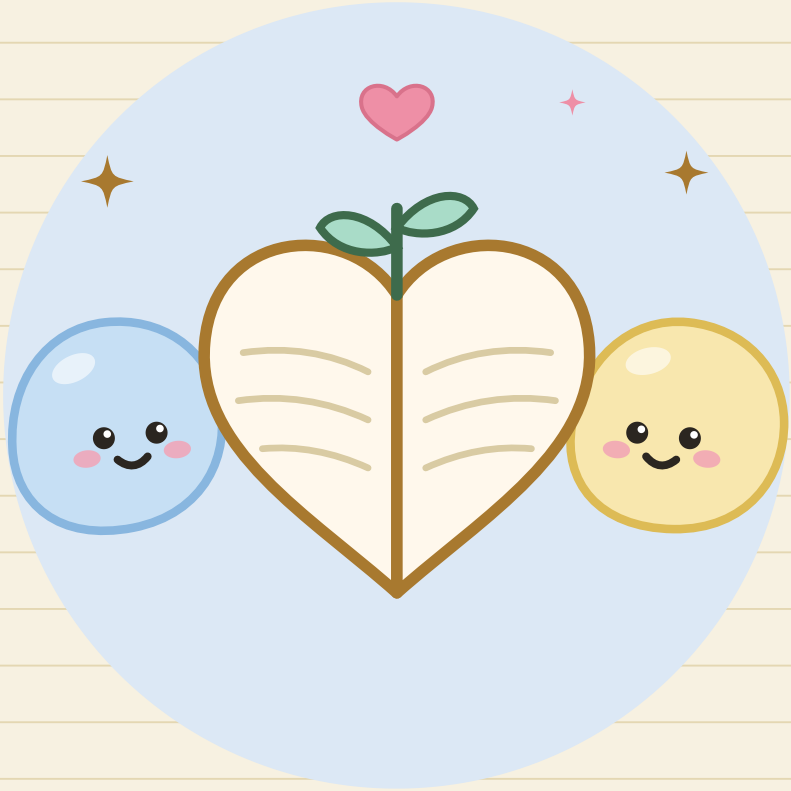
Spread Love & Acceptance

Understanding yourself and the people you share a life with



Understanding people · Short version

Part Three: how feelings, stress, trust, change, grief and love work.

by Christian

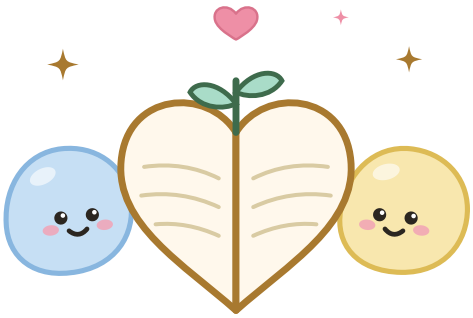
Spread Love & Acceptance

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE · SHORT VERSION

Spread Love & Acceptance

Understanding yourself and the people you share a life with

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE · SHORT VERSION



by Christian

Spread Love & Acceptance
spreadloveandacceptance.com

Spread Love & Acceptance: Understanding people, the short version.
By Christian. Published by Spread Love & Acceptance.

This edition: October 2026. Made from the chapters at spreadloveandacceptance.com/book, where they are kept up to date.

Free to read and share. You may print, copy and share this book for personal use and for non-commercial teaching, as long as you credit "Spread Love & Acceptance, spreadloveandacceptance.com" and don't change it or sell it.

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, page **189** says more about helping someone in a crisis, and Chapter 16, page **264** 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 17 chapters in one part, in the short version. There is no wrong way in.

THE PARTS

> **Part Three: Understanding people.** How feelings, stress, trust, change, grief, groups and love work, for anyone, in any kind of relationship.

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 short version. The full 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 each think we do more than our share.	Part Three · Chapter 3 · Everyone feels like the one who sees clearly	47	WORKPAPER WP-01 Who did what
We've just had a baby and we're both exhausted.	Part Three · Chapter 2 · Rest isn't one thing	31	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?
I'm caring for a parent or partner, and it's wearing me down.	Part Three · Chapter 12 · Your limits make your help last	189	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?

TALKING IT THROUGH

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
Small things turn into big rows.	Part Three · Chapter 2 · When you're flooded	31	WORKPAPER WP-11 The Calm-Down Kit
One of us goes quiet and the other pushes for an answer.	Part Three · Chapter 5 · Feeling safe with someone	78	WORKPAPER WP-11 The Calm-Down Kit: our pause plan
Texts and messages keep landing wrong.	Part Three · Chapter 4 · Messages lose their tone	61	TOOL Chat analyzer
We need to say sorry and mend things.	Part Three · Chapter 11 · A real apology	174	WORKPAPER WP-09 Say it so it lands
Conflict at work, with a colleague or in a team.	Part Three · Chapter 4 · Saying hard things kindly	73	WORKPAPER WP-09 Say it so it lands

KNOWING YOURSELF

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
I can't tell what I'm feeling.	Part Three · Chapter 1 · Naming a feeling helps you hold it	16	TOOL My weather today

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
I'm wiped out and everything feels like too much.	Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress adds up, like a tank filling	**31**	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?
ADHD: I'm overwhelmed and keep forgetting things.	Part Three · Chapter 9 · ADHD, time and motivation	**136**	TOOL "How to talk to me" card
I'm autistic, and people keep misreading me (or I misread them).	Part Three · Chapter 9 · Autism and the double empathy problem	**136**	TOOL "How to talk to me" card
My inner critic is loud.	Part Three · Chapter 7 · The critic and the soothing system	**108**	WORKPAPER WP-11 The Calm-Down Kit
I want to change a habit, but it keeps slipping.	Part Three · Chapter 6 · Slips are part of change	**93**	The self path, step by step

HARD SEASONS

IF THIS IS GOING ON	READ	PAGE	TRY
Someone I love has died.	Part Three · Chapter 8 · Grief comes in waves	**131**	When you've lost someone
I feel lonely, or I live on my own.	Part Three · Chapter 5 · Building connection from where you are	**88**	Living on your own, living well
A teenager's anger, or I'm a teenager and I'm angry.	Part Three · Chapter 13 · The hot minutes	**215**	WORKPAPER WP-11 The Calm-Down Kit
Left out of a group, a friend group or a group chat.	Part Three · Chapter 17 · Groups online, and their pull	**276**	TOOL Chat analyzer
Worry keeps me awake, or my mood is low.	Part Three · Chapter 16 · Worry time; low mood	**255**	WORKPAPER WP-02 How much are you carrying?
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 15 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.

