“I heard that as bigger than it probably was. Give me a second.”



- 3 Decide, once settled**
Reply now, later, or not at all. Could a kinder meaning fit?

Keep the two questions apart

“Was this job done?”

A fact.

Check the job list and its owner.

“Did that land as an attack?”

A reaction.

Check your own state first.

Naming a feeling (affect labelling) and looking for another meaning (reappraisal) both have some research behind them.

FIGURE 11 Let a comment land before you react: notice, name, decide. And keep the fact question apart from the feeling question.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 11

Say it so it lands

Carla, who runs a café with her business partner Femi

Say it so it lands

Your name

Carla

Date

8 October 2026

Before you speak or send: fact, feeling, ask

Use it on one thing that actually stung.

Raw reaction

Great, so I'm doing the stock order on my own again.

What's the fact underneath this? (One sentence, no adjectives.)

The stock order for the café wasn't placed by Tuesday noon, and I placed it at 4.

What's the feeling underneath this? (Frustrated, tired, unseen, rushed...)

I felt stretched thin, and a bit alone with it.

What's the actual ask? (What do you want to happen next, specifically?)

Could you own the Tuesday stock order from next week, with me as backup when you're at the bank?

Before you react: four quick checks

Is this about a specific, nameable task or event?

☒ Yes No

Would I read this the same way if I weren't already carrying a lot?

Yes No ☒ Not sure

Is there a neutral interpretation that also fits what was said?

☒ Yes No

Am I responding to their words, or to a pattern from a past conversation?

☒ Their words A past pattern

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Ways to say it

Quick one, no rush: could you own the Tuesday stock order from next week, with me as backup when you're at the bank?

Suggestions

Your own load is part of how this reads. A few hours, or a night's sleep, often changes how it reads. There's a kinder reading that also fits. Try asking about it first: "Did you mean ____, or ____?"

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The raw reaction stays on the sheet, not in the message.

Fill in your own: Say it so it lands (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-09)

Keep the two questions apart

Put the two halves of this chapter together, and you can separate two things that usually get tangled:

THE QUESTION	WHAT KIND OF QUESTION	WHAT IT'S CHECKED AGAINST
"Was this job done?"	A fact	The agreed owner on the job list
"Did that land as an attack?"	A reaction	Your own state right now

Both questions matter. They just need different answers, and they go better one at a time. Take the fact to the job list. Take the reaction to a quiet moment and the Say it so it lands worksheet.

Two questions, in three relationships

- **Business partners.** "The invoice went out late" is a fact. "You always drop the ball" is a feeling dressed as a fact. They fix the invoice date first, then talk about the frustration on Friday.

- **Adult siblings after a loss.** “Who is clearing Dad’s flat on Saturday?” is a fact. “You were never there for him” is years of feeling. Mixing them guarantees a row. See Family rifts.
- **A couple coming out to family.** “Who tells your parents, and when?” is a planning question. “I’m scared they’ll reject us” deserves its own gentle talk first. See Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out).

If only one of you is on board: split them on your side. Answer the fact, then add, “And I’d like to come back to how that felt, maybe tonight.”

- **Research:** The authors of *Difficult Conversations* (Stone, Patton and Heen, 1999) describe how a hard talk often holds a “what happened” conversation and a feelings conversation at once. What someone meant and how it landed can both be true.

A worked example: the flat thank-you

Wednesday, 7pm. Sam says, “Thanks for doing the dishes,” in a flat voice. Alex hears sarcasm and feels a flash of anger.

Without the pause: Alex snaps back, “You don’t have to say it like that.” Sam, who was only tired, feels attacked. Now there’s an argument about tone, and nobody remembers it started with a thank-you.

With the pause: Alex notices the flash and says, “That landed a bit oddly for me. Give me a second.” After a breath: “Did you mean that as a thank-you?” Sam says, “Yes, sorry, I’m just exhausted.” It can be over in seconds.

Money between you

Money is where the two kinds of fair meet most often, and where many couples clash. In one study of couples’ home diaries, money arguments weren’t the most frequent kind, but they were more likely to come back and to stay unsolved (Lauren Papp and colleagues, 2009). Talking about money early, in a planned way, takes much of the heat out.

Three common ways to share money

WAY	HOW IT WORKS	OFTEN SUITS
All shared	Both incomes go into one pot, and everything comes out of it.	Couples who see money as “ours,” often married or long settled
Separate	Each keeps their own money and pays agreed bills, often half each.	New couples, similar incomes, people who value independence
Proportional	Each puts into a shared pot in line with what they earn (say 60/40), and keeps the rest.	Different incomes, where half each would squeeze one person

Many couples mix them: a joint account for shared bills and food, plus some money each that nobody has to explain. None of these is the right one. The right one is the one you both chose with your eyes open, and look at again when life changes.

Which kind of fair? “Half each” is fair by promises: the same rule for both of you. “In line with income” is fair by results: it aims to leave each of you with a similar share of what you earn. The Grace and Ruth example earlier in this chapter shows both side by side.

How to talk about it

1. **Start with your money stories, not the numbers.** Each of you says how money worked in the home you grew up in, and one feeling money gives you: safe, anxious, free, ashamed. People carry strong beliefs about money, and savers and spenders often end up together. Knowing each other’s story turns “you’re tight” or “you’re careless” into “that’s how you learned it.”
2. **Put everything on the table:** income, regular bills, debts, savings, and money you send to family. Debts in particular are easier to share early than to discover later.
3. **Agree the shared bills and how you’ll split them.** The “Who does what?” page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand/)’s Money tab shows both splits side by side.

4. **Agree some money each, no questions asked**, even a small amount. It often stops small purchases turning into arguments.
5. **Agree a “talk first” amount for big buys**, the same for both of you: “Anything over £200, we talk first.” A limit you both chose, and both keep, is care, not control.
6. **Set a short monthly money chat**: fifteen minutes on what’s coming up and anything that felt unfair, with the same kind rules as the monthly look-back in Chapter V (page 185).

For example (made up): Niamh and Tariq are about to move in together. Niamh takes home £2,600 a month and Tariq £1,900. Rent and bills will be £1,500. Half each would leave Niamh with £1,850 and Tariq with £1,150. They choose proportional instead: Niamh pays 58% (£870) and Tariq 42% (£630), which leaves them £1,730 and £1,270. They open a joint account for rent, bills and food, keep the rest separate, and agree to talk first about anything over £200. Tariq sends £100 a month to his mum. It’s on the list from day one, so it never becomes a surprise.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“Talking about money is unromantic.”** Not talking about it tends to be less romantic later. Keep the first talk short and kind.
- **“Whoever earns more should decide.”** Both people’s say counts the same, whoever earns what. Unpaid work at home is work too.
- **“Agreeing to check in about big buys is controlling.”** Not if you both chose it and it applies to both of you. Care is not control. It’s different when one person holds all the money, checks every penny, or leaves the other with none of their own. Normal limits and control explains the difference.

If only one of you is on board: Write down your own money story and your own numbers. Then ask for one small thing, like a monthly money chat, rather than a whole system.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Can we each say how money worked in our families growing up? I think it explains a lot about us.” “Would half each, or in line with our pay, feel fairer to you?”

More: Money together, including moving in.

Research notes

Lauren Papp, E. Mark Cummings and Marcie Goeke-Morey (2009) found in couples' home diaries that money conflicts were more pervasive and recurrent than other conflicts, and more likely to stay unresolved. Jeffrey Dew, Sonya Britt and Sandra Huston (2012) found, in US survey data, that money disagreements were the strongest of the disagreement types in predicting later divorce. Scott Rick, Deborah Small and Eli Finkel (2011) found that tightwads and spendthrifts tend to marry each other, and that bigger differences went with more money conflict. Brad Klontz and colleagues (2011) described common “money scripts”: beliefs about money that people carry, often from growing up. *This book's idea*: matching the two kinds of fair to the two common splits, and a “talk first” amount that applies to both people.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: money talks go better on a slow evening, not a rushed morning. It can help to count the hours and the money together first.

TOOL

Who does what? Count the hours and bills ·

spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand

A couple and a housemate

A couple sharing a home with a housemate who isn't a partner is a different shape from three equals. Two of you share a bond the third doesn't, and that can tilt things without anyone meaning it.

Two lists: house jobs and couple jobs

- **House jobs** belong to everyone who lives there: bins, bathroom, shared shopping, the landlord, the bills. They go on one list for all three of you,

each with one owner.

- **Couple jobs** belong to the two of you: your room, your plans, each other's families, your own money. Keep them on a separate list, so the housemate isn't pulled into couple business and the house list doesn't quietly become the couple's list.

Avoiding two against one

- **One person, one voice on house decisions.** The couple doesn't agree things the night before and announce them at breakfast. House questions get decided with all three of you there.
- **Hear the housemate first** on anything that affects them, so they aren't answering a decision that's already been made.
- **Keep couple arguments out of shared rooms**, and never ask the housemate to take sides or be the referee.
- **Watch the quiet tilt.** Who chooses the TV, the heating, when guests come? If it's always the couple, say so and change it.
- **Count the housemate in fully.** They log their own week, own their own jobs and score their own tank, like everyone else.

Money with three

Money can tilt fairness too, especially if one name is on the lease or the housemate pays rent to the couple. Be clear, and write it down: what the rent covers, how the bills split, and what happens if someone moves out.

For example (made up): Ollie and Hamza share a two-bedroom flat with their friend Bex. They split the rent by room, because the couple has the bigger bedroom, and the bills by person, because all three use the heating and the internet. A small house kitty pays for loo roll, washing-up liquid and bin bags. Bex owns the kitty; she likes being the one who restocks.

EACH MONTH	OLLIE	HAMZA	BEX	HOW IT'S SHARED
Rent, £1,500	£450	£450	£600	By room: the couple's room counts as £900
Bills, £240	£80	£80	£80	By person
House kitty, £30	£10	£10	£10	By person

EACH MONTH	OLLIE	HAMZA	BEX	HOW IT'S SHARED
Total	£540	£540	£690	Bex pays more than either of them, and has a room to herself

All three agreed it, and they'll look at it again when the rent goes up. They hold a short house meeting on the first Sunday of the month, all three of them, and Ollie and Hamza keep their couple check-in for their own evenings.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"We're two, so we get two votes."** On house questions, each person has one voice, and you aim for something all three can live with.
- **"The housemate should fit in with us."** It's their home too. The setup should work for all three.
- **"One shared list is simpler."** Until the housemate finds couple jobs on it, or the couple's arguments spill onto it. Two short lists are kinder.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"That's a house question. Let's decide it when Bex is here." "Is there anything about how we run the house that doesn't work for you?"

More: Sharing a room and More than two. *This book's idea:* the two lists, and one voice each on house questions.

Your part, and only your part

You control whether, when and how you bring something up, and whether you cover a job out loud. How the other person responds is theirs. If you cover again and again with no thanks and no change, match the energy: cover less, and say so kindly. Fair by promises only works when both people keep theirs.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what's in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy, giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when

someone can't. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).

On your own: your own kind of fair

Fair starts with knowing what fair means to you, and which jobs are truly yours.

- Write down what fair means to you, in one sentence.
- List the jobs you own, and the ones you picked up without ever agreeing.
- Practise letting a comment land before you answer, then reply with a fact, a feeling and an ask.

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:

Step 5: find words for what you feel (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · Step 6: kind ways to say no · Part One: where your sense of fair came from (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then) The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on sharing the load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-share-the-load)

More for your situation

Fair looks a little different in each kind of relationship. These pages take this chapter into one situation each. Start from your relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship) lists them all.

- **Couples and partners:** More than two partners · Money together · Gaming, phones and time together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together) · Different hours · Coming home after time apart · When one of you is ill
- **Families:** Foster, adoptive and kinship families · When a child has ADHD · Grown-up children · Adult siblings and family rifts · Kids grown and gone (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest) · Two faiths, one family
- **Friends, housemates and work:** Friends · Sharing a room · Coming out as an adult

- **On your own, or helping others:** On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own) · For counsellors, coaches and group leaders (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

This chapter draws on 6 of the author’s thirteen fields (see the Preface (page 18) or the About page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/about)). Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves.

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Philosophy	Two old ideas behind fairness: judging by outcomes (consequentialist) and judging by promises (deontological). Neither is wrong; a home needs to agree which it’s using.	Fix the setup, not the person
Business	Look to the owner. A clear job list, like a contract that says which state’s laws apply, settles “was this done?” without blame.	Fix the setup, not the person
Economics	Two people keeping score in two currencies, then arguing about the exchange rate. Silent covering is rewarded by “it got done,” and that’s how unbilled debt grows.	Notice the quiet incentives
Neurobiology	How the brain turns down sounds and sensations, borrowed loosely. In the brain it is automatic and takes a fraction of a second. Here it’s only a picture for a pause of a few seconds that you choose to take.	Read your state first
Aromatherapy	For some people, a familiar scent or a calmer room is a quick cue to slow down. Where and when you talk is part of the method.	Read your state first
Psychology	Why a flat “thanks” can be heard as sarcasm, especially when things are already tense, and why covering turns sour only when it’s silent.	Notice the quiet incentives

How they connect

The fields don’t just sit side by side. They meet, and each meeting point is where a tool comes from. From the most obvious connection to the most abstract:

The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath) explains all seven.

- **Obvious: Philosophy + Business** (*ownership and structure*). Fair by promises only works when the promises are written down. The job list turns an old philosophical question into a practical one: does this job have an owner, and did the owner do it? This holds up “Fix the setup, not the person”.
- **Hidden: Economics + Psychology** (*quiet incentives*). When “it all got done,” the person who covered becomes invisible, and the setup quietly rewards them for carrying more. Saying it and logging it is how the incentive stops. This holds up “Notice the quiet incentives”.
- **Abstract: Philosophy + Neurobiology** (*state and setting*). Keep the two questions apart. “Was this job done?” is checked against the agreement; “Did that land as an attack?” is checked against your own state. Ethics and the body each answer their own question, one at a time. This holds up “Fix the setup, not the person”.

Six of the thirteen fields meet in this chapter. Its two halves look different, fairness and a few seconds of calm, but they share one root: separate the fact from the reaction, and each gets the answer it needs.

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, each person keeps using their own kind of fair without saying so. The one who judges by results thinks everything's fine. The one who judges by promises feels let down over and over. Every comment about a chore gets answered at full volume.

When it goes right, you both know which jobs are owned and which are shared. Covering gets mentioned and logged. When a comment stings, one of you says, “Give me a second,” the other waits, and the one who paused comes back to it.

Questions people often ask

What if we can't agree on which kind of fair to use?

Use the mix above: owned jobs by promises, shared jobs by results. Try it for a month, then look again together.