The book in two pictures

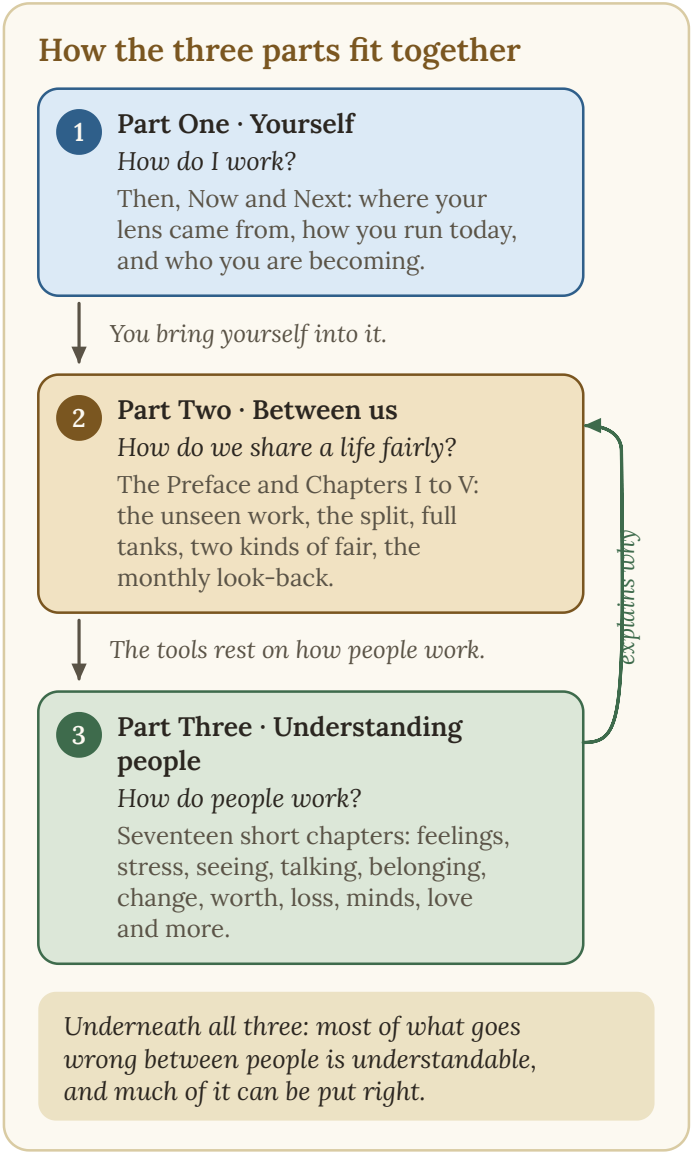


FIGURE 1 How the three parts fit together: you bring yourself into every shared life, and Part Three explains why the Part Two tools work.

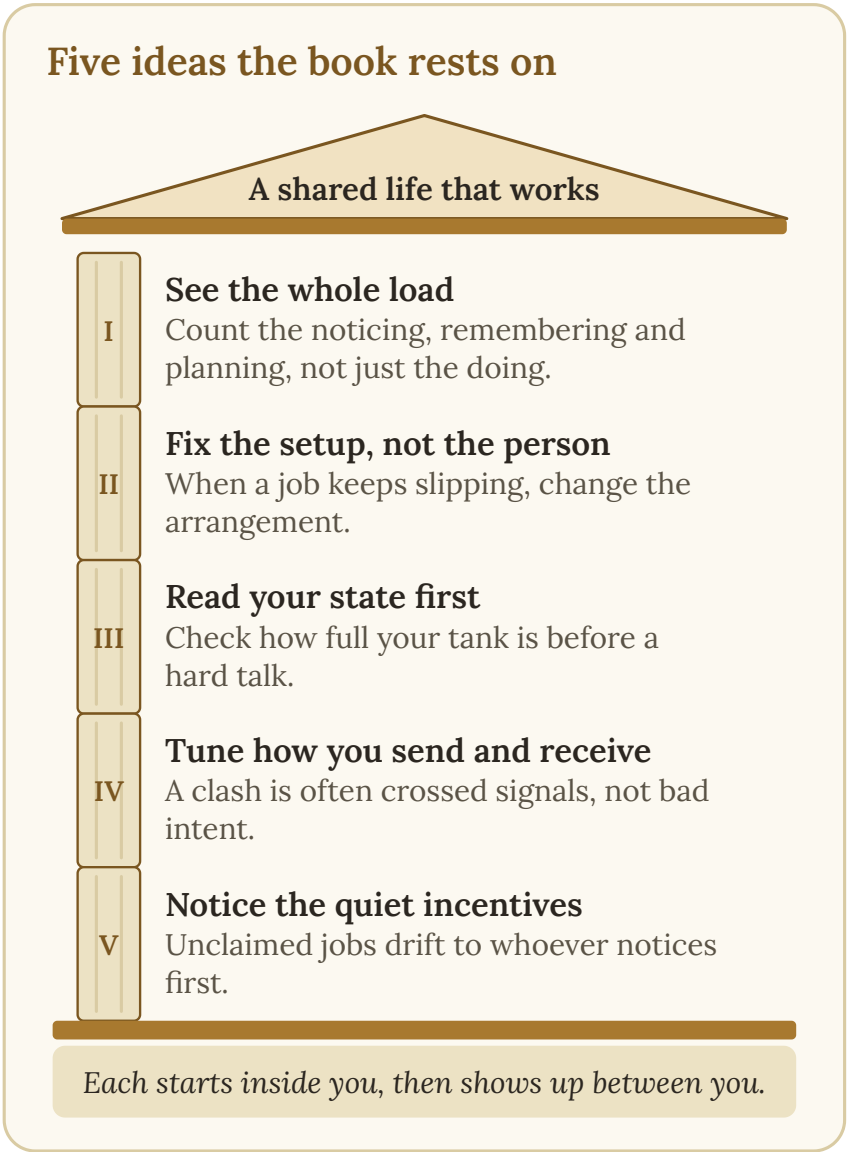


FIGURE 2 Five ideas the whole book rests on. Each one starts inside you, then shows up between you and the people you share a life with.