Isn't it petty to hold someone to a small job?

Not if you both agreed to it. What feels petty is usually the build-up of unspoken covering. Saying it early and kindly is the opposite of petty.

What if "give me a second" turns into an hour?

That's fine, as long as you say so and name a time to come back. If a second isn't enough, take a proper break; twenty minutes or more often works better than a quick one. Pausing is for timing, not for avoiding the talk.

Where can I get help finding the words?

Professor Puddles, the site's friendly chat host, can help you phrase a request or a reply.

Limits and cautions

- Fair by promises is a tool for jobs, not for judging people. "You didn't do your job" is a fact about a task. It never means "you're a bad partner, parent or roommate."
- Be flexible when life is hard. Illness, grief and big changes are exactly when agreements should be looked at again, not enforced.
- Letting a comment land is not the same as swallowing it. If something that was said still hurts after you've settled, it deserves a calm conversation.
- These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. If talking about what's fair ever feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can't say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn't advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **There are two kinds of fair:** by results (did it all get done?) and by promises (did each of us do what we agreed?). Agree which one you're using.
- ✓ **Once a job has an owner, look to the owner.** Covering for someone is kind when you say it out loud.
- ✓ **Let a comment land before you react:** notice it, name it, then decide what to say.
- ✓ **Keep the two questions apart:** "Was the job done?" is about a fact; "Did that comment hurt?" is about a feeling.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 11 · Healing after hurt

Repair and apologies that land

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 4 · How communication works

Letting words land before you reply

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 10 · Values, meaning and a good life

Fairness as a value you choose together

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 17 · Groups, influence and culture

How a group's norms decide what feels fair

[read online](#)

PUT IT TO USE



Six-week program, week 4: talk about it kindly

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
prog-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01)



Say it so it lands

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
workpapers/
wp-09-say-it-so-it-lands](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-09-say-it-so-it-lands)

V

PART TWO • CHAPTER V

The monthly look-back: a calm relationship check-in

Once a month, look back for the problems that keep coming back, and fix the setup instead of having the same argument again.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Where this fits: the five big ideas
2. Why a monthly look, on top of the weekly ones
3. Getting ready
4. Step one: gather the month's notes
5. What a gap looks like at this scale
6. Step two: sort each repeat
7. A worked example month
8. Step three: close the month and keep count
9. The quiet months
10. How to talk about a pattern
11. What the look-back is for, and what it isn't
12. Starting out: before you move in
13. Raising a grandchild (kinship care)
14. Your part, and only your part
15. On your own: a monthly look at yourself
16. More for your situation
17. Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter
18. When it goes wrong, and when it goes right
19. Questions people often ask
20. Limits and cautions
21. Closing the month, and starting again

THE THIRD TUESDAY IN A ROW

The bins again. You could have the same ten-minute back-and-forth about Tuesday. Or you could notice that Tuesday has now happened three times, and ask what it is about Tuesdays.

Like the tools in earlier chapters, the look-back in this chapter checks a shared setup over time. It never judges either person's character, and it never settles "who owes what" for hours already passed.

The idea is borrowed from accounting, where a shortfall that keeps coming back gets a careful look at month-end. Here, the shortfall is a job that keeps falling short, and the look-back is a careful, friendly look at your month's notes, more like a self-check than an inspection.

IN SHORT:

- **Weekly check-ins miss patterns.** Once a month, look back over four weeks of notes and your job list.
- **Mark an *x* for each week a job slipped.** Anything with two or more gets sorted.
- **A problem that keeps coming back usually has no real owner.** Fix the setup, not the person.
- **Keep it short and kind,** and look back even in the quiet months.

Where this fits: the five big ideas

The whole program rests on five big ideas. Each one starts inside you and then shows up between you and other people. This chapter mostly teaches “Fix the setup, not the person” and “Notice the quiet incentives”, with help from “See the whole load”. (Borrowed from systems thinking, behavioural economics and ledger accounting.)

- **In you:** Look at your own routines as a setup you can adjust. Spot the easy defaults, like “I’ll just do it,” that let a gap quietly reopen.
- **Between you and others:** Look at the month together, give repeating gaps a clear owner, and keep count so jobs don’t drift back to whoever notices first.

Why a monthly look, on top of the weekly ones

By this point in the book, two rhythms are already running. There’s the 90-second daily check-in (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-13-daily-check-in). And there’s the weekly catch-up, a short end-of-week talk where you tally the week in the “Who does what?” page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand) (where each person lists their

hours) and take a quick look at your job list (One owner per job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-03-one-owner-per-job)).

Both are useful because they are small and frequent. But small, frequent checks have a blind spot. A job that slips for one week looks like bad luck. The same job slipping week after week is a pattern, and patterns are easy to miss week by week. They show up best when you step back and look at a whole month.

The monthly look-back is that step back. Instead of asking “How did this week go?”, it asks: **which gaps kept reopening, however many times we closed them?**

Why a month, and why notes beat memory

A month is long enough for a repeat to show up three or four times, and short enough that you still remember what was going on. It also matches how many households already run: rent, bills and school letters come monthly.

Notes matter because memory is a poor counter. The last argument feels like it happens “all the time.” The quiet weeks are forgotten. Four short weekly notes give you something steadier than either person’s memory, and they take the “I’m sure it was more than that” out of the conversation.

A look-back in three settings

- **Housemates.** Five people in a shared house hold a twenty-minute house meeting on the first Sunday of the month. Each brings one thing that kept slipping. See Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room).
- **A small team at work.** Many teams already do this and call it a retrospective: what went well, what kept going wrong, what to try next. It’s the same habit with different words.
- **A family with school-age kids.** A short family meeting with snacks. Each person names one good thing and one thing that kept getting forgotten. The kids often spot the gaps first.

If only one of you is on board

You can do a look-back on your own notes: which of your jobs slipped, and which jobs you kept picking up that aren't yours. Then invite the other person once, with the result, not the method: "I noticed the recycling has needed doing every week and I've done it each time. Could we give it an owner?" A finding is easier to say yes to than a new meeting.

Honest research notes

- **Research:** People judge how often something happens by how easily examples come to mind, so recent and vivid moments feel more common than they are. Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman called this the availability heuristic.
- **Research:** Looking back together at a stretch of work, asking what went well and what to try next, is a common team practice called a retrospective.
- **This book's idea:** Using a monthly look-back at home, with its **X** count, is the site's own adaptation. It hasn't been tested as a household method.

Getting ready

- Your four weekly notes from this month, in Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-01), the one-week log. A few lines a week is all it needs.
- Your current job list from One owner per job.
- The What keeps coming back? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-04-what-keeps-coming-back) sheet, on paper or on screen.
- Twenty minutes, at a time you've both agreed on, when neither of you is rushed, hungry or worn out.

If either of your stress tanks is high that day (0.60 or more on How much are you carrying? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-02-how-much-are-you-carrying), which measures how full your stress tank is), move the look-back. It can wait a day or two.

Getting ready in different setups

- **Long distance or different hours.** Do it by video, or in a shared note that each person fills in, then talk for ten minutes. Pick a time that isn't straight after a night shift. See Long distance (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance) and Different hours (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours).
- **Separated co-parents.** Keep it about the children's jobs only, short and in writing if talking is hard. Your parenting plan or court order comes first. See Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting).
- **Foster and kinship carers.** Your own household notes are separate from the records your agency or social worker asks for. Some gaps, like contact visits, belong in the care plan, not your look-back. See Foster and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship).
- **Children and teens.** Keep it short, give them a job in the meeting (reading out the list, keeping time), and start with one good thing each.

Common mix-up: "Our notes have to be detailed." They don't. Three lines a week is plenty. Detail makes the notes harder to keep, and the look-back only needs to know which jobs slipped.

A note on safety: Each person's notes are their own. Nobody should demand to see the other's notes, check their phone, or ask for an hour-by-hour account. That is monitoring, not a look-back. If it's happening to you, see Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety)



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

The look-back has its own workpaper: a month of notes, one list, and an **X** for each week a job slipped. It makes a pattern easy to see.

WORKPAPER WP-04

wp-04

What keeps coming back? · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

Step one: gather the month's notes

Go through the four weekly logs. Write down every job that *slipped* in any week. A job slipped if it was noticed but not done, if it only got done after someone raised it more than once, or if its owner couldn't do it and someone else quietly covered. Mark an **x** for each week it happened.

In accounting terms, you are reconciling the plan (the job list: who should do each job) against the log (Who did what: who did it). Every difference is an item to explain.

One **x** is normal life. Two are worth a look. Three or four in one month is a real pattern, not just bad luck.

Common mix-ups: An **x** is not a grade, and it goes next to a job, never next to a person. "Bins: **x x x**" is a fact about a job. "Alex: **x x x**" is a scorecard, and it will start an argument. If a job slipped because someone covered it, it still gets an **x**: the point is to find the jobs where the plan and real life don't match.

For example: Three adult siblings share their mum's care. Their month shows "Mum's prescriptions" with three **x**. Nobody failed: each thought the pharmacy delivery covered it, and it only did some months.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Let's mark the jobs first and talk about why afterwards."

What a gap looks like at this scale

A single missed job is an event. A real **gap** is a job that keeps producing the same event, month after month, without ever landing on a steady owner. It's the difference between "the bins didn't go out on Tuesday" and "the bins have quietly become nobody's job for three months." The first is ordinary noise. The second is a gap in the job list that the weekly check-ins keep patching instead of fixing.

This matters because gaps like these are where the unbilled debt (page 20) from the Preface grows fastest. It doesn't come from any single missed job.

It comes from the same job being argued over from scratch every time it comes back, because it never got a name that stuck.

Why a repeat points to the setup

If the same job keeps slipping whoever is meant to do it, the cause is usually in the arrangement: no clear owner, an owner with no time at that moment of the week, or a job that only one person ever notices. Asking “Who keeps failing?” finds someone to blame. Asking “What about this setup keeps failing?” finds something you can change.

- **A grandparent raising grandchildren.** School forms kept getting missed. The forms went into one child’s bag and the grandad never saw the bag. The fix was a tray by the door, not trying harder. See kinship care.
- **A couple when one comes home.** After months away, the returning partner wants to help with “everything,” so nothing gets a new owner and old jobs keep slipping. See the handover week (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home).
- **A parent and a child with ADHD.** “Remember your PE kit” slipped every week. A checklist on the door, owned by the child and backed up by the parent, closed the gap. See When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids).
- **Research:** When a job is shared among several people, each tends to feel less responsible for it (diffusion of responsibility, from work by John Darley and Bibb Latané).
- **Research:** Quality-improvement thinkers such as W. Edwards Deming argued that most repeated problems come from the system people work in, not from the people.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 12

One owner per job: a list for two homes

Laura and Dan, co-parents in two homes

One owner per job: a list for two homes

Person A

Laura

Person B

Dan

Date of this list

1 October 2026

The split you agreed (optional)

Week on, week off; handoff Sunday at 5

Who owns each job

Job	How often	Owner	Helper or backup	Notes
Pack the handoff bag	Weekly	Laura	Dan	Laura keeps the checklist and the spare kit; whoever hands over packs from it
Send medicine and chargers with the bag	Weekly	Laura	Dan	Inhaler: write the last dose time on the card
School forms and permission slips	As needed	Dan	Laura	
Reply to school emails and apps	Weekly	Dan		Dan reads them Sunday night
Kids' doctor and dentist visits	As needed	Dan		Dan books; tells Laura the date
Homework help (Laura's weeks)	Daily	Laura		
Homework help (Dan's weeks)	Daily	Dan		
Activities and sign-ups	As needed	Dan	Laura	Swimming and Cubs

Job	How often	Owner	Helper or backup	Notes
Buy clothes as they outgrow them	As needed	Laura		Receipts in the shared folder
Big decisions (school, health, new activities)	As needed	Both (decide together)		A decision, not a job: Dan puts it on the list; talked through by phone, never at handoff

DOES EVERY JOB HAVE AN OWNER?

Jobs with an owner

10 of 10. Every job has an owner.

How the jobs sit across the homes

Counted by how often each job comes round (a daily job about five times a weekly one): Laura's home 52% · Dan's home 47% · Together 1%. You wrote down the split you agreed: "Week on, week off; handoff Sunday at 5". Does this match it? Two homes rarely split evenly, and that can be fair: weekdays and weekends, distance and work all play a part.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. If one parent is afraid of the other, a shared list isn't the right tool: see Not safe at home? on this site.

Fill in your own: One owner per job (two homes)
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-03)

Step two: sort each repeat

For every job with two or more **x**, decide which of three kinds of gap it is. (As in Chapter II, the owner is the person who does the job, start to finish. The second name on the list is only a backstop who notices if it slipped and gently checks in.)

KIND OF GAP	WHAT IT MEANS	WHAT TO DO
Structural gap	There's no clear owner, or the named owner isn't the person actually doing it.	Update the job list in this session, and agree on the change together.
Capacity issue	There's a named owner, but they've been unable to keep up with it.	Set a time for an honest, kind conversation about handing it over or changing it. Don't just quietly promise to try harder.
One-off	It slipped more than once, but for a clear short-term reason, such as illness, travel or a busy month at work.	Note it and move on. Don't make a lasting change because of a short-term cause.

For a capacity conversation, two workpapers help: Who did what, which besides the log has kind scripts for saying “not right now,” and the fact-feeling-ask shape in Say it so it lands (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-09-say-it-so-it-lands).

The three kinds, in different homes

- **Structural gap, housemates.** The hallway light bulb has been out for weeks. Nobody owns “things that break.” They give it an owner.
- **Capacity issue, a carer.** A woman caring for her husband after a stroke owns the bills and the shopping, and both keep slipping. She isn't careless. She's out of hours. The talk is about who else can help, not about her trying harder. See When one of you is ill (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) and Caregivers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).
- **One-off, a family in grief.** In the month after a funeral, half the list slipped. That is a one-off, and the kindest look-back that month is very short.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **Calling a capacity issue a structural gap,** to avoid a hard talk. Moving the job to someone else without asking how the first person is doing can miss the real problem. Fix: ask, “Is it the job, or is it everything?”

- **Calling the same gap a one-off every month.** “It was just a busy month,” three months running, isn’t a one-off anymore. Fix: if a one-off comes back the next month, sort it again.
- **Deciding the kind for someone else.** Only the owner can say whether they’re out of capacity. Fix: ask, don’t diagnose.

If only one of you is on board

Sort your own jobs honestly. If one of yours is a capacity issue, say so first: “The school forms keep slipping, and I think I’m out of room this term. Could we talk about it Thursday?” Going first makes it easier for the other person to say the same about theirs, later.