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2 Stress and the nervous system: the ladder, flooding, rest and recovery 31

3 How we see each other: perception, bias, and the stories we tell 47

4 How communication works: meaning, listening, repair and messages 61

5 Attachment, trust and belonging 78

6 Habits and change: why change is hard and how small steps work 93

7 Self-worth, shame and self-compassion 108

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PART THREE

Understanding people

How feelings, stress, trust, change, grief, groups and love work, for anyone, in any kind of relationship.

IN THIS PART

Chapter 1	How feelings work	16
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PROFESSOR PUDDLES

If a question pops up while you read, ask me. Nothing you type leaves your device.

TOOL **Ask Professor Puddles** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask

1

PART THREE · CHAPTER 1

How feelings work: signals, the body, and naming what you feel

What feelings are for, where they start, and why putting a name to one can make it easier to carry. For anyone: on your own, at home, with friends, at work or out in the world.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. A feeling is a signal, not a verdict
2. Feelings start in the body
3. Naming a feeling helps you hold it
4. More words, better tools
5. Feelings come in layers
6. Feelings rise and pass like waves
7. Feelings spread between people
8. If you weren't brought up to talk about feelings
9. Feeling it isn't the same as doing it
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **A feeling is a signal,** not a verdict. It says "something here matters to me." It doesn't say what to do.
- **Feelings start in the body.** A tight chest or a hot face often comes before the word for it.
- **Naming helps.** "I feel let down" is easier to hold than a big, nameless rush.
- **Feeling it isn't doing it.** You can let a feeling be there and still choose what you do next.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **My weather today and the daily check-in** (Part One, Now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now); Part Two, Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1)) ask for one word about how you are. Naming a feeling turns its volume down a little, and a daily word catches feelings while they are still small. Big idea: *read your state first.*
- **Say it so it lands** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) asks for a feeling, not a verdict. "I felt let down" is easier to hear than "you never care." Big idea: *tune how you send and receive.*

THURSDAY, 4:50PM

A message from your manager: "Got a minute tomorrow?" Your stomach drops. By the time you get home you have snapped at the cat, skipped dinner and replayed every mistake from the last month. Nobody has said anything bad. Your body heard "trouble" before you had a single clear thought.

This part of the book is about how people work: you, and everyone around you. We start with feelings, because they are under almost everything else. How we talk, how we see each other and how we handle stress all run through them. This chapter teaches how feelings work first. What to do with them comes second.

01

A feeling is a signal, not a verdict.

Feelings are fast messages about what matters to you. Fear says "something might be a danger." Anger says "something seems unfair, or in my way." Sadness says "I lost something that mattered." A signal is worth listening to. But it can be wrong about the details, the way a smoke alarm can go off for burnt toast.

For example: You feel jealous when a friend makes a new close friend. The jealousy isn't proof that you're a bad person, or that your friend is leaving. It is a signal that the friendship matters to you.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This feeling is telling me something matters. What is it?" "Is this the fire, or the toast?"

TRY THIS:

Next time a strong feeling arrives, finish this sentence: "This feeling is trying to protect…"

02

Feelings start in the body.

Often your body reacts before your mind has a word: a racing heart, a hot face, a heavy chest, a knot in the stomach. Your brain then tries to make sense of it. That's why being hungry, tired or in pain can feel a lot like being upset. The body is sending a strong signal, and the mind guesses what it means.

For example: A teenager comes home "furious" at their parent over nothing much. After a sandwich and a sit-down, the fury is mostly gone. Some of it was hunger wearing anger's coat.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

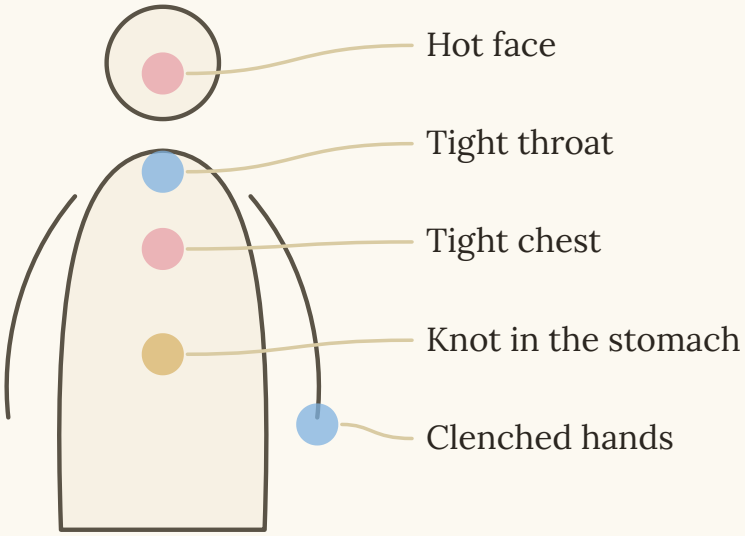
"Where is this in my body?" "Am I hungry, tired, cold or sore right now?"

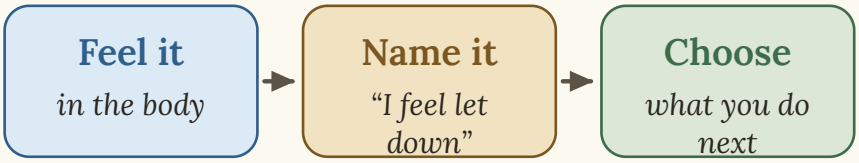
TRY THIS:

Three times today, pause and ask: "What does my body feel like right now?" Just notice. No need to change anything.

A feeling is a signal, not a verdict

It often shows up in the body before it has a word.





It says: something here matters to me.
It doesn't say what to do.