A note on safety: A capacity talk needs both people to be able to say “I can’t” without fear. If saying no leads to anger, threats or punishment, that is not a capacity problem you can fix with a list. See Not safe at home?

The monthly look-back

Which gaps kept reopening, however often we closed them?

1 Mark the month

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Recycling	×	×	×	×
Bins	×	×	.	×
School forms	.	×	.	.
Dog's walk	.	.	.	.

The **×** goes next to a job, never next to a person.

2 Sort each repeat

Structural gap

No clear owner, or the wrong name on the list.

➔ Update the job list.

Capacity issue

An owner who has run out of room.

➔ Set a time for a kind talk.

One-off

A clear short-term reason: illness, travel.

➔ Note it and move on.

3 Count, and close the month

Fewer structural gaps over several months is a good sign. Zero isn't the goal.

Short and kind. A look at the setup, not a review of either person.

This book's own method, adapted from team "retrospectives"; it hasn't been tested as a household method.

FIGURE 12 The monthly look-back: mark the month, sort each repeat, count and close. The cross goes next to a job, never a person.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 13

What keeps coming back?

Ash, Robin and Jules, a triad sharing a home

What keeps coming back?

Person A

Ash

Person B

Robin

Person C

Jules

Month

September 2026

Part A: Gather the month's notes

Mark an *x* for each week a job slipped. *x* = it slipped that week.

Task	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Times flagged
Cat litter	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>	3
Recycling out on Thursday		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>		2
Book Jules's car service			<i>x</i>		1
Shared calendar kept up to date	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	4

Part B: Sort each gap

Sort every task flagged twice or more.

Task	Named owner on the job list?	Classification	Action
Cat litter	No	Structural gap	Robin owns it, with Ash as backup; on the one-owner list tonight
Shared calendar kept up to date	Yes	Capacity issue	Ash owns it but is on nights this month; talk on Sunday about what comes off Ash's list
Recycling out on Thursday	Yes	One-off, no action	Two bank holidays moved the day

PART C: WRAP UP THE AUDIT

Structural gaps found

1. Update One owner per job for each of these in this session.

Capacity issues found

1. Set a time for the conversation. This audit brings it to light, but it doesn't replace it.

One-offs

1

Part D (optional): Thanked, or only noticed when it's missed?

Job	Gets thanked	Only noticed when missed?	One way to notice it
Keeping the calendar	Rarely	Yes	Say thanks at Sunday dinner when it's up to date
Topping up the cat food	Never	Yes	A note on the fridge

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. A task with no owner is a gap in the setup, not a verdict on the person who kept covering it.

Fill in your own: What keeps coming back? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-04)

A worked example month

Here's what Sam and Alex's look-back sheet looks like at the end of a month:

JOB	WK 1	WK 2	WK 3	WK 4	TOTAL	X	KIND
Bins out (Tuesday night)	X	X	X		3		Structural gap
School forms signed	X		X	X	3		Capacity issue
Dishes before bed		X	X		2		One-off
Plants watered			X		1		(normal life)

X = it slipped that week. A blank means the job went fine.

- **The bins** are Alex's on paper. But Alex works late on Tuesdays, so for three weeks Sam quietly took it out. At the weekly catch-up in Chapter IV (page 151), they agreed to try a swap for the rest of the month, and in week 4 Sam took it out with no trouble. The named owner wasn't the person doing it, so it's a structural gap. Now they make the trial swap official: Sam owns the bins, and Alex takes the recycling and the weekly grocery order, so the hours stay even. They update the job list on the spot.
- **The school forms** have a clear owner, Sam, who is swamped this term. That's a capacity issue. They set a time for a proper talk on Thursday evening instead of solving it now.
- **The dishes** slipped during the two weeks Alex was travelling. That's a one-off. They note it and change nothing.

Result: one structural gap, one capacity issue, one one-off. They write those three numbers down. The whole thing takes eighteen minutes.

A second month: three siblings and their dad

Three grown-up siblings share the care of their dad, who lives alone. One lives nearby, one an hour away, one abroad. They do their look-back on a video call, using a shared list.

- **Calling Dad's landlord about repairs:** 3 ✗. Nobody had ever agreed who would. A *structural gap*. The sibling abroad takes it, because it can be done by email from anywhere.
- **Weekly visit:** 2 ✗. The sibling nearby owns it and has been working double shifts. A *capacity issue*. They book a separate call for Sunday.
- **Dad's food order:** 1 ✗, the week the website was down. *Normal life*.

The sibling abroad says, "I know I can't visit. I want to own something real." That sentence did more than the list. When old hurts make even this kind of call hard, see Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).

Step three: close the month and keep count

1. Update the job list for every structural gap.

2. Set a time for the conversation for every capacity issue. The look-back finds the issue. It doesn't replace the conversation.
3. Write down how many structural gaps, capacity issues and one-offs you found.

A falling number of structural gaps is a good sign, over several months; one month can be a normal swing. A number that keeps rising usually means something bigger has changed, such as a new job, a new baby or a move, and that change may need its own conversation.

The look-back also feeds back into Chapter II (page 89). If a gap was a blank row, filling it in raises next month's ownership score. If the names were filled in but wrong, like the bins, the score holds steady, but now it's true: the list names who really does each job. Only the look-back catches that kind of gap. The progress report (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/report-01) (your progress, week by week) can keep the monthly counts, including how many gaps came back after being fixed the month before. That repeat count is the one to watch most closely.

Common mix-up: "Our goal is zero." A count of zero can mean a solid setup, or that someone has stopped marking **X** to keep the peace. Fix: the count is for noticing a direction over months, not for winning a month.

- **Research:** Goodhart's law, from economics, warns that when a measure becomes a target, people start managing the number instead of the thing it was measuring.
- **Research:** An unusually bad month is often followed by a more ordinary one, simply by chance. Statisticians call this regression to the mean. It's why one month is never enough to judge a change.

If only one of you is on board: keep your own count of the jobs you own and the jobs you covered. Over three months, it shows you whether things are settling or whether you're carrying more and more. That is useful to know for yourself, whether or not you ever show it to anyone, and it's good evidence for a calm conversation if you choose to have one.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I've been keeping a simple count for three months. Can I show you what I noticed?"



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

If you'd rather not add things up by hand, the Fair split check, over a month, does the counting, so the talk can be about the setup, not the sums.

TOOL **Fair split check: over a month** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/look-back-30-days

The quiet months

The look-back is built to find gaps, so it is tempting to skip it when there aren't any. That's the month it matters in a different way. Where audits are done well, a control that has always worked is still tested again on a schedule, because working so far is not the same as working now. People are no different. A month with no **X** can mean the setup is solid. It can also mean nobody has looked closely, or that one person is quietly covering so well that the page looks clean.

On a quiet month, keep the same twenty minutes and add three questions:

1. What's going well that we haven't said out loud?
2. Is anything small that we've stopped mentioning because it didn't seem worth it?
3. Does the job list still match life as it is now?

The first question gives thanks a place. The second catches what slow drift hides. The third is the review date for the whole setup. This is the same re-

check that the Complacency guide (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency) sets out for every kind of relationship and for yourself, and a quiet month is a good time to practise it.

Quiet months, in three relationships

- **An empty nest.** With the kids gone, the list is short and nothing slips. The look-back finds a different gap: they haven't planned anything together in months. See Kids grown and gone (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest).
- **Old friends.** Nothing has gone wrong, but one of them has started every catch-up for a year. A quiet month is a gentle time to say so. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Gaming and time together.** No chores slipped, but evenings have drifted into separate screens. The question "What have we stopped noticing?" brings it up without blame. See Gaming and time together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together).
- **Research:** People adapt to good things as well as bad ones, so what once felt special starts to feel normal. Psychologists call this hedonic adaptation. Saying thanks out loud is one way to keep noticing.

Common mix-up: "If nothing's wrong, the look-back is a waste of time."

Fix: make the quiet-month version shorter, not absent. Ten minutes and three questions is enough, and it keeps the habit alive for the month you need it.

If only one of you is on board: ask the three questions of yourself, then share one answer. "Something I've stopped saying: I really like how you handle the car stuff." Starting with a thank-you is the easiest way into a quiet-month talk.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: a quiet month deserves a high five! Name what went well before anything else. The weekly card has a nice way to begin.

TOOL Kitchen-table check-in · spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins

How to talk about a pattern

When a gap needs a real conversation, use Check-ins (spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins) for the order: one topic, a good moment, and hearing each other back before answering. Try the Chat analyzer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator), which shows how a sentence may land, on the sentence that names the pattern.

How you say it matters. A pattern said as a verdict (“You never put the bins out”) will get argued with. A pattern said as a repeated fact (“The bins have slipped three weeks in a row. What’s getting in the way on Tuesdays?”) can get an owner. Keep the month from turning into overload, blame or criticism of the person. The ground rules are how the conversation stays a repair.

Give context on both sides before you decide anything. A gap that looks like neglect from one side may be a heavy month from the other, and a job that “always gets done” may be getting done at a cost nobody has said out loud. Each person says briefly what the month was like for them, and the other repeats back what they heard. Only then do you decide who owns what. The Complacency guide has words for raising something someone has stopped noticing.

If the talk starts going badly, either of you can call a pause, and the person who paused names a time to come back.

A good habit: open every look-back by each naming one thing that went well this month. Turning Towards (spreadloveandacceptance.com/turning-toward) has more ideas for small, specific thank-yous.

Naming a pattern, in three relationships

- **Coworkers:** “The client notes have been missing after three of the last four calls. What would make it easier to write them up?”
- **A parent and a teen:** “Your bike’s been left out in the rain three times this month. What would help you remember?” (Not: “You never look after your things.”)
- **Two faiths, one family:** “Both of our holiday seasons ended with me doing all the cooking. Can we plan next time differently?” See Two faiths (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“This has come up three times this month. What’s getting in the way?”
“I’d like to hear what this month was like for you before we decide anything.”

If only one of you is on board: name the pattern as a repeated fact, once, and ask one question. Then listen. You can’t make the other person join the look-back, but a calm question often gets a calmer answer than a meeting would.

- **Research:** John Gottman’s research found that how a hard conversation starts strongly predicts how it ends. A gentle start (describe, feel, ask) goes better than an accusation.
- **Research:** Saying back what you heard before answering, often called reflective listening, helps people feel understood.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 14

Kitchen-table check-in: this week

Linda and her grown-up son Jordan, who live together

Our weekly check-in

Week of Oct 5 · Linda and Jordan

Who’s checking in (optional)

Linda and Jordan

One thing that went well

Jordan cooked twice, and we ate together on Thursday.

One thing that felt heavy

The bathroom, again. And Mum's back was bad all week.

One small thing to try next week

Jordan owns the bathroom on Saturdays. Linda stops checking it.

Our next check-in

Sunday after dinner

Any jobs that slipped or came up again this week? (optional)

Dishes

Laundry

Trash and recycling

Groceries

Cooking

Cleaning the bathroom

Paying the bills

Planning and remembering

ON THE CARD

One topic at a time. We're on the same side. Tick a job once it has one owner.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented.

Fill in your own: Kitchen-table check-in: this week

(spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins)

What the look-back is for, and what it isn't

The monthly look-back, set out as a working sheet in What keeps coming back?, does three things:

1. It finds which jobs are real repeating gaps, not one-off misses.
2. It decides whether each gap needs a new owner or a conversation about capacity.
3. It closes the month cleanly, so next month starts from a fixed setup instead of the same unresolved argument.

It is not a monthly performance review of either person. And it never goes back to add up hours that were "owed." Past hours can't be handed back, and billing for them doesn't fix anything; it just turns a look-back into a grievance. That doesn't mean pretending they didn't happen. You can thank

someone for what they carried before (“I see how much you’ve been carrying”); you just don’t bill for the past. The only question the look-back asks about the past month is where the *setup* failed to hold. So the setup, not anyone’s effort or affection, is what changes for next month.

It also doesn’t replace the weekly catch-up. The monthly look-back only works because the weekly notes keep feeding it real information. Skip the weekly checks, and the monthly one becomes guesswork.

No blame, still responsible

Fields where mistakes can be serious, like aviation and healthcare, learned that when mistakes are punished, people hide them, and when they lead to learning, people report them. So they review what went wrong without assigning personal blame. The same thinking keeps a look-back honest at home. “No blame” doesn’t mean “nobody is responsible.” The owner still owns the job next month. It just means the question is what to change, not who to shame.

Common mix-up: “If we can’t bill past hours, the person who carried more just loses out.” Fix: say thank you for what was carried, and change who carries next month. That is how the balance is restored, going forward.

- **Research:** Blameless reviews, and the idea of a “just culture” described by Sidney Dekker and James Reason, separate honest mistakes from reckless ones.
- **This book’s idea:** Not billing for past hours is a choice this book makes, not a research finding. It keeps the look-back pointed forward.

Starting out: before you move in

Most of this book’s examples are people who have shared a home for years. If you’re a few months in and about to move in together, the tools work even better now, before habits set. Here is a gentle order to use them in, about one step a week. None of it is a test, and you can stop at any point.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO TOGETHER	THE TOOL
Week 1	Each write down the rulebook from the home you grew up in: who did what, how money was talked about, what “tidy” meant. Swap, and be curious rather than judging.	The rulebook from home (spreadloveandacceptance.com/growing-up), and Part One: Then (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then-in-depth)
Week 2	Money: your money stories first, then the numbers, the split you’ll use, and a “talk first” amount for big buys.	Money between you (page 174) and the “Who does what?” page’s Money tab
Week 3	Your first job list for the new place, with one owner per job, thinking jobs included: bills, the landlord, birthdays, the food shop.	One owner per job (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-03)
Week 4	A pause plan, made on a calm day: your pause word, how long each of you needs, and how you’ll come back.	Our pause plan (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw) and Chapter I (page 61)
Week 5	What matters most: each name three things that matter most to you about a home (quiet, friends round, faith, family nearby, saving) and where they might pull against each other.	Part Three, Chapter 10: Values, meaning and a good life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-10-values-in-depth)
After the move	After two weeks, each log one ordinary week. After four weeks, do your first monthly look-back: short, kind, and mostly about what’s going well.	Who did what (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-01), then What keeps coming back?

THE REASONING. In the first months, nothing has an owner yet, so jobs go to whoever notices first, and that quickly becomes a habit neither of you chose. A few small talks now are far easier than untangling a habit later.

Bringing it up without it feeling like an audit

Eight months in, a worksheet can feel like a test. Say what it’s for: not keeping score, but never having to guess. Use your own words for the tools

(“our list,” “our monthly chat”), keep each step to one evening or less, and drop anything that doesn’t help.

A worked example: Niamh and Tariq

Made up. Niamh and Tariq have been together eight months and move in at the end of next month.

- **Week 1:** Niamh’s family tidied as they went. Tariq’s did one big clean on Sunday. Neither is wrong. They agree: the kitchen every night, the rest on Sunday morning.
- **Week 2:** They choose a split in line with their pay (worked through in Chapter IV (page 174)), and put the £100 Tariq sends his mum on the list from day one.
- **Week 3:** Tariq owns the bills and the landlord. Niamh owns the food shop and the meal plan. Tariq owns the bins, with Niamh as backstop.
- **Week 4:** Their pause word is “kettle.” Tariq needs about twenty minutes to settle, Niamh about ten, so the one who pauses says when they’ll be back.
- **Week 5:** Tariq would like his mum to visit often. Niamh needs quiet weeknights. They agree on weekend visits, with one weeknight a month for Sunday-lunch leftovers and his mum’s stories.
- **After the move:** At their first look-back, the recycling slipped twice. Nobody owned it. Now Niamh does.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **“If we need a plan, something must be wrong.”** Planning is what people do for things that matter, like a holiday or a wedding. A home is one of them.
- **“We’ll work it out as we go.”** You will, and the first few months decide a lot of it by default. A little planning makes the defaults your choice.
- **“The list will make us feel like flatmates.”** Keep it short and light, and keep it in its place: one list, one monthly chat. The rest of the time is just your life together.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I don't want us to keep score. I just want us never to have to guess. Could we try a few small things before we move?" "How did your family split the jobs when you were growing up?"

More: Money together: moving in (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together). *This book's idea*: the week-by-week order.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: before you move in, pick owners for just three jobs, over a slow cup of tea. Small and early is easiest.

WORKPAPER WP-03

One owner per job · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-03

Raising a grandchild (kinship care)

Many grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings and family friends end up raising a child whose parents can't, for a while or for good. It's an act of great love, and it comes with work nobody planned for: school all over again, contact with the child's parent, sometimes social workers or courts, and your own feelings about all of it. This section is written for the carer. It uses the monthly look-back, because so much of kinship care is about things that keep coming back.

The things that keep coming back

Cancelled contact calls, a hard evening after a visit, the school phoning, forms piling up: these are patterns, not one-offs. Use What keeps coming back? on your own, or with a partner or helper, and sort each repeat like any other. Some have no owner (who rings the school back?). Some are capacity issues (you are doing too much). And some, like a parent who misses calls, are outside your control. For those, the job you can own is the plan for the evening after.

An evening-after plan (made up): When a call with Mum is cancelled, say so plainly and early ("Mum can't ring tonight"), don't guess her reasons out loud, offer one comfort (hot chocolate, a game, football on the telly), let

him be cross or sad without fixing it, and write the next planned call on the calendar together.

The child's loyalty bind

Children in kinship care often love the parent who can't look after them, and the carer who does. They may feel that being happy with you is disloyal to their mum or dad, or they may protect the parent by not talking about them. Some act up after contact; some go quiet.

- **Give permission to love both.** "You can love your mum and live with me. You don't have to choose."
- **Don't run the parent down** in front of the child, even when you're angry with them. Say the facts plainly and kindly.
- **Keep promises small, and don't make them for the parent.** Not "Mum's coming," but "Mum is planning to come. If she can't, we'll still go to the park."

Explaining an absent parent, at different ages

Most guidance for carers suggests the truth, told simply, in words that fit the child's age, and told again as they grow. Short, true and kind, and always clear that it isn't their fault.

- **Under 5:** very short and concrete. "Mummy isn't well enough to look after you. Granny looks after you now, and Granny is staying."
- **5 to 8:** a little more, with the same core. "Mum has an illness that makes it hard for her to look after children. It's not your fault, and nothing you did caused it. The grown-ups are making sure you're looked after."
- **9 to 12:** more of the why, and room for questions. "Your mum is having a really hard time with her drinking. She loves you. Right now she can't keep you safe and settled, so you live with me. You can ask me anything, and if I don't know, I'll say so."
- **Teenagers:** the fuller truth, and their own views. They may be angry with their parent, or with you. Let them feel both. Ask what they want to know, and what they want to tell friends and school.

School, and the child's social worker if there is one, can often help you find the words. Some children like a simple life story book with photos of where they've lived and the people who love them.

When you and the child's parent don't get on

Often the parent is your own adult child. You may be angry, grieving and worried all at once, and they may resent you for raising their child. Most advice about family rifts says to step back from someone who hurts you. In kinship care you often can't, because the child needs contact.

- **Keep it business-like, for the child's sake.** Short, civil messages about the child: times, school, health. It's the same approach as co-parenting across two homes (Chapter III (page 140)).
- **Hold the parent and the child apart in your mind.** You can be hurt by your son or daughter and still greet them warmly at a visit, for the child.
- **Leave the door open,** without pressure. Family estrangement is more common than many people think, and some families do find their way back, often slowly (Karl Pillemer, 2020).
- **Grieve your own losses too:** the life your child might have had, the grandparent you expected to be, the retirement you planned. Pauline Boss called loss with no clear ending "ambiguous loss." Naming it can help.

WORDS YOU COULD USE, WITH YOUR ADULT CHILD:

"I'm not trying to replace you. I'm keeping him safe and settled until things change. He talks about you, and I want your visits to go well."

With the child: "Mum loves you. She isn't well enough to look after you right now, and that's not your fault."

Look after yourself

Raising a child a second time round is tiring. Research on grandparents raising grandchildren finds real rewards and real strain, and a strong need for support (Bert Hayslip and Patricia Kaminski, 2005). Respite (a regular break), a group of other kinship carers, and help with money and school are all worth asking for. In England and Wales, the charity Kinship (kinship.org.uk) offers advice and local support groups for kinship carers.

Foster, adoptive and kinship families lists more support, in the UK and elsewhere.

A worked example: Maureen and Tyler

Made up. Maureen, 63, has raised her grandson Tyler, 9, since he was six. Her daughter, Kerry, rings on Sundays when she can. Maureen does her monthly look-back on her own, with a cup of tea, on the first Monday of the month.

In October, two things came up three times: Kerry's Sunday call didn't happen, and Tyler had a meltdown at bedtime on those Sundays. The first is outside Maureen's control. The second she can plan for. She writes an evening-after plan (hot chocolate, his football annual, no guessing about Kerry's reasons out loud) and asks her brother to take Tyler swimming on Sunday afternoons, so waiting for the phone isn't the whole day.

She also sends Kerry one short message: "Tyler looks forward to your calls. If Sunday at six doesn't work, would another time be easier? Love, Mum." Kerry replies a week later and suggests Wednesdays. It isn't fixed, but it's a step.

Common mix-ups, and how to fix them

- **"If I tell him the truth, it will hurt him."** A simple, kind truth usually hurts less than a mystery he fills in himself, often by blaming himself.
- **"Staying civil with her means I'm letting it go."** Civil is for the child. Your feelings about what happened are real too, and they deserve a place: a friend, a support group or a counsellor.
- **"I should be able to manage on my own."** Nobody raises a child alone well for long. Asking for respite is part of doing it well.

Research notes

Bert Hayslip and Patricia Kaminski (2005) reviewed research on grandparents raising grandchildren: the costs and rewards, how varied these families are, and the need for support. Karl Pillemer (2020) drew on a national survey to show that family estrangement is more common than people assume and that some people reconcile. Pauline Boss (1999) named

“ambiguous loss.” *This book’s idea*: the evening-after plan, and using the monthly look-back for the parts of kinship care that keep coming back.

Your part, and only your part

In the look-back you can only fix the gaps you own, and offer help with the rest. You can’t make someone keep a rhythm. Keep the rhythms you can keep, notice which ones are kept in return, and let your effort follow: more where it’s shared, less where it isn’t, so the rhythm doesn’t run on one person’s energy.

The idea runs through the whole book: you can only do what’s in your control, and you protect your own energy by matching energy with energy, giving in proportion to what comes back, with room for seasons when someone can’t. Part One covers it in full: your circle of control, and matching energy (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now-in-depth).

On your own: a monthly look at yourself

Once a month, look back at your own month, kindly. Not a scorecard, more like a weather report.

- What filled your battery this month, and what drained it?
- Which of your limits held, and which slipped?
- Choose one small thing to keep, and one to change next month.

IN THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM:

The Individual package and your report (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · Part One: a kind monthly look at yourself (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next-in-depth) · Step 1: check your battery The Individual package puts every workpaper for the path into one fillable PDF, with a report written just for you. · The whole book on sharing the load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/topic-share-the-load)

More for your situation

A monthly look-back works in every kind of relationship, with small changes. These pages take it into one situation each. Start from your relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship) lists them all.

- **Couples and partners:** More than two partners (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two) · Money together · Gaming and time together · Different hours · Coming home · When one of you is ill
- **Families:** Foster, adoptive and kinship families · When a child has ADHD · Grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children) · Adult siblings and family rifts · Kids grown and gone · Two faiths, one family
- **Friends, housemates and work:** Friends · Sharing a room · Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out)
- **On your own, or helping others:** On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own) · For counsellors, coaches and group leaders (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors)

Where the thirteen fields meet in this chapter

This chapter draws on 7 of the author's thirteen fields (see the Preface (page 18) or the About page (spreadloveandacceptance.com/about)). Here is what each one brings, and which of the five big ideas it serves.

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Finance	The month-end close; reconcile the plan against the log, so next month starts clean.	See the whole load
Business	The audit habit, used as a friendly self-check. A failure that keeps repeating usually means a missing control (auditors call it a deficiency), here a job with no real owner.	Fix the setup, not the person
Economics	A deficit is a shortfall. Past hours can't be handed back, so they aren't billed afterwards: chasing them only turns a look-back into a grievance.	Notice the quiet incentives

FIELD	WHAT IT BRINGS HERE	BIG IDEA
Behavioural science	Patterns show up best at the right scale. One slip is noise; three or four in a month is a pattern that's easy to miss week by week.	Notice the quiet incentives
Psychology	A pattern said as a verdict gets argued with. Said as a repeated fact, it can get an owner.	Tune how you send and receive
Philosophy	The Ship of Theseus, an old puzzle: is a ship rebuilt plank by plank still the same ship? A home's agreements get rebuilt a little at a time, and they're still yours, as long as you keep the plans up to date.	Fix the setup, not the person
Holistic therapies	Body first, argument second: not on a day when either stress tank is high. A calm look-back a few days late beats a tense one on time.	Read your state first

How they connect

The word in brackets is the root the two fields share; the polymath page explains all seven. From the most obvious connection to the most abstract:

- **Obvious: Finance + Business** (*feedback loops*). A monthly close and an audit are the same habit: step back, find what didn't reconcile, fix the control. In this book that's the monthly look-back, about twenty minutes a month. This holds up "Fix the setup, not the person".
- **Hidden: Economics + Behavioural science** (*quiet incentives*). The easiest default, "I'll just do it," is the one that reopens the gap. A monthly count makes the default visible, so the job gets a name that sticks. This holds up "Notice the quiet incentives".
- **Abstract: Economics + Philosophy** (*balance*). Past hours can't be handed back. What can change is who carries next month. So the only question the look-back asks about last month is where the setup failed to hold. A ledger that looks forward is a fairness choice, not just an accounting one. This holds up "Fix the setup, not the person".

When it goes wrong, and when it goes right

When it goes wrong, the look-back turns into a list of complaints. Every **x** becomes "you, again." Old hours get added up. Someone leaves feeling

judged, and next month both people quietly find a reason to skip it.

When it goes right, it's short, a little dull and oddly calming. A couple of jobs get new owners. One talk gets scheduled. The number of gaps is written down. Over the next few months it gets smaller, and you both notice the difference at home.

Questions people often ask

We missed a few weekly logs. Can we still do the look-back?

Yes. Use what you have, and be honest about the gaps in your notes. Just avoid making big changes based on thin information.

What if we disagree about which kind of gap something is?

Start with the simplest question: does the job have a named owner, and is that person the one actually doing it? If you still disagree, call it a structural gap and look at the job list together. Updating the list is low-risk and easy to undo.

How long should it take?

About twenty minutes. If it runs much longer, you're probably solving capacity issues in the meeting. Schedule those as separate talks.

Can someone help us prepare?

Professor Puddles, the site's friendly chat host, can help you word the sentence that names a pattern.

Limits and cautions

- The look-back finds patterns in jobs. It can't tell you why someone feels the way they do. That still needs a conversation.
- Don't use it in a week when either of you is very stretched. A calm look-back a few days late beats a tense one on time.
- Agreements made for an old life often need changing. The Ship of Theseus (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth) is a good story to keep in mind: a ship rebuilt plank by plank is still the same ship, and a

home whose agreements get rebuilt is still your home, as long as you keep the plans up to date.

- These tools only work when each person feels free to say no, to ask for a pause, or to keep their own notes private. If looking back together ever feels unsafe, or one of you feels you can't say no, stop using the tools and talk with a trained counsellor on your own. When someone is afraid of their partner, counselling together isn't advised. Not safe at home? lists free, private hotlines.

Closing the month, and starting again

This is the last chapter of Part Two, but the program keeps going around. Each month, you look back, change one or two things, and start again. You see the work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/preface), stay in tune (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1), check the split can last (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2), know what you're carrying (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3), agree what fair means (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4), and look back again. The aim was never a perfect ledger. It's a shared life where nobody is quietly carrying more than the other can see.

That's the end of Part Two. The book goes on in Part Three: Understanding people (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-1-feelings-in-depth), chapters on how people work, for anyone. To put Parts One and Two into practice first, try the six-week program (spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01): six gentle weeks, with one chapter and one small tool each week.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Weekly check-ins miss patterns.** Once a month, look back over four weeks of notes and your job list.
- ✓ **Mark an X for each week a job slipped.** Anything with two or more gets sorted.
- ✓ **A problem that keeps coming back usually has no real owner.** Fix the setup, not the person.
- ✓ **Keep it short and kind,** and look back even in the quiet months.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming

The same kind look, on your own

[read online](#)

Part Three · Chapter 6 · Habits and change

Why problems come back, and how habits stick

[read online](#)

Part Two · Chapter II · Is the split working?

The setup score the look-back finds

page 80

Part Three · Chapter 11 · Healing after hurt

Repairing what the look-back finds

[read online](#)

PUT IT TO USE



Six-week program, week 6: make it last

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
prog-01](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/prog-01)



What keeps coming back? A monthly look-back

[spreadloveandacceptance.com/
workpapers/
wp-04-what-keeps-coming-back](https://spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/wp-04-what-keeps-coming-back)

Workpapers and tools in this book

Every workpaper and tool the chapters point to, in two separate lists, with the chapters that mention each one. All of them are free at spreadloveandacceptance.com, with no account, and what you type stays on your device.