Illustration. Everyone's body signals are a little different; these are common ones, not a medical map.

FIGURE 3 A feeling is a signal, not a verdict. It often shows up in the body first; naming it helps you choose what to do next.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 1

My weather today

Esme, 29, at 4:50pm, after "Got a minute tomorrow?" from her manager

Check today's weather

The sky

Clear: Calm and connected · *Gusty: Revved up* · Fogged in: Running on empty

Who you'll mostly be around today

A partner · Family · A co-parent · Roommates · *Coworkers* · Someone I care for · Friends · Mostly on my own

The pressure

Light · *Building* · Heavy

Ground conditions

Haven't eaten in a while · Thirsty · In pain or unwell · Been still all day · Too much noise or light · *Running on caffeine* · Screens since I woke up

Last night's sleep

Barely slept · Short night · *About enough* · Properly rested

People load

Barely any · *A normal amount* · A lot · Nonstop, no gaps

What's blowing in

Work · Money · Kids or caring · Health · Family · The house · *One conversation* · Something I can't name

What would actually help in the next hour?

Space · Food or water · Rest · To move · *To be heard* · *A plan* · Company · Quiet · Someone to take something off me

YOUR FORECAST

Gusty today
Revved up · Some room today

Talk window
wait about 20 minutes

It's gusty. You're revved up. That energy is useful for doing something physical, but it is poor weather for deciding anything about another person.

The ground underneath: you haven't eaten in a while and you're running on caffeine. That isn't a side note. It's likely a big part of why today feels the way it does, and it's easier to change than character is.

Blowing in: one conversation. Weather from one front tends to land on whoever is nearest, often someone who had nothing to do with it. Worth saying out loud before it does.

You said what would help is a plan and to be heard. Arrange that before anything else.

If you want to send someone a line: "I don't need it solved. I just need you to hear this for a few minutes first."

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Esme ate something, then rang her sister to be heard. She didn't reply to the message until the morning.

Fill in your own: My weather today (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks)

03

Naming a feeling helps you hold it.

Putting a feeling into words can turn its volume down a little. In brain-scan research by Lieberman and colleagues (2007), simply putting a name to a feeling ("I feel scared") turned down the brain's alarm response. A name gives a big, cloudy rush some edges, so you can see it, talk about it and decide what to do.

For example: Two housemates are tense all evening. One finally says, "I think I'm embarrassed about the noise complaint, and I've been acting cross." The other relaxes. Now they know what's in the room.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think what I'm feeling is…" "I'm not sure what this is yet. Maybe worried?"

TRY THIS:

Once a day, name one feeling out loud or on paper. A guess is fine. "Something like sad" still counts.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

If the words won't come, weather words often will. Pick "foggy" or "stormy" and start from there.

TOOL **My weather today** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks

04

More words, better tools.

"Bad" is a very blunt word. "Disappointed," "left out," "overwhelmed" and "ashamed" each point to something different, and each needs something different. A review by Kashdan, Barrett and McKnight (2015) found that people who can tell their feelings apart more finely tend to cope with them in healthier ways. You don't need fancy words. You can use numbers, colours or body words too.

For example: A dad tells his partner, "I feel bad about my mum." They talk in circles. Then he says, "Actually, I feel guilty that I haven't visited, and scared she's getting worse." Now the talk has somewhere to go.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"On a scale of one to ten, I'm about a six." "It's less angry and more… let down." "It feels heavy, like a grey day."

TRY THIS:

When you notice “bad,” try for one more exact word. When you notice “fine,” try for one more honest one.

05

Feelings come in layers.

The feeling you show first isn’t always the first one you felt. Anger is often a cover for hurt or fear, because anger feels stronger and safer. And we often have feelings about our feelings: ashamed of being sad, scared of being angry. That second layer can hurt more than the first.

For example: A grandmother is short with her daughter after the grandkids’ visit is cancelled. Under the shortness is hurt. Under the hurt is a fear: “Am I still needed?”

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

“What might be under this one?” “It’s okay to feel this. I don’t also have to feel bad for feeling it.”

TRY THIS:

Next time you feel angry, ask gently: “Is there hurt or worry underneath?” You don’t have to say it. Just look.

06

Feelings rise and pass like waves.

Most feelings, even big ones, rise, peak and settle if you don’t keep feeding them. Moods are different. They are like weather (in plain words: a background feeling that lasts hours or days) that colours everything, often without you noticing. A grey mood can make a small thing feel huge, and a good mood can make the same thing feel like nothing.

For example: A woman living alone has a bad morning and decides “my whole life is going nowhere.” By evening, after a walk and a call with her sister, the same life looks ordinary and okay. The facts didn’t change. Her weather did.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This is a wave. It will peak and pass." "Is this a feeling about now, or a mood colouring everything?"

TRY THIS:

Don't make big decisions at the top of a wave. Write the decision down, and look at it again tomorrow.

07

Feelings spread between people.

We pick up each other's feelings, often without noticing: a tense voice, a sigh, a slammed door. That's part of how people bond. It also means stress can move round a home or a team like a cold. You can care about someone's feeling without catching all of it.

For example: A team leader comes into a meeting rushed and anxious. Within ten minutes the whole team feels behind. The next week, she takes two slow breaths at the door first. The meeting feels different.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Is this feeling mine, or did I pick it up?" "I can stay beside their storm without standing in the middle of it."

TRY THIS:

Notice who you tend to "catch" feelings from. Before your next talk with them, settle yourself for one minute first.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: good moods are catching too! Tail wags definitely are. Want a small way to share one?

TOOL **Stay close: one small idea** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding`

08

If you weren't brought up to talk about feelings.

Many people grew up in homes, generations or cultures where feelings were kept private: "Don't make a fuss," "Big boys don't cry," "We don't talk about that." This is common for men and for older people, and in some cultures it is a sign of respect and strength.

It isn't a flaw. And it doesn't mean you don't feel. Many people who rarely say a feeling show it every day by doing: fixing the tap, driving someone to hospital, turning up. Caring by doing is real caring. Words can be added slowly, at your own pace, a few at a time.