Workpapers mentioned in this book

Pages to fill in, on your own or together.

WORKPAPER WP-01 **Who did what** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-01

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Is the split working? (page 80), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

WORKPAPER WP-02 **How much are you carrying?** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-02

In: Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), The monthly look-back (page 185)

WORKPAPER WP-03 **One owner per job** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-03

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

WORKPAPER WP-04 **What keeps coming back?** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-04

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), The monthly look-back (page 185)

WORKPAPER WP-09 **Say it so it lands** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-09

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

WORKPAPER WP-11 **The Calm-Down Kit** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151)

WORKPAPER WP-12 **Same moment, different speeds** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-12

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50)

WORKPAPER WP-13 **The 90-second daily check-in** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-13

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), The monthly look-back (page 185)

Tools mentioned in this book

Interactive helpers to use on the site.

TOOL Chat analyzer · spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL Rewind the talk · spreadloveandacceptance.com/carrier-wave-decoder

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50), Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL Cool-down corner: make a pause plan · spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw

In: Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL Kitchen-table check-in · spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins

In: Is the split working? (page 80), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL Chat analyzer: Help me write it (ask for a change) · spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins

In: Two kinds of fair (page 151)

TOOL How you connect: the 2-minute style quiz · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength

In: Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL Rhythms side by side · spreadloveandacceptance.com/tools/frequency-calibration

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50)

TOOL Who does what? Quick look · spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand

In: The work nobody sees (page 18)

TOOL Who does what? Count the hours and bills · spreadloveandacceptance.com/lemonade-stand

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Is the split working? (page 80), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL Who does what? Not sure where to start · spreadloveandacceptance.com/snapshot

In: The work nobody sees (page 18)

TOOL Cool-down corner: Upset right now? · spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now

In: Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL **My weather today** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks

In: Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL **Ask Professor Puddles** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL **Plan it once: handoff bag for two homes** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

co-parenting

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL **Plan it once: room agreement for roommates** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

sharing-a-room

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL **Team job list: the 10-minute weekly round** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/work

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118)

TOOL **Learn by doing: connect two fields of study** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/

polymath

In: The work nobody sees (page 18), Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80), Full tanks and different angles (page 118), Two kinds of fair (page 151), The monthly look-back (page 185)

TOOL **Fair split check: this week** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/is-the-setup-working

In: Why we get out of tune (page 50), Is the split working? (page 80)

TOOL **Fair split check: over a month** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/look-back-30-days

In: The monthly look-back (page 185)

How the numbers work

Every number in this book is arithmetic you can do with a pencil. None of them is a test, a diagnosis or a verdict on anyone: they describe a week, a load or a way of sharing work. The weights and cut-offs are this book's own rules of thumb, not research findings, and you are free to disagree with them. The worked examples are the book's own, so you can check them against the chapters.

Two habits run through all of them. **Scores are rounded to two decimal places before their band is read**, so the number you see and the words you see always agree. And **nobody's score is ever worked out for them**: if someone's own answer is missing, the total waits.

The load: How much are you carrying?

You score five things from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very true), about the last day or two: sleep debt, workload elsewhere, unresolved conflict, your physical state, and time pressure today.

$$\text{load} = (\text{sleep} + \text{workload} + \text{conflict} + \text{body} + \text{time}) \div 20$$

The answer runs from 0 to 1, and **higher means heavier**. Under 0.30 is a light load, 0.30 up to 0.60 a medium load, and 0.60 or more a high load. (The worksheet splits each band in two for its words: very light under 0.15, light, medium on the lighter side under 0.45, medium on the heavier side, high under 0.80, and very high from 0.80.) Your **battery** is the other side of the same thing, the energy you have left: a high load means a low battery. The battery is a picture in words, not a second score.

WORKED EXAMPLE Rosa, from Part Two, Chapter III, page 118, scores sleep 3, workload 4, conflict 1, body 2 and time 3.

$$3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 = 13; 13 \div 20 = 0.65, \text{ which is a high load.}$$

Two or more of you: each person scores only themselves, and the shared figure is the plain average of everyone's own scores. If any one person is at 0.60 or more, treat that as the headline, whatever the average says.

Coming back after a pause (the Calm-Down Kit): if you like numbers, take the score again after a calming round. Under 0.50, go back at the time you named. From 0.50

to 0.59, take another round. At 0.60 or more after two rounds, put it off to a named time. The kit’s line sits at 0.50 on purpose: you don’t need a light load to come back, just less than half.

My weather today: the room in your day

My weather today shows words, not numbers: a sky (clear, gusty or fogged in) and how much room you have today. Behind the words sits a rough tally from 0 to 100, where **higher means a heavier day**. You only see it if you tick “Show the numbers behind this”.

WHAT YOU PICKED	ADDS
The sky: clear, gusty, fogged in	0, 26, 34
The pressure: light, building, heavy (skipped: 6)	0, 10, 20
Last night’s sleep: properly rested, about enough, short night, barely slept (skipped: 6)	0, 2, 10, 18
People load: barely any, a normal amount, a lot, nonstop (skipped: 4)	0, 3, 9, 14
Ground conditions (hungry, thirsty, in pain and so on)	4 each, up to 14
What’s blowing in (work, money, health and so on)	3 each, up to 10

Under 45 reads as lots of room today, 45 to 64 as some room, and 65 or more as very little room.

WORKED EXAMPLE Joel, from Part One, Now (online), picks gusty, building pressure, a short night, a lot of people time, one ground condition (hungry) and one thing blowing in (work).

$26 + 10 + 10 + 9 + 4 + 3 = 62$: some room today, with less than usual, so the forecast says to go gently and settle first.

Workload balance: how evenly the hours are shared

Two people. Work out each person’s share of the logged hours as a percentage.

$$\text{balance} = 1 - (\text{the difference between the two percentages} \div 100)$$

50/50 scores 1.00; one person doing everything scores 0.00. It doesn't matter which of you does more. Balance ignores the total, which is one reason the load sits beside it.

WORKED EXAMPLE Rosemary logs 14 hours and Ken 10 (Part Two, Chapter II, page 80). Out of 24 hours, that is 58.3% and 41.7%.

$$1 - (58.3 - 41.7) \div 100 = 1 - 0.167 = 0.83$$

Three or more people, or an agreed split. The same idea, said more generally: how much of the week would have to change hands to reach the target, compared with the most that ever could.

each share = that person's hours $\div$ everyone's hours
target = an even share ($1 \div$ number of people), or the split you agreed
moved = $\frac{1}{2} \times$ the sum of every |share - target|
most = $1 -$ the smallest target share
balance = $1 -$ moved $\div$ most

WORKED EXAMPLE Three partners log 15, 9 and 6 hours (Chapter II, page 85): shares 0.50, 0.30 and 0.20, against a third each.

moved = $\frac{1}{2} \times (0.167 + 0.033 + 0.133) = 0.167$; most = $1 - 0.333 = 0.667$;
balance = $1 - 0.167 \div 0.667 = 0.75$. In hours, $0.167 \times 30 = 5$ hours a week would change hands for an even split.

With an agreed split, use it as the target: co-parents who agreed 60/40 and log 12 and 8 hours score 1.00.

Ownership: does every job have a name?

ownership = jobs with a named owner $\div$ all the jobs on the list

The calculator counts a job as owned when it has one named owner. A backstop, the person who notices if it slipped, is a good habit and has its own column, but the score only needs the owner. The starter jobs on the worksheet don't count until you give them an owner or change them. Never raise the score by deleting the jobs nobody owns: they are exactly what the score is there to show.

WORKED EXAMPLE Rosemary and Ken list 12 regular jobs, and 9 have an owner: $9 \div 12 = 0.75$.

Who carries more of the list. A score of 1.00 can still mean one person owns everything, so One owner per job also shows each person's share of the list, with each job weighted by how often it comes round and how big it is:

weight of a job = how often $\times$ size
how often: daily 5, weekly 1, ongoing 1, monthly 0.25, as needed 0.1
size: small 0.5, medium 1 (the default), big 2
(or, where you gave the hours each time: hours $\div$ 0.5)
share = the weights of that person's jobs $\div$ the weights of all the jobs

A job you decide together counts the same for each of you; on a list for two homes it shows as "Together" instead.

WORKED EXAMPLE One person owns the cooking (daily, medium: 5) and the bills (monthly, medium: 0.25). The other owns the laundry (weekly, big: 2) and the car (as needed, medium: 0.1). Each owns two jobs, but $5.25 \div 7.35 = 71\%$ of the list's weight sits with the first person, and 29% with the second.

Who's carrying more right now. Who did what flags the busiest person when their share of the logged minutes (or of the work done without being asked) is at least half, and at least 20 points over an even share: 70% or more for two people, 53% or more for three. In the Preface, page 18's example, one partner did 105 of the 115 minutes that were noticed and handled without anyone asking: 91%, so the sheet says so.

The setup score: can the way you share the work last?

setup score = balance $\times$ 0.40
+ ownership $\times$ 0.35
+ (1 - the average load) $\times$ 0.25

The weights add up to 1, so the score runs from 0 to 1, and here **higher means the setup is working better**, the opposite of the load. The load is the only part that counts against the score, which is why it enters as 1 - load. 0.70 or more reads as working well (the "Who does what?" page says "holding"); 0.40 up to 0.70 as needs a

look (“drifting”); below 0.40 as needs a rethink, together. It is a snapshot of the setup, never a probability and never a verdict on anyone.

WORKED EXAMPLE Rosemary and Ken (Chapter II, page 80): balance 0.83, ownership 0.75, and their own load scores are 0.45 and 0.30, an average of 0.375.

$0.83 \times 0.40 + 0.75 \times 0.35 + (1 - 0.375) \times 0.25 = 0.333 + 0.263 + 0.156 = 0.75$: working well.

The shortfall is what each part could have earned minus what it did earn: balance $0.40 - 0.333 = 0.067$; ownership $0.35 - 0.263 = 0.088$; load $0.25 - 0.156 = 0.094$. The biggest shortfall is the load, which usually eases outside the chore list (more sleep, a lighter week elsewhere). The calculator’s “what would help most” is the single change with the biggest gain: handing about 2 hours a week from Rosemary to Ken would take balance from 0.83 to 1.00, worth 0.067. Naming one more job’s owner would be worth 0.029, and a load lower by 0.10 on average 0.025.

The overall score adds a fourth part, retuning: of the moments that landed badly this week, how many you retuned before answering.

overall = balance $\times$ 0.35 + ownership $\times$ 0.30 + (1 - load) $\times$ 0.20 + retuning $\times$ 0.15
(no rough moments this week: leave retuning out, and divide the first three parts by 0.85)

In Chapter II’s first worked example (balance 0.60, ownership 0.80, an average load of 0.40, and 3 of 5 rough moments retuned): $0.21 + 0.24 + 0.12 + 0.09 = 0.66$.

The 30-day look-back: what shifted this month?

The look-back splits the last 30 days into four weeks (the first takes the first ten days). For each part you filled in (balance, ownership, the load, and last-minute rescues), it compares the start of the month with the end:

start = the average of weeks 1 and 2
end = the average of weeks 3 and 4
it shifted if end - start is 0.10 or more (balance, ownership, load),
or 1 a week or more (rescues); anything smaller didn’t
shift

One next step: a part that moved the wrong way comes first (the biggest move for its size). Otherwise, the first of these that is still true at the end: ownership under 0.70, balance under 0.70, 2 or more rescues a week, or anyone's load at 0.60 or more. If none is, keep the same rhythm and look again in 30 days.

Hours to change hands over the month: for each person, the hours they did minus their share of everyone's hours, added up week by week. Half the sum of those gaps (ignoring the minus signs) is how many hours would change hands to make the month even.

WORKED EXAMPLE Suppose Rosemary and Ken keep going for a month (made up, like them). Their four weeks: hours 14 and 10, 15 and 9, 13 and 11, 12 and 12; jobs with an owner 9, 9, 11 and 11 of 12; Rosemary's load 0.45, 0.50, 0.40, 0.35 and Ken's 0.30 every week; rescues 3, 2, 1, 1.

PART	START (WEEKS 1-2)	END (WEEKS 3-4)	CHANGE	READS AS
Balance	$(0.83 + 0.75) \div 2 = 0.79$	$(0.92 + 1.00) \div 2 = 0.96$	+0.17	Better
Ownership	0.75	0.92	+0.17	Better
Average load	0.39	0.34	-0.05	About the same
Rosemary's own load	0.48	0.38	-0.10	Lighter
Rescues a week	2.5	1	-1.5	Fewer

Three of the four parts shifted, all for the better, and nothing is left on the watch list, so the next step is to keep the rhythm. The setup score went from 0.73 to 0.87. Over the month Rosemary did 54 hours and Ken 42, so 6 hours would have changed hands for an even month.

On your own: is your week sustainable?

The “Who does what?” page’s “just me” view adds up the hours your week is spoken for (jobs, the thinking work, care and so on) and compares them with a waking week of about 112 hours (16 waking hours, 7 days).

share = the hours spoken for ÷ 112

Under 50% reads as sustainable, 50% up to 70% as full but workable, and 70% or more as stretched. A made-up example: 50 hours spoken for is 45%, which leaves real room; 80 hours is 71%, a lot to keep up week after week.

All of these are this book's own ways of putting things into numbers. They have not been tested in research studies, and they shouldn't be quoted as findings. The free calculators on the website do the arithmetic for you, and each one has a "How is this worked out?" note.

Blank worksheets

Photocopy or print these pages, as many times as you like, and fill them in by hand. Each one is a blank copy of a worksheet in the book. The free fillable versions on the website do the sums for you, and keep what you type on your own device.

Who did what

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-01.html

Write down what actually happened this week, before anyone starts remembering it as a story. Write down only what you did or saw yourself; never fill in someone else's side for them.

Person A

Person B

Week beginning

Part A: Who did what, this week

One row for each task noticed or done, including the invisible ones: remembering, planning, booking, forms. Time spent only thinking, noticing or planning counts too: log it as "Thinking and planning".

Day	Task noticed or done	Who did it	Minutes (rough)	How it came up: asked for, noticed, or thinking time?

This week's totals

Person A: minutes (and %), of which noticed and handled without being asked

Person B: minutes (and %), of which noticed and handled without being asked

Workload balance score: $1 - (A\% - B\%, \text{ ignoring any minus sign}) \div 100 =$

Part B (optional), Kind ways to say no: say why the request is fair, say honestly what you have left, and offer something instead.

Describes how the logged work was split this week, not anyone in it. How the score works: "How the numbers work", at the back.

How much are you carrying?

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-02.html

Fill this in on your own, about yourself only. Never fill it in for someone else.

Your name

Date

The checklist

Score each row based on how the last 24–48 hours have actually gone. Circle one: 0 = Not at all, 4 = Very true. Living with a long-term illness? Your physical row may always be high. That is load, not a mood.

	Not at all				Very true
Sleep debt (less rested than usual)	0	1	2	3	4
Workload elsewhere (job, school, caregiving)	0	1	2	3	4
Recent unresolved conflict (any source)	0	1	2	3	4
Physical state (hungry, sick, in pain)	0	1	2	3	4
Time pressure today specifically	0	1	2	3	4

Your load score

Points (add the five circled numbers): ____ out of 20

Load score: points ÷ 20 = ____ out of 1.00

Higher means a heavier load (and a lower battery). Under 0.30: light. 0.30 to 0.59: medium. 0.60 or more: high. Put off anything that doesn't need deciding in the next hour.

Optional

☐ Some of what I'm carrying is caring for someone

Anything you want to name before talking

A high score is a way to press pause, not a way out. It means “let’s come back to this tomorrow,” not “this doesn’t need to happen.”

One owner per job

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-03.html

Every regular job gets one owner: the person who does it and sees it through. If you like, add a helper or backup who pitches in, notices if it slips, or covers it on a bad week. List the invisible jobs too: forms, gifts, renewals, planning, appointments.

Date of this list

The split you agreed (optional)

Who owns each job

Job	How often	Owner	Helper or backup (optional)	Size (optional)	Notes

How often: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, As needed, Ongoing. Size: Small, Medium, Big.

Does every job have an owner?

Jobs with an owner: ____ of ____ = ____ out of 1.00

Changes to the list (optional)

Date	What changed	Who

Where we've landed

Agreeing means everyone has read this version and knows who owns what. It doesn't mean every job feels perfectly fair, only that ownership is clear.

☐ We're agreed on this

Who agreed (optional)

Look at this again on (optional)

What keeps coming back?

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-04.html

A monthly look-back, done together, across four weeks of Who did what and One owner per job. It looks for the tasks that keep slipping. The goal is to find where the setup needs a fix, not to tally what anyone owes.

Month

Part A: Gather the month's notes

List every task that was noticed but not done, or done only after being raised more than once. Mark an **x** for each week it came up.

[illegible]

Part B: Sort each gap

Sort every task flagged twice or more. A **structural gap** has no clear owner (fix One owner per job now). A **capacity issue** has an owner who can't keep up (set a time for an honest conversation). A **one-off** has a temporary cause (note it and move on).

Task	Named owner on the job list? (Yes / No)	Classification	Action

Part C: Wrap up the audit

Structural gaps found

Capacity issues found

One-offs

Part D (optional): Thanked, or only noticed when it's missed?

Job	Gets thanked (Often / Sometimes / Rarely / Never)	Only noticed when missed? (Yes / No)	One way to notice it

Not a bill for the past, and not a performance review. A task with no owner is a gap in the setup, not a verdict on the person who kept covering it.

Say it so it lands

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-09.html

A self-check each of you uses on your own side of a conversation. Use it on one thing that actually stung.

Your name

Date

Before you speak or send: fact, feeling, ask

Raw reaction (optional, and just for you)

What’s the fact underneath this? (One sentence, no adjectives.) For example: “The bins went out late on Tuesday.”

What’s the feeling underneath this? (Frustrated, tired, unseen, rushed...) A feeling about you, not a verdict about them.

What’s the actual ask? (What do you want to happen next, specifically?) Something the other person can say yes to.

Before you react: four quick checks

Check	Circle one
Is this about a specific, nameable task or event?	Yes · No
Would I read this the same way if I weren’t already carrying a lot?	Yes · No · Not sure
Is there a neutral interpretation that also fits what was said?	Yes · No
Am I responding to their words, or to a pattern from a past conversation?	Their words · A past pattern

A “No” or “Not sure” on the second check, a “Yes” on the third or “A past pattern” on the fourth are good reasons to pause first. A kind “not right now” and a time to come back keeps it honest.

The Calm-Down Kit

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-11.html

A short plan, made ahead of time, for calming your body down enough to have the conversation, or to put it off honestly. Fill in Part A on an ordinary day, not a hard one. Your kit is yours; only the pause plan is made to share.

Whose kit is this? (your name) _____ Date _____

Part A: What tends to start it

What tends to start it	How it shows up in my body first

Part A: My two defaults

Pick two calming steps now: asymmetric breathing (breathe in for 4, out for 6) · naming the room (5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you can touch) · weight and pressure (feet pressed flat into the floor, or something warm held in both hands) · gating (cutting noise and light: lower the lights, step out) · walking it out · a low, steady sound.

First default _____ Second, if the first isn't available _____

Part A: My pause line

Say how you are, how long you need, and when you'll be back: "I'm at capacity. I need ten minutes. I'll be back at quarter past."

Our pause plan (agree it together, and share it)

Our pause word or signal _____ The shortest break we take _____

How we set the time to come back _____ The first sentence when we come back _____

Part B, in the moment: say your pause word or line, then do your first calming step.

Part C: Coming back

Still hot? Another round. Twice? Name a new time. Settled enough to listen? Go back at the time you named. (For number fans: your load score, 0 to 1. Under 0.50 go back; 0.50 to 0.59 another round; 0.60 or above after two rounds, put it off.)

Time	What I did	How I feel now (Still hot / Settled enough)	Load before (0-1)	Load after (0-1)

Next small action _____ If you put the conversation off: when you'll pick it back up _____

Where I've landed

☐ I'm going with this

Look at this again on (optional) _____

Nothing in this kit works by cold, pain or shock, and none of it is treatment.

The 90-second daily check-in

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-13.html

Each person answers each prompt in one sentence, about their own day, and fills in only their own rows. No debating, no solving, no arguing back. Anything that needs a real discussion waits for the weekly catch-up.

Week beginning

Each day

Day	Person	Load (Low / Medium / High)	One thing I appreciated today	One small thing that didn't feel great	One thing that would help tomorrow
Mon					
Mon					
Tue					
Tue					
Wed					
Wed					
Thu					
Thu					
Fri					
Fri					
Sat					
Sat					
Sun					
Sun					

The weekly catch-up (optional)

Skim the week for anything that came up more than twice, and move it to the right worksheet.

Sore spot that keeps coming up	Times this week	Move to (One owner per job / Say it so it lands / Keep watching)

Where we've landed

☐ We're agreed on this

Who agreed (optional)

Look at this again on (optional)

Same moment, different speeds

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-12.html

For a few moments that come round often, each person marks how fast they want to move, how much they want to talk, and how urgent it feels. Each person fills in only their own rows, ideally before looking at the other's. There are no right answers.

Date

Part A: Each person's speed

Speed: right away · within the hour · later the same day · after a night's sleep. Talk: quiet time first · a few words, then act · talk it all through. Urgency: low · medium · high.

Moment	Person	Speed	Talk	Urgency	What helps me (optional)
A plan changes at the last minute					
A bill, letter or form needs dealing with					
Something breaks or goes wrong at home					
One of us is upset about something					
Deciding what to do with free time					

Part B: Where your speeds differ

For each moment, count how many steps apart your answers are on each list. Start with the biggest gap: a difference in pace, not in how much anyone cares.

Part C: One small agreement

Moment	What we'll try	Try it until

Where we've landed

Agreeing means you have both seen the gaps and will try the agreement. It doesn't mean either of you has to change speed for good.

☐ We're agreed on this

Who agreed (optional)

Look at this again on (optional)

Not a compatibility test and not a diagnosis. Run it again every few months, or after a big change.

Is it us, or is it everything else?

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-14.html

A one-week log that keeps two things apart: pressure from outside (money, work, health, sleep, family) and friction that really starts between you. A line or two each evening, each person about their own day. Write what happened, not who was wrong.

Week beginning _____

Part A: Each evening

Day	Person	Outside pressure today (None / A little / A lot)	Where it came from	A tense moment between us (if any)	Looking back, it was mostly (Outside pressure / Between us / Some of both / Not sure yet)
Mon					
Mon					
Tue					
Tue					
Wed					
Wed					
Thu					
Thu					
Fri					
Fri					
Sat					
Sat					
Sun					
Sun					

Part B: The week at a glance

Tense moments on heavy days: _____ of _____

Part C: What got blamed on the wrong thing?

The moment	What it seemed to be about	What was really going on	What would help next time

Part D: One plan for the pressure

The pressure we're facing right now _____ How we'll flag a heavy day _____

What we'll go easy on until it passes _____ One bit of outside help we could ask for (optional) _____

Outside pressure explains a hard day. It doesn't excuse unkindness, and it doesn't make what anyone felt less real.

Keep your little rituals alive

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/f
ill/wp-15.html

Every three months or so, a short look at the small shared habits that keep you close: the morning coffee, the Sunday walk, the birthday breakfast. Nobody is to blame for one that lapsed.

Date

Part A: Our rituals, big and small

How it's doing: Alive (still happening, still means something) · Fading (on autopilot or less often) · Stopped · New idea. How often: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly, Now and then.

Ritual or habit	How often	How it's doing	What it gives us, or what got in the way

Part C: One to restart, or start

The ritual	The smallest version that still counts
The first time: when, and who will suggest it	What would make it easy to skip, and how we'll protect it (optional)

Part D (optional): One to let go, with thanks

The ritual	What it gave us
------------	-----------------

Where we've landed

☐ We're agreed on this

Who agreed (optional)

Look at this again on (optional)

A ritual is something you would both miss, not a test of love. Look at this sheet again in about three months.

Words used in this book

The book's own words, each in one plain sentence. More at spreadloveandacceptance.com/glossary.

Backstop

The second name on a job: someone who notices if it slipped and checks in kindly. Not a supervisor. A job counts as owned once it has an owner; the backstop is a good habit on top.

Battery

Your battery is how much energy you have left today. Full means you have room to spare; low means you're running on empty. "How much are you carrying?" measures the other side of it, your load: a higher load score means a heavier load, and a lower battery.

For example: After a poor night and a long workday, your load score is high and your battery is low, so a small request feels big.

A bid

A bid is any small reach for attention or connection, like "look at this," a sigh or a joke.

For example: They show you a photo of a dog. Looking and smiling back is turning towards it.

Calm-Down Kit

The Calm-Down Kit is your own short list of what settles your body, chosen ahead of time so you don't have to think when you're wound up.

For example: A glass of cold water, a walk to the corner, and three long breaths out.

Carrier wave

The carrier wave is the feeling that travels underneath the words: the tone that arrives before the meaning does.

For example: "Fine." can carry calm, hurt or tiredness. The carrier wave tells you which.

Check-in

A check-in is a short, planned talk that keeps small things small. The daily one takes about ninety seconds, with no debating.

For example: "Load today: heavy. Thank you for the dishes. One small thing: the car. My ask: could you fill it up?"

Complacency

Complacency is what happens when something has worked for a long time and you stop checking on it. It isn't laziness or a lack of love. It's a setup nobody has looked at lately.

For example: "How was your day?" "Fine." Months go by and nobody has asked a real question.

Double empathy

The idea, from the autistic researcher Damian Milton, that misunderstandings between autistic and non-autistic people run both ways: each finds the other hard to read, so neither side is simply "missing" something.

Drift

Drift is how two people slowly fall out of step when nobody checks in, even when nothing is wrong.

For example: Three busy weeks, no real talk, and small things start to feel big.

Flooded

Flooded means being so wound up that listening stops working for a while. The kind thing is a short pause with a time to come back.

For example: "I need twenty minutes. Can we talk again at eight?"

Frequency

Your frequency is your natural pace: how fast you decide, talk, reply and recover.

For example: One person answers a text in a minute; the other answers at the end of the day. Neither is wrong.

Gatekeeping

Holding on to how a home or child-care job must be done, so the other person steps back. Researchers first described it in mothers ("maternal gatekeeping"), but anyone can do it.

A kind no

A kind no says what you can and can't do right now, without blaming anyone.

For example: "I can't take that on this week. I could help on Saturday."

Kinship care

When a grandparent, aunt, older sibling or family friend raises a child whose parents can't.

The ladder

Three everyday states: calm and connected, revved up, running on empty. My weather today calls them clear, gusty and fogged in. A best guess about your state, not a measurement.

Ledger

A notebook where you write down what happened, so you can look at it calmly later. The book works the same way: see what is really going on, without blame, then change one small thing.

The load

The load is all the work of a shared life, including the thinking, planning and remembering that nobody sees.

For example: Buying the gift is one job. Remembering the birthday, picking the gift and wrapping it are three more.

Mental load

The noticing, planning and remembering behind running a shared life: knowing the shoes are too small, booking the appointment, keeping the list. It is real work, even though nobody sees it.

My weather today

My weather today is a one-minute check on your own conditions today, like sleep, stress and energy: Clear means calm and connected, Gusty means revved up, and Fogged in means running on empty.

For example: Short night, busy day: the forecast says to keep big talks for tomorrow.

Owner (one owner per job)

The owner of a job is the one person who makes sure it gets done from start to finish, so nobody has to keep asking.

For example: Sam owns the recycling: noticing it's full, taking it out and buying the bags.

Parallel parenting

Co-parenting with as little direct contact as possible: each home runs its own way, and messages stay short, polite and about the children.

Pressure

Pressure, in My weather today, is how much you were already carrying today: light, building or heavy. Behind the forecast sits a rough tally from 0 to 100; under 45 leaves room in the day, 65 or more means go gently. It is a reading of what you told it, not a score or a grade.

For example: A pressure of 40 leaves room in the day; 75 means go gently and leave big things for later.

Repair

A repair is anything that stops a tense moment from getting worse, like a joke, a softer tone or “Can we start over?”

For example: “I said that badly. What I meant was...”

Retune

To retune is to notice you’ve fallen out of step with someone and adjust together: slower, softer, or at a better time.

For example: “Can we start that again? I came in too fast.”

The rulebook from home

The rulebook from home is the unwritten set of rules you grew up with, about love, upset, chores and rest, that you may still expect others to follow.

For example: “Whoever notices the mess cleans it” was the rule at home, so a messy kitchen feels like “It’s always me.”

Second arrow

The extra pain we add on top of a hard moment, such as being angry at ourselves for being sad. The first arrow is the event; the second is what we tell ourselves about it (a Buddhist image).

Setup score

The one number from Is the setup working for everyone?: balance, ownership and stress added up with weights (0.40, 0.35 and 0.25), from 0 to 1. 0.70 and up is working well, 0.40 to 0.69 needs a look, under 0.40 needs a rethink, together. It judges the setup, never a person.

Static

Static is the crackle between two people when the words are fine but the tone, pace or timing doesn’t match.

For example: You ask “When will you do it?” calmly. They hear pressure. Nobody meant harm, but it crackles.