For example: A retired builder whose wife has died has never talked about feelings in his life. At his grandson's football match, he finally says to his son, "I wasn't brought up to say this, but I miss her. Every morning." His son puts a hand on his shoulder. Nothing else needs to be said.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I wasn't brought up to say this, but I miss her." "I'm not good with words for this. It's been a hard week." "I don't know what to call it. I just feel heavy." "I'm not one for talking, but I wanted you to know I'm proud of you."

TRY THIS:

Pick one sentence above and say it once this week, to one person, or even just out loud on your own. Short is fine. A text counts. So does writing it down.

09

Feeling it isn't the same as doing it.

A feeling usually comes with an urge: to shout, run, hide, check, fix or text. The feeling isn't a choice. What you do with the urge is more of one. Pushing a feeling down tends to make it come back stronger, and acting on every urge can hurt people. The middle path is: let the feeling be there, and choose the action.

For example: A father feels a hot rush of anger when his son breaks a window with a ball. He says, "I'm too cross to talk right now. Let's sort this out in ten minutes." The anger was real. The shouting didn't happen.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm feeling a lot right now. I'm going to take a minute before I answer." "I want to reply when I'm calmer."

TRY THIS:

Pick one urge you often act on too fast, like sending a sharp text. Make a rule: wait ten minutes first.

FRIDAY, 9:05AM

You notice the knot in your stomach again. This time you name it: "I'm scared I'm in trouble." You remember it's a signal, not a verdict, and you ask your manager straight away: "Is today's chat about something I should worry about?" "Oh no, it's about the summer rota." The knot loosens. The feeling was real. The story it told was not.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** No one else is there to notice for you, so a daily one-word check-in with yourself matters more. See On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).
- **With a partner:** "What are you feeling?" can sound like a test. "Do you want to tell me, or shall I just sit with you?" is easier to answer.
- **With friends:** A friend going quiet may be feeling low, not cross with you. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Parents and children:** Children learn feeling words from us. Naming your own ("I'm frustrated, so I'm taking a breath") teaches more than any lesson. See For parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents).
- **At work:** Feelings don't stay at home. A short "I'm a bit flat today, not upset with anyone" can stop a team guessing. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

- **If you show love by doing:** Fixing, driving, cooking and turning up are love. If someone close shows care that way, you can thank them for it in words: "I noticed you cleared the drive. Thank you."
- **With strangers:** The rude person in the queue may be scared, in pain or grieving. You can't know. You can choose not to catch it.

Common mix-ups

- **"Some feelings are bad."** Feelings aren't good or bad. Some are painful, and some actions are harmful. The feeling itself is information.
- **"If I feel it, it must be true."** Feeling stupid doesn't make you stupid. A feeling is a signal to check, not a fact.
- **"Letting it out always helps."** Shouting or hitting a pillow tends to keep anger going. Naming it, moving, or talking it through calmly helps more.
- **"Calm people don't feel much."** Many calm people feel a lot. They have just practised letting feelings be there without acting on every one.
- **"I should be able to name it straight away."** Many people find feelings hard to name, and some find it very hard. That's a difference, not a failing. Body words, numbers and colours count.
- **"Their face tells me what they feel."** Faces are a poor guide. People show the same feeling in different ways. Asking is kinder and more accurate than guessing.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Ask, don't assign.** "You're angry" can feel like a label. "You seem upset. Am I reading that right?" leaves room for them to correct you.
- **Make the feeling make sense.** "Of course you're upset, that was a lot" helps more than advice. You can make sense of a feeling without agreeing with every action.
- **Offer choices.** "Do you want ideas, or just someone to listen?" Many people only want the second.

- **Accept other ways of saying it.** Some people find words hard. A number, a text, a drawing or "I'm at a seven" is a real answer.
- **Don't make their feeling about you.** If their sadness makes you anxious, settle yourself first, so they don't have to look after your feelings too.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "That sounds really hard." "Do you want to talk, or would company help more?" "You don't have to find the right word. A number is fine."

When to get more help

Everyone has hard days and big feelings. It may be time to talk to a doctor, a counsellor or another trained professional if:

- a low, numb, anxious or angry feeling stays most days for two weeks or more;
- feelings are stopping you from sleeping, eating, working or seeing people;
- you are using alcohol, drugs or other things to stop feeling;
- you feel you can't cope, or have thoughts of harming yourself. If that's happening now, contact your local emergency number or a crisis line straight away. You deserve help today.

If you feel afraid of someone you live with or are close to, that fear is an important signal. It is not something to "manage" on your own. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help.

This chapter is general education, not a diagnosis or therapy. It can't know your situation.

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

Workpapers pages you fill in, on your own or together

- The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11): a plan, made on a calm day, for heated moments.

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- My weather today (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks): a short, private daily check of your mood and state.
- Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now): steps for when a feeling is very big, very fast.

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- Know your own wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/know-yourself): how you tend to feel and react, and why.
- The library: what emotions are (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions), naming feelings, emotional granularity, when feelings are hard to name, emotional contagion and sensing your body (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/stress).

More for your situation

- Next in Part Three: Stress and the nervous system (page 31)
- Part One, Now: your wiring, your weather and your words
- Wired differently (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wired-differently) and Neurodivergent relationships (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- For teens: when feelings get loud (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)
- For caregivers: resentment and guilt (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers)
- Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief)
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **A feeling is a signal,** not a verdict. It says "something here matters to me." It doesn't say what to do.
- ✓ **Feelings start in the body.** A tight chest or a hot face often comes before the word for it.
- ✓ **Naming helps.** "I feel let down" is easier to hold than a big, nameless rush.
- ✓ **Feeling it isn't doing it.** You can let a feeling be there and still choose what you do next.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words
Reading your own weather day to day — read online

Part Two · Chapter III · Full tanks and different angles
Feelings when a stress tank is full — read online

Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress and the nervous system
What the body does under pressure — page 31

Part Three · Chapter 13 · Anger
One feeling up close — page 205

PUT IT TO USE



The Calm-Down Kit
A plan, made on a calm day, for heated moments
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11



My weather today
A short, private daily check of your mood and state
spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks

2

PART THREE · CHAPTER 2

Stress and the nervous system: the ladder, flooding, rest and recovery

What stress does to your body and your mind, why kind people say things they don't mean when they are flooded, and the kinds of rest that actually help you recover.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Stress is your body getting ready
2. Stress depends on what you have to meet it
3. The ladder: three everyday states
4. When you're flooded, thinking goes offline
5. Stress adds up, like a tank filling
6. Settle the body first
7. Rest isn't one thing
8. Sleep and stress feed each other
9. Stress is easier to carry when it's shared
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Stress is your body getting ready** for a demand. A little helps. Too much, for too long, wears you down.
- **Three everyday states:** calm and connected, revved up, and running on empty. Each one changes how you think and hear.
- **Flooded means offline.** When stress is very high, listening and careful thinking get much harder. Pause, settle, then come back.
- **Rest is a skill.** Different kinds of tired need different kinds of rest.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **How much are you carrying? and the stress tank** (Part Two, Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3)) work because stress adds up from many small loads. A full tank makes small things feel big, so you check the tank before you judge the moment. Big idea: *read your state first.*
- **The Calm-Down Kit** (Part One, Now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)) settles the body before any words, because a flooded body can't think or listen. Its "come back at a set time" rule stops a pause looking like walking out.
- **The setup score** (Part Two, Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2)) counts stress as well as hours, because a split that looks fair on paper can still leave one person running on empty.

MONDAY, 7:52AM

The bus is late, the kids can't find a shoe, and your phone buzzes with a work message. Your partner says, "Have you seen my keys?" and you hear yourself snap, "I'm not your secretary!" A second later you think, "Where did that come from?" It came from a body that was already full.

The last chapter looked at feelings. This one looks at the system underneath them: your nervous system, and what happens to it under pressure. Understanding stress won't make life less busy. It can make your reactions, and other people's, a lot less mysterious.

01

Stress is your body getting ready.

When something needs dealing with, your body gears up: the heart speeds, breathing quickens, muscles tense and stress hormones rise. This is useful. It helps you catch a falling glass, meet a deadline or speak up. The trouble starts when the body stays geared up for too long, with no chance to come back down.

For example: A nurse handles an emergency calmly and well. Two hours later, at home, she can't sit still and cries at an advert. Her body is still running the emergency.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"My body is getting ready for something. That's its job." "The emergency is over. I can let my body catch up."

TRY THIS:

After something stressful, give your body a clear "it's over" signal: a walk, a shower, a stretch or a song.

02

Stress depends on what you have to meet it.

The same event can be easy for one person and huge for another. Stress grows when a demand looks bigger than what you have to meet it: time, energy, money, help, skills or sleep. That's why a small thing can tip you over on a bad day, and why giving someone more support can shrink their stress without changing the task at all.

For example: Two coworkers get the same tight deadline. One has a quiet evening ahead. The other has a sick child at home. Same task. Very different stress.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"It's not the task, it's that I don't have much left today." "What would make this feel more doable?"

TRY THIS:

When something feels huge, write two lists: what it asks of you, and what you have. Then ask what could make the second list longer.

03

The ladder: three everyday states.

The ladder is a picture, not a real ladder. In plain words, it means three states your body moves between during the day. This book uses three plain words for them. **Calm and connected:** breathing is easy and you can hear hard things. **Revved up:** fast, tense, and small things feel urgent or personal. **Running on empty:** flat, slow and short of words.

You move up and down all day. The Nervous System Ladder (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks) is a thirty-second self-check. It gives a best guess, not a reading.

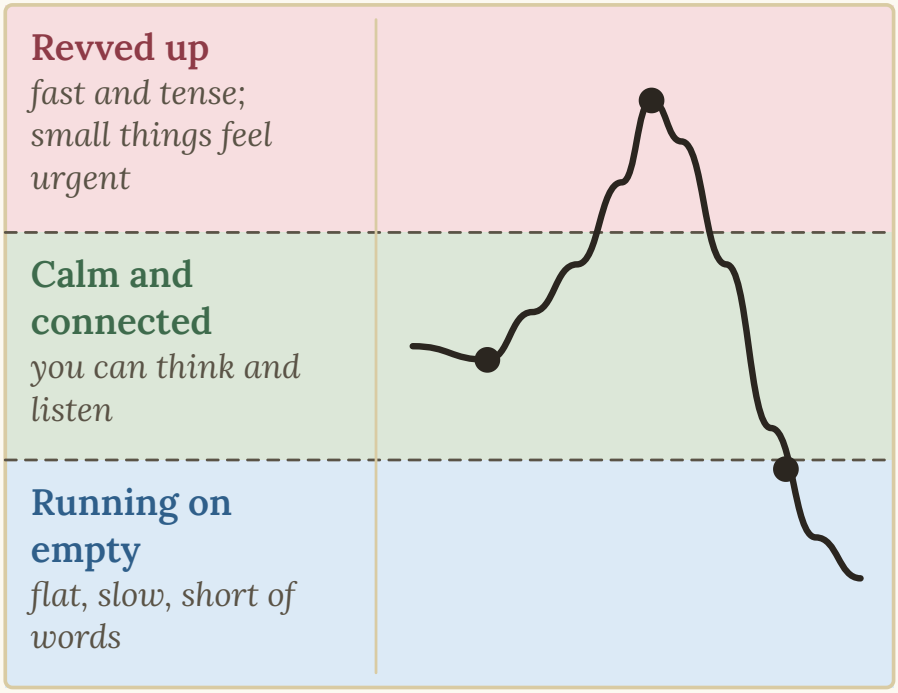
For example: A grandfather minding a toddler all afternoon is calm at two, revved up by four and running on empty by six. The same toddler, the same grandfather. The state changed.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm revved up right now." "I'm running on empty. Can this wait till morning?"

TRY THIS:
Set three reminders today. Each time, pick a rung: calm, revved up or running on empty. No judging, just noticing.

The ladder: three everyday states

You move up and down it all day.



Same grandfather, same toddler. The state changed.

Hard talks go best from the middle band.

Everyday words, not a medical model. A related map is the "window of tolerance" (Siegel, 1999): inside it, you can feel strongly and still think.

FIGURE 4 The ladder: three everyday states. You move up and down it all day; hard talks go best from the middle band.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 2

The ladder (the sky, in My weather today)

Mike, who cares for his wife, Ann

The sky

Pick the one closest to true right now. This is a reading of you, never of anyone else.

The sky

Clear: Calm and connected Gusty: Revved up *Fogged in: Running on empty*

Who you'll mostly be around today

A partner Family A co-parent Roommates Coworkers *Someone I care for* Friends Mostly on my own

The pressure

Light Building *Heavy*

Last night's sleep

Barely slept Short night About enough Properly rested

What's blowing in

Work Money *Kids or caring* *Health* Family The house One conversation Something I can't name

What would actually help in the next hour?

Space Food or water *Rest* To move To be heard A plan Company Quiet *Someone to take something off me*

YOUR FORECAST

Fogged in today
Running on empty · Very little room today

Talk window
another day is kinder

You were already carrying a heavy day before this. Treat the size of your reaction as a reading on the day, not on whoever is in front of you.

Between you and the person you care for today: do the essentials kindly and let the rest go. If anyone can cover one thing today, ask them.

If you need to say something now: "I'm at the end of what I can carry today. Could you take [one thing] off me?"

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. A heavy reading is information about a day, not a failing in a person.

Fill in your own: My weather today: the sky (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks)

04

When you're flooded, thinking goes offline.

At the top of the stress curve, the body is in full alarm. Careful thinking, listening and seeing the other side get much harder. Many people call this being **flooded**. You might say things you don't mean, freeze, or only want to get away. It isn't a character flaw. It's a body that needs to come down before the talk can go on.

For example: Two adult siblings start sorting their late father's things. Within minutes they are shouting about a lamp. Neither cares about the lamp. Both are flooded with grief.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

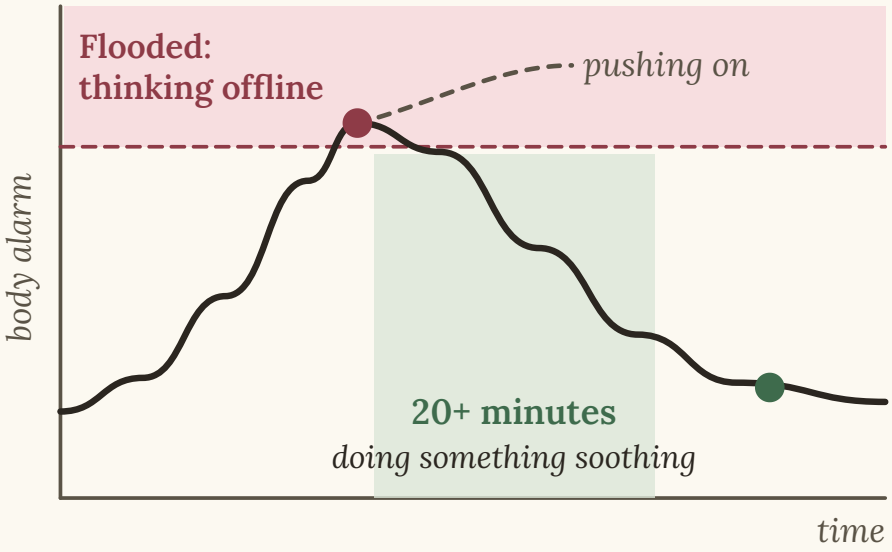
"I'm too flooded to listen well. Can we stop for twenty minutes and come back at four?"

TRY THIS:

Learn your own flood signs: heat, a racing heart, tunnel vision, a loud inner voice. When you notice two of them, pause.

Flooded means offline

Pause, settle, then come back.



- Pause, and name a time to come back.
- Settle the body. Don't rehearse the argument.
- Come back and talk, once you can listen.

Illustrative curve. John Gottman's work on couples suggests a real break of at least about twenty minutes when flooded.

FIGURE 5 Flooded means offline. Pause and name a time to come back, settle the body for at least twenty minutes, then talk. Illustrative curve.

05

Stress adds up, like a tank filling.

Think of a tank (in plain words: how much stress you are already carrying today). Stress from one place spills into the next. Traffic, a hard meeting, a noisy shop and a worrying text can all fill the same tank. By evening, a tiny thing makes it overflow. The last drop gets the blame, but the tank was nearly full already. Small daily hassles count, not just big events.

For example: A teenager explodes when asked to empty the dishwasher. The dishwasher isn't the problem. A friendship fell apart at lunch, and the dishwasher was the last drop.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"My tank was already full when I got home. That wasn't really about you."
"Rough day? You don't have to explain."

TRY THIS:

Before reacting to a small thing in the evening, ask: "How full was I before this happened?" Part Two's Chapter III has a simple way to tell.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Stress fills up a little at a time, like a puddle in a long shower of rain. I would know. Five quick questions tell you how full yours is today.

WORKPAPER WP-02 **How much are you carrying?** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-02

06

Settle the body first.

You can't think your way out of a body in alarm. You can help the body come down, and the thinking often follows. Slow breathing with long out-breaths, moving, cold water on your face, a familiar song, pressure (like a heavy blanket) or simply leaving a noisy room can all help. Different things work for different people.

For example: A manager feels her heart race before giving hard feedback. She walks round the block once, breathing out slowly. She goes in steadier.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Body first, words second." "What has helped me settle before?"

TRY THIS:

On a calm day, list three things that settle you. Keep the list on your phone. The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11) helps you build it.

07

Rest isn't one thing.

Lying on the sofa scrolling isn't always rest. Recovery comes in different kinds: sleep, switching off from work in your head, real relaxation, doing something absorbing you enjoy, and feeling in charge of your own time. Different kinds of tired need different kinds of rest. Being with people restores some people and drains others.

For example: Housemates plan a "relaxing" Saturday party. One loves it and wakes up refreshed. The other needs all of Sunday alone to recover. Both rested. They just needed different things.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I need quiet rest tonight, not people rest. It's not about you." "What kind of tired are you?"

TRY THIS:

Ask yourself: am I body-tired, people-tired, brain-tired or feelings-tired? Pick a rest that matches.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: rest can be a nap, a walk or ten minutes of soft music. Find the kind that suits you, and keep it close.

TOOL **Cool-down corner: calm sounds and music** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes

08

Sleep and stress feed each other.

Stress makes sleep harder, and poor sleep makes stress hit harder. After a short or broken night, small things feel bigger, tempers are shorter and people pull away from each other. In a brain-scan study by Yoo and colleagues (2007), one night without sleep made the brain's alarm centre react more strongly to upsetting pictures.

In a daily study by Gordon and Chen (2014), people reported more conflict with their partner after nights of poor sleep. And in experiments by Ben Simon and Walker (2018), people who had missed a night's sleep kept others at a greater distance and felt lonelier. You can't always fix sleep, but you can notice when it's part of the story.

For example: A nurse coming off three night shifts finds herself in tears over a parking ticket. Her sister says, "You've barely slept. Let's sort it out on Thursday." On Thursday, it's just a parking ticket.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I slept badly. If I'm short with you today, that's why, and it's not about you." "Can we talk about this after we've both slept?"

TRY THIS:

Before a hard conversation, ask: "Have we both slept?" If not, pick another time. At night, try the same few calm steps before bed, in the same order, so your body learns the signal. If poor sleep goes on for weeks, talk to a doctor. Sleep problems are common and often treatable.

09

Stress is easier to carry when it's shared.

People calm each other. A steady voice, a hand on the shoulder or just a quiet person nearby can help a nervous system settle. Saying your state out loud also helps others read you right: "I'm stressed about work" stops a partner or friend from thinking it's about them. Sharing stress isn't dumping it. It's letting someone stand beside you.

For example: A father tells his ten-year-old, "I'm a bit stressed about money this month. It's my grown-up job to sort it, and you're not in trouble." His son stops tiptoeing round him.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm stressed, and it's not about you." "Do you want help, a hug, or just some space?"

TRY THIS:

Tonight, tell one person your state in one sentence, and ask theirs.

MONDAY, 7:58AM

Six minutes after the snap, you find your partner by the door. "Sorry. My tank was full before you said a word. Your keys are on the bathroom shelf." They laugh. "Rough start?" "Very." The morning is still busy. It isn't a fight anymore.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** No one notices you're running on empty, so build rest in before you need it. See On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).
- **With a partner:** Agree a pause word on a calm day, and that whoever pauses names a time to come back. See One of you wants to talk now, the other needs space (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw).
- **With friends:** A friend who cancels again may be overwhelmed, not uninterested. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Parents and children:** A child can't settle until the nearest grown-up does. Your calm is borrowed before it is learned.
- **At work:** A flooded colleague can't take in feedback. Waiting an hour often works better than pushing now. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

- **Shift work, illness and caring**: Some people run on empty for structural reasons. That calls for a different setup, not more effort. See Different hours (spreadloveandacceptance.com/different-hours), When one of you is ill (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) and Caregivers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).
- **If you have ADHD**: Keeping track of everything quietly fills the tank before the day starts. Move the remembering out of your head (a shared list, labelled alarms, one place for keys), and plan hard talks for your better time of day. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-2-stress-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"All stress is bad."** Short bursts of stress help you rise to a challenge. The problem is stress with no recovery.
- **"If I'm calm, I can't be upset."** Calm means steady, not happy. You can be calm and sad, or calm and firm.
- **"Pausing is avoiding."** A pause with a time to come back is a way to finish the talk well. A pause with no return is avoiding.
- **"Rest is lazy."** Recovery is part of the work. Bodies and minds that never recover tend to break down.
- **"Everyone should be able to handle what I can."** People have different loads, different bodies and different resources. Compare the load, not the person.
- **"Running on empty means they don't care."** Short replies and flat faces often mean tired, not cold.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Be the calm, not the coach.** A lower voice, slower words and a steady presence help more than "calm down."
- **Lighten the load, not just the mood.** Taking one task off someone's list can do more than any pep talk.

- **Ask what kind of help.** Practical help, company, a distraction or space? Ask, don't guess.
- **Don't debate someone who is flooded.** Offer a break and a time to come back. Facts can wait twenty minutes.
- **Notice long stretches.** If someone has been running on empty for weeks, gently mention it, and help them find support.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "You seem really stretched. Is there one thing I could take off your plate?" "We don't have to sort this now. Shall we pick it up after dinner?"

When to get more help

Stress is normal. Constant stress that never lets up is a warning sign. It may be time to see a doctor, counsellor or other trained professional if:

- you've felt exhausted, dread-filled or numb most days for several weeks, even after rest;
- you can't sleep, or sleep but never feel rested;
- you have physical signs that worry you, such as chest pain, constant headaches or stomach trouble (always get chest pain checked straight away);
- you're relying on alcohol, drugs or other habits to get through the day;
- you feel you can't cope, or have thoughts of harming yourself. If that is happening now, contact your local emergency number or a crisis line.

If the stress comes from being afraid of someone, such as how they will react, what they will do or whether you are allowed to leave, that is not ordinary stress. Your body may be warning you. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) has free, private help.

This chapter is general education, not medical advice or diagnosis.

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

Workpapers **pages you fill in, on your own or together**

- The Calm-Down Kit: your plan for heated moments.

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- The Nervous System Ladder: a thirty-second self-check.
- Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now): steps to calm down, alone or together.
- Drift (spreadloveandacceptance.com/calm-visualizer), Brain Breakers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes) and calm games (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pause-and-play): gentle ways to come down.

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- The library: the stress response (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/stress), appraisal, the window of tolerance, flooding (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/relationships), burnout and slow breathing (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/calm).

More for your situation

- Back: How feelings work (page 16) · Next: How we see each other (page 47) · All chapters in the contents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/contents)
- Part Two, Chapter III: full tanks and different angles
- How to stop fighting: calm steps (spreadloveandacceptance.com/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-partner)
- New baby, sharing the load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent) and Coming home after time apart (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home)
- For teens: big feelings and stress (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)
- Sensory overload at home (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Stress is your body getting ready** for a demand. A little helps. Too much, for too long, wears you down.
- ✓ **Three everyday states:** calm and connected, revved up, and running on empty. Each one changes