Stress tank

How much stress you are already carrying, from How much are you carrying?: a load score from 0 (empty) to 1 (full). Under 0.30 is low, 0.30 to 0.59 moderate, 0.60 and up high. A fuller tank means less room to take more on. (Your battery is the other side of it: energy left.)

Talk window

The talk window says whether now is a good time for a big conversation: open, wait a little, or closed for today.

For example: Your window says “wait,” so you ask to talk after dinner instead of right now.

Unbilled debt

Unbilled debt is the work of a shared life that got done but was never noticed or thanked.

For example: You remembered the dentist appointment, and nobody knew there was anything to remember.

Wave Code

Four letters from the style quiz in How you connect, one for each of four preferences about how you take in and send words. Each letter shows where you lean on a dial today: a shorthand for preferences, not a personality type.

Wired differently

Being wired differently means your brain works in a less common way, such as being autistic, ADHD, dyslexic or highly sensitive, which changes how words land.

For example: A hint like “the bins are full” may be heard as a plain fact, not a request.

Wiring

Your wiring is the way your brain and senses take in words, sound, change and people. It stays the same from day to day.

For example: Some people need a plan in writing. Others think best out loud.

Workpaper

A workpaper is a short worksheet. Each person fills in their own, then you read them together.

For example: “Who did what” is a week’s log of who did what.

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Research notes

The 83 studies and books the chapters mention, chapter by chapter, each with what it found in plain words and where to read it. Each entry was looked up and checked: most against the paper itself or its abstract, some (mostly older books) against a publisher's or library's record. Unchecked works are left out. The full list, with notes on how strong each finding is, is at spreadloveandacceptance.com/research.

Reading research: a few words in plain English

The chapters often say how sure the research is: “a small study”, “linked with”, “didn’t replicate”. Here is what those words mean, so every note in the book is something you can weigh for yourself.

Correlational (“linked with”)

Two things tend to go together: people who sleep less tend to argue more. It doesn’t show which causes which, or whether a third thing, like a new baby, causes both.

Experiment

Researchers change one thing on purpose, ideally deciding by chance who gets it, and compare. Better at showing cause, though often in a lab, for a short time, with a small group.

Meta-analysis

A study of studies: it pools many studies of the same question. Usually more trustworthy than any one study, but only as good as the studies in it.

Replication

Doing a study again to see if the result holds. When a large team re-ran 100 published psychology studies in 2015, only about a third gave a clear result again, and the effects were on average about half as big. So one study is a start, not the end.

Effect size

How big a difference is, not just whether there is one. A result can be real (“significant”) and still tiny. The book says “small” or “modest” when that is the case.

Who was studied

Much of psychology studies students in Western, educated, well-off countries. A finding may not fit every age, culture or kind of family, and many studies of couples looked only at a mother and a father.

Self-report

People answered questions about themselves. That is often the only way to ask about feelings, but memory and wanting to look good both creep in.

How the book labels things: a Research note describes published findings in plain words and says where the evidence is thin. This site's idea marks the book's own ways of putting things into practice, such as the worksheets and the setup score, which have not been tested in studies. The full list at spreadloveandacceptance.com/research also says how strong each finding is: strong, moderate or early.

PREFACE TO PART TWO

The work nobody sees

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). *Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work.* Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61(1), 199–212. Defined maternal gatekeeping along three dimensions and, in 622 dual-earner mothers, classified about one in five as gatekeepers; they did more family work each week and had less equal divisions of labour.
doi.org/10.2307/353894

Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1979). *Interpersonal attraction in exchange and communal relationships.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37(1), 12–24. Distinguished communal relationships (benefits given in response to needs) from exchange relationships (benefits given in return for benefits). When people wanted a communal relationship, being repaid in kind reduced attraction.
clarkrelationshiplab.yale.edu

Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1992). *When Partners Become Parents: The Big Life Change for Couples.* BasicBooks (New York); reissued 1999 (Erlbaum) and 2011. Based on the Becoming a Family Project, a long-term study of expectant couples, describes how strain and conflict between partners commonly rise across the transition to parenthood, and tests couples groups as prevention.
openlibrary.org/works/OL92708W

Daminger, A. (2019). *The cognitive dimension of household labor.* American Sociological Review, 84(4), 609–633. Interviews with 35 couples (70 interviews) identified four parts of household “cognitive labour”: anticipating needs, identifying options, deciding, and monitoring. Women did more of it overall, especially anticipating and monitoring; deciding was shared more equally. The work was often unseen by both partners.
doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). *Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 8(4), 377–383. Participants who believed others could also hear a person having a seizure were slower and less likely to help; the presence of others reduced each person's sense of responsibility.
doi.org/10.1037/h0025589

di Leonardo, M. (1987). *The female world of cards and holidays: Women, families, and the work of kinship.* Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 12(3), 440–453. Named “kin work”: the cards, calls, visits, gifts and gatherings that keep extended families connected. In the families she studied, it was done mostly by women and often treated as effortless.
doi.org/10.1086/494338

Doss, B. D., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). *The effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality: An 8-year prospective study.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96(3), 601–619. Following 218 couples over the first eight years of marriage, those who had a first child showed sudden declines in relationship quality after the birth, on average, compared with couples who did not.
doi.org/10.1037/a0013969

Gordon, A. M., Impett, E. A., Kogan, A., Oveis, C., & Keltner, D. (2012). To have and to hold: Gratitude promotes relationship maintenance in intimate bonds. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(2), 257–274. People who felt more appreciated by their romantic partners were more appreciative of their partners in return, and appreciation was linked with relationship maintenance and commitment.
doi.org/10.1037/a0028723

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press (reissued 2003, 2012). Coined “emotional labour” from a study of flight attendants (and bill collectors) trained to display feelings at work; distinguished surface acting from deep acting.
search.worldcat.org/title/9280843

Hochschild, A. R., with Machung, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. Viking Penguin (updated edition 2012, Penguin Books). Interviews and home observations of dual-earner couples with young children found that working mothers did much more of the housework and childcare, adding up to a large extra load over a year; many couples told themselves stories that the split was fair.
penguinrandomhouse.com

Kurdek, L. A. (2007). *The allocation of household labor by partners in gay and lesbian couples*. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(1), 132–148. Among 43 gay and 36 lesbian couples where both partners worked full-time, household tasks were divided more evenly than is typical in heterosexual couples, often by negotiation and specialisation rather than gender.
doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06292019

Ross, L., & Ward, A. (1996). Naive realism in everyday life: Implications for social conflict and misunderstanding. In E. S. Reed, E. Turiel, & T. Brown (Eds.), *Values and Knowledge* (pp. 103–135). Lawrence Erlbaum / Psychology Press. Described naive realism: people assume they see the world objectively, so those who disagree must be uninformed, irrational or biased – a dynamic that fuels conflict and misunderstanding.
doi.org/10.4324/9780203773772-6

Ross, M., & Sicoly, F. (1979). Egocentric biases in availability and attribution. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(3), 322–336. In five experiments (married couples, groups, basketball teams), people recalled more of their own contributions to joint work and took more responsibility than others gave them; spouses’ estimates of their own shares typically summed to more than 100 percent.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.3.322

Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Brown, G. L., Cannon, E. A., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Sokolowski, M. S. (2008). *Maternal gatekeeping, coparenting quality, and fathering behavior in families with infants*. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(3), 389–398. In 97 couples with infants, fathers were more involved in day-to-day care when mothers actively encouraged them (gate-opening); when mothers were highly critical (gate-closing), fathers’ own beliefs about involvement mattered less.
doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.3.389

Yavorsky, J. E., Kamp Dush, C. M., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). *The production of inequality: The gender division of labor across the transition to parenthood*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 662–679. Time-diary data from dual-earner couples showed a gender gap in total work opening up after a first baby: mothers took on most of the added childcare without cutting their paid hours; survey reports overstated how equal things were.
doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12189

Why we get out of tune

Bryant, C. M., Conger, R. D., & Meehan, J. M. (2001). *The influence of in-laws on change in marital success.* *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(3), 614–626. Following couples for several years, found that conflict and poorer relationships with in-laws predicted later declines in marital success (stability, satisfaction and commitment).
doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00614.x

Carrère, S., & Gottman, J. M. (1999). *Predicting divorce among newlyweds from the first three minutes of a marital conflict discussion.* *Family Process*, 38(3), 293–301. In 124 newlywed couples, how the first three minutes of a conflict discussion went (more negative and less positive emotion) predicted which couples divorced over the next six years.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1999.00293.x

Gilovich, T., Savitsky, K., & Medvec, V. H. (1998). *The illusion of transparency: Biased assessments of others' ability to read one's emotional states.* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(2), 332–346. In several sets of studies, people overestimated how well others could read their internal states (for example, liars overestimated how detectable their lies were, and people thought their disgust showed more than it did).
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.2.332

Gordon, T. (1970). *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training.* New York: P. H. Wyden (book; revised 2000). A parenting book and course that popularised “I-messages”: describing your own feelings and the effect of a behaviour rather than blaming the other person.
search.worldcat.org/title/670595

Gottman, J. M. (1994). *What predicts divorce? The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Hillsdale, NJ); reissued by Routledge. Gottman's report of his long-term studies of couples, including “flooding”: feeling so physically overwhelmed in a conflict that listening and thinking become very hard.
routledge.com

Kruger, J., Epley, N., Parker, J., & Ng, Z.-W. (2005). *Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think?* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(6), 925–936. Across five experiments, people overestimated how well email recipients would detect their tone (such as sarcasm or seriousness), partly because they found it hard to step outside their own perspective.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.925

Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C. H. M., Potts, H. W. W., & Wardle, J. (2010). *How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world.* *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(6), 998–1009. Following 96 volunteers who repeated a daily behaviour in the same context for 12 weeks, automaticity rose along a curve that levelled off; reaching 95% of each person's plateau took between 18 and 254 days, and missing a single day did not meaningfully set progress back.
doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674

Lambert, N. M., Fincham, F. D., Stillman, T. F., Graham, S. M., & Beach, S. R. H. (2010). *Motivating change in relationships: Can prayer increase forgiveness?* *Psychological Science*, 21(1), 126–132. In two small experiments with students, people asked to pray for a romantic partner (study 1) or for a friend daily for four weeks (study 2) reported more willingness to forgive that person than people in comparison conditions; in study 2 this went with a rise in selfless concern.
doi.org/10.1177/0956797609355634

Lieberman, M. D., Eisenberger, N. I., Crockett, M. J., Tom, S. M., Pfeifer, J. H., & Way, B. M. (2007). *Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli.* *Psychological Science*, 18(5), 421–428. In a brain-imaging study, labelling the emotion in a picture reduced amygdala and other limbic responses compared with other ways of processing the image.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01916.x

Mahoney, A. (2010). *Religion in families, 1999–2009: A relational spirituality framework*. Journal of Marriage and Family, 72(4), 805–827. Reviewed a decade of peer-reviewed studies on religion in marriage and parent–child relationships, “for better and worse”, organising them by how faith may help form, maintain and change family relationships; faith can strengthen family life and can also be a source of strain.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00732.x

Milton, D. E. M. (2012). *On the ontological status of autism: The “double empathy problem”*. Disability & Society, 27(6), 883–887. A short conceptual paper arguing that misunderstanding between autistic and non-autistic people runs both ways: each side finds the other hard to read, so the problem lies between them, not only in the autistic person.
autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/double-empathy

Rosenberg, M. B. (1999). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion (later editions: A Language of Life)*. PuddleDancer Press (Encinitas, CA); 2nd ed. 2003, 3rd ed. 2015. Describes Nonviolent Communication: expressing observations, feelings, needs and requests, and listening for the same in others.
vufind.lboro.ac.uk/Record/562413

Ross, L. (1977). *The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: Distortions in the attribution process*. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 10, 173–220. Reviewed the biases of the lay ‘intuitive psychologist’ and named the fundamental attribution error: underestimating situational causes and overestimating personal dispositions when explaining others’ behaviour.
doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60357-3

Savitsky, K., Keysar, B., Epley, N., Carter, T., & Swanson, A. (2011). *The closeness–communication bias: Increased egocentrism among friends versus strangers*. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47(1), 269–273. In three experiments, people overestimated how well they communicated with friends and spouses, more than with strangers, and made more egocentric errors following a friend’s directions; closeness seemed to relax the checking people do with strangers.
sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103110002118

Yoo, S.-S., Gujar, N., Hu, P., Jolesz, F. A., & Walker, M. P. (2007). *The human emotional brain without sleep—a prefrontal amygdala disconnect*. Current Biology, 17(20), R877–R878. After a night without sleep, the amygdala reacted more strongly to negative pictures and was less connected to the prefrontal cortex.
doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2007.08.007

PART TWO • CHAPTER II

Is the split working?

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). *A global measure of perceived stress*. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24(4), 385–396. Introduced the Perceived Stress Scale, a short questionnaire about how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded your life has felt lately; scores went with symptoms of depression and illness.
doi.org/10.2307/2136404

Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1992). *When Partners Become Parents: The Big Life Change for Couples*. BasicBooks (New York); reissued 1999 (Erlbaum) and 2011. Based on the Becoming a Family Project, a long-term study of expectant couples, describes how strain and conflict between partners commonly rise across the transition to parenthood, and tests couples groups as prevention.
openlibrary.org/works/OL92708W

Daminger, A. (2019). *The cognitive dimension of household labor.* *American Sociological Review*, 84(4), 609–633. Interviews with 35 couples (70 interviews) identified four parts of household “cognitive labour”: anticipating needs, identifying options, deciding, and monitoring. Women did more of it overall, especially anticipating and monitoring; deciding was shared more equally. The work was often unseen by both partners.
doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). *Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility.* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377–383. Participants who believed others could also hear a person having a seizure were slower and less likely to help; the presence of others reduced each person's sense of responsibility.
doi.org/10.1037/h0025589

di Leonardo, M. (1987). *The female world of cards and holidays: Women, families, and the work of kinship.* *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12(3), 440–453. Named “kin work”: the cards, calls, visits, gifts and gatherings that keep extended families connected. In the families she studied, it was done mostly by women and often treated as effortless.
doi.org/10.1086/494338

Doss, B. D., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). *The effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality: An 8-year prospective study.* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(3), 601–619. Following 218 couples over the first eight years of marriage, those who had a first child showed sudden declines in relationship quality after the birth, on average, compared with couples who did not.
doi.org/10.1037/a0013969

Feinberg, M. E., & Kan, M. L. (2008). *Establishing Family Foundations: Intervention effects on coparenting, parent/infant well-being, and parent-child relations.* *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(2), 253–263. A randomised trial with 169 expectant first-time couples found that the Family Foundations classes, delivered before and after birth, improved coparenting and some aspects of parent and infant wellbeing at follow-up.
doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.2.253

Goodhart, C. A. E. (1975). *Problems of monetary management: The U.K. experience.* Paper presented at the Conference in Monetary Economics, Sydney, July 1975; published in *Papers in Monetary Economics*, Vol. I (Reserve Bank of Australia, 1976); reprinted in Goodhart, *Monetary Theory and Practice* (Macmillan, 1984). The original source of “Goodhart's law”: a statistical regularity tends to break down once authorities put pressure on it for control purposes.

rba.gov.au/publications/rdp/1990/9013/conference-volumes.html

Hochschild, A. R., with Machung, A. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home.* Viking Penguin (updated edition 2012, Penguin Books). Interviews and home observations of dual-earner couples with young children found that working mothers did much more of the housework and childcare, adding up to a large extra load over a year; many couples told themselves stories that the split was fair.
penguinrandomhouse.com

Kurdek, L. A. (2007). *The allocation of household labor by partners in gay and lesbian couples.* *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(1), 132–148. Among 43 gay and 36 lesbian couples where both partners worked full-time, household tasks were divided more evenly than is typical in heterosexual couples, often by negotiation and specialisation rather than gender.
doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06292019

Ross, M., & Sicoly, F. (1979). *Egocentric biases in availability and attribution.* *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37(3), 322–336. In five experiments (married couples, groups, basketball teams), people recalled more of their own contributions to joint work and took more responsibility than others gave them; spouses' estimates of their own shares typically summed to more than 100 percent.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.3.322

Strathern, M. (1997). ‘Improving ratings’: Audit in the British University system. *European Review*, 5(3), 305–321. Anthropological commentary on the “audit explosion” in British universities; widely credited as the source of the popular phrasing of Goodhart's law (when a measure becomes a target, it stops being a good measure).
cambridge.org

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (annual, since 2003). *American Time Use Survey (ATUS)*. Federal survey (conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau). The federal survey of how, where and with whom Americans spend their time, including unpaid housework and childcare; it has run every year since 2003.

bls.gov/tus

Yavorsky, J. E., Kamp Dush, C. M., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). *The production of inequality: The gender division of labor across the transition to parenthood*. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 662–679. Time-diary data from dual-earner couples showed a gender gap in total work opening up after a first baby: mothers took on most of the added childcare without cutting their paid hours; survey reports overstated how equal things were.

doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12189

PART TWO • CHAPTER III

Full tanks and different angles

Amato, P. R. (2001). *Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis*. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(3), 355–370. Updated a meta-analysis comparing children of divorced and continuously married parents; differences in wellbeing were small on average and persisted in studies from the 1990s.

doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.15.3.355

Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). *A global measure of perceived stress*. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24(4), 385–396. Introduced the Perceived Stress Scale, a short questionnaire about how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloaded your life has felt lately; scores went with symptoms of depression and illness.

doi.org/10.2307/2136404

Emery, R. E. (1982). *Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 92(2), 310–330. Reviewed evidence that conflict between parents, in married and divorced families, is linked to children's problems, and that the amount and type of conflict matter.

doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.92.2.310

Gottman, J. M. (1994). *What predicts divorce? The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Hillsdale, NJ); reissued by Routledge. Gottman's report of his long-term studies of couples, including “flooding”: feeling so physically overwhelmed in a conflict that listening and thinking become very hard.

routledge.com

Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered*. W. W. Norton. Drawing on long-term studies of about 1,400 families, argues that most children of divorce and remarriage turn out reasonably well, with outcomes varying widely.

www.norton.co.uk/books/9780393324136-for-better-or-for-worse

Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1971). *The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior*. General Learning Press (short monograph). Proposed the actor-observer hypothesis: people tend to explain their own actions by the situation and others' actions by their dispositions.

krimdok.uni-tuebingen.de/Record/1098932900

Maccoby, E. E., & Mnookin, R. H. (1992). *Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody*. Harvard University Press. Following more than a thousand separating families for three years, described three patterns of co-parenting among families where children spent time in both homes: cooperative, conflicted and disengaged; most parents avoided legal battles but many found it hard to cooperate.

hls.harvard.edu

Neff, K. D. (2003). *Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself*. *Self and Identity*, 2(2), 85–101. Defined self-compassion as three parts: self-kindness instead of harsh judgement, common humanity instead of isolation, and mindfulness instead of over-identifying with painful feelings.

doi.org/10.1080/15298860309032

Neff, L. A., & Karney, B. R. (2009). *Stress and reactivity to daily relationship experiences: How stress hinders adaptive processes in marriage*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(3), 435–450. Spouses under more stress outside the relationship reacted more strongly to everyday negative experiences within it.
doi.org/10.1037/a0015663

Papernow, P. L. (2013). *Surviving and Thriving in Stepfamily Relationships: What Works and What Doesn't*. Routledge. Describes “stepfamily architecture” and five common challenges it creates, drawing on research and clinical experience; closeness between stepfamily members typically builds slowly.
routledge.com

Ross, L., & Ward, A. (1996). *Naive realism in everyday life: Implications for social conflict and misunderstanding*. In E. S. Reed, E. Turiel, & T. Brown (Eds.), *Values and Knowledge* (pp. 103–135). Lawrence Erlbaum / Psychology Press. Described naive realism: people assume they see the world objectively, so those who disagree must be uninformed, irrational or biased — a dynamic that fuels conflict and misunderstanding.
doi.org/10.4324/9780203773772-6

PART TWO • CHAPTER IV

Two kinds of fair

Adams, J. S. (1965). *Inequity in social exchange*. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, pp. 267–299. Academic Press. Founding statement of equity theory: people compare the ratio of what they put in to what they get out with someone else's, and feel tension when the ratios differ.
doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60108-2

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). *Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61(1), 199–212. Defined maternal gatekeeping along three dimensions and, in 622 dual-earner mothers, classified about one in five as gatekeepers; they did more family work each week and had less equal divisions of labour.
doi.org/10.2307/353894

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). *Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377–383. Participants who believed others could also hear a person having a seizure were slower and less likely to help; the presence of others reduced each person's sense of responsibility.
doi.org/10.1037/h0025589

Deming, W. E. (1986). *Out of the Crisis*. MIT Press (Center for Advanced Engineering Study), Cambridge, MA. Deming's case for quality management, arguing that most problems come from the system people work in rather than from individual workers.
eploes.lib2.uniwa.gr/Record/lib2_1%2F6426/Details?lng=en

Deutsch, M. (1975). *Equity, equality, and need: What determines which value will be used as the basis of distributive justice?* *Journal of Social Issues*, 31(3), 137–149. Argued that equity is only one of several justice principles, alongside equality and need, and proposed when groups favour each: equality in cooperative relationships, equity in economic ones, need in caring ones.
data.gesis.org/gesiskg/resource/zis-Deutsch1975Equity

Dew, J., Britt, S., & Huston, S. (2012). *Examining the relationship between financial issues and divorce*. *Family Relations*, 61(4), 615–628. In US national survey data on about 4,500 couples, financial disagreements were the strongest of the disagreement types in predicting later divorce, for both wives and husbands.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00715.x

Gottman, J. M. (1994). *What predicts divorce? The relationship between marital processes and marital outcomes.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Hillsdale, NJ); reissued by Routledge. Gottman's report of his long-term studies of couples, including "flooding": feeling so physically overwhelmed in a conflict that listening and thinking become very hard.
routledge.com

Klontz, B., Britt, S. L., Mentzer, J., & Klontz, T. (2011). *Money beliefs and financial behaviors: Development of the Klontz Money Script Inventory.* Journal of Financial Therapy, 2(1), 1–22. In 422 respondents, beliefs about money clustered into four "money scripts" (money avoidance, money worship, money status and money vigilance), several of which were linked with income and net worth.
doi.org/10.4148/jft.v2i1.451

Kruger, J., Epley, N., Parker, J., & Ng, Z.-W. (2005). *Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think?* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 89(6), 925–936. Across five experiments, people overestimated how well email recipients would detect their tone (such as sarcasm or seriousness), partly because they found it hard to step outside their own perspective.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.925

Lieberman, M. D., Eisenberger, N. I., Crockett, M. J., Tom, S. M., Pfeifer, J. H., & Way, B. M. (2007). *Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity in response to affective stimuli.* Psychological Science, 18(5), 421–428. In a brain-imaging study, labelling the emotion in a picture reduced amygdala and other limbic responses compared with other ways of processing the image.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01916.x

Papp, L. M., Cummings, E. M., & Goeke-Morey, M. C. (2009). *For richer, for poorer: Money as a topic of marital conflict in the home.* Family Relations, 58(1), 91–103. In home diary records of marital conflict, money was not the most frequent topic, but money conflicts were more pervasive, problematic and recurrent than other conflicts and more likely to stay unresolved.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00537.x

Rick, S. I., Small, D. A., & Finkel, E. J. (2011). *Fatal (fiscal) attraction: Spendthrifts and tightwads in marriage.* Journal of Marketing Research, 48(2), 228–237. Tightwads and spendthrifts tend to marry each other; the bigger the difference within a couple, the more conflict over money, which in turn predicts lower marital wellbeing.
doi.org/10.1509/jmk.48.2.228

Ross, M., & Sicoly, F. (1979). *Egocentric biases in availability and attribution.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37(3), 322–336. In five experiments (married couples, groups, basketball teams), people recalled more of their own contributions to joint work and took more responsibility than others gave them; spouses' estimates of their own shares typically summed to more than 100 percent.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.3.322

Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Brown, G. L., Cannon, E. A., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Sokolowski, M. S. (2008). *Maternal gatekeeping, coparenting quality, and fathering behavior in families with infants.* Journal of Family Psychology, 22(3), 389–398. In 97 couples with infants, fathers were more involved in day-to-day care when mothers actively encouraged them (gate-opening); when mothers were highly critical (gate-closing), fathers' own beliefs about involvement mattered less.
doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.3.389

Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most.* Viking (New York); 10th-anniversary edition, Penguin 2010. A practitioner book from the Harvard Negotiation Project describing three conversations inside every hard conversation (what happened, feelings, identity) and the gap between intent and impact.
penguinrandomhouse.com

Taylor, M. J., McNicholas, C., Nicolay, C., Darzi, A., Bell, D., & Reed, J. E. (2014). *Systematic review of the application of the plan-do-study-act method to improve quality in healthcare.* BMJ Quality & Safety, 23(4), 290–298. Of 73 healthcare articles reporting the use of plan-do-study-act cycles, most did not report key features of the method, such as iterative cycles, small tests of change and real-time data.
doi.org/10.1136/bmjqs-2013-001862

Thibaut, J., & Walker, L. (1975). *Procedural Justice: A Psychological Analysis*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Hillsdale, NJ). Founded procedural-justice research: people's judgments of whether a decision process is fair (especially having a voice) shape how satisfied they are with the outcome.
law.virginia.edu/node/127096

PART TWO • CHAPTER V

The monthly look-back

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief*. Harvard University Press. Named "ambiguous loss": losses without clear closure, such as someone physically absent but psychologically present, or present but psychologically changed (as in dementia), and suggested ways to cope.

bookshare.org/browse/book/2050897

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). *Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 377–383. Participants who believed others could also hear a person having a seizure were slower and less likely to help; the presence of others reduced each person's sense of responsibility.

doi.org/10.1037/h0025589

Dekker, S. (2007). *Just Culture: Balancing Safety and Accountability*. Ashgate (2nd ed. 2012). Argues for a "just culture" that separates honest mistakes from reckless behaviour, and that who draws the line matters as much as where it is drawn.

relbib.de/Record/1613173431

Deming, W. E. (1986). *Out of the Crisis*. MIT Press (Center for Advanced Engineering Study), Cambridge, MA. Deming's case for quality management, arguing that most problems come from the system people work in rather than from individual workers.

eploes.lib2.uniwa.gr/Record/lib2_1%2F6426/Details?Ing=el

Goodhart, C. A. E. (1975). *Problems of monetary management: The U.K. experience*. Paper presented at the Conference in Monetary Economics, Sydney, July 1975; published in *Papers in Monetary Economics*, Vol. I (Reserve Bank of Australia, 1976); reprinted in Goodhart, *Monetary Theory and Practice* (Macmillan, 1984). The original source of "Goodhart's law": a statistical regularity tends to break down once authorities put pressure on it for control purposes.

rba.gov.au/publications/rdp/1990/9013/conference-volumes.html

Hayslip, B., Jr., & Kaminski, P. L. (2005). *Grandparents raising their grandchildren: A review of the literature and suggestions for practice*. *The Gerontologist*, 45(2), 262–269. Reviewed research on custodial grandparents: the costs and benefits of raising a grandchild, how varied these families are, their need for social support, parenting, and help at several levels.

doi.org/10.1093/geront/45.2.262

Pillemer, K. (2020). *Fault Lines: Fractured Families and How to Mend Them*. Avery (Penguin Random House). Draws on the Cornell Reconciliation Project, including a national survey on estrangement and interviews, to show family estrangement is more common than people assume and that some people reconcile.

search.worldcat.org/oclc/1145305518

Reason, J. (1990). *Human Error*. Cambridge University Press. A theory of human error that sorts slips, lapses and mistakes, and introduced the layered-defences thinking behind the "Swiss cheese" model of accidents.

doi.org/10.1017/CB09781139062367

Reason, J. (1997). *Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents*. Ashgate (now Routledge). Describes how organisational accidents arise from latent conditions combining with front-line errors, and sets out ideas for a safety and “just” culture.
routledge.com

Strathern, M. (1997). ‘Improving ratings’: Audit in the British University system. *European Review*, 5(3), 305–321. Anthropological commentary on the “audit explosion” in British universities; widely credited as the source of the popular phrasing of Goodhart’s law (when a measure becomes a target, it stops being a good measure).
cambridge.org

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1973). *Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability*. *Cognitive Psychology*, 5(2), 207–232. People judge how common something is by how easily examples come to mind. That usually works, but vivid or recent examples make some things seem more common than they are.
apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA045770.pdf

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Key ideas and the pages where the book talks about them. Chapter names are in the contents.

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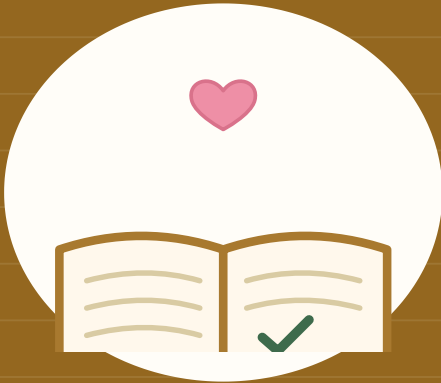
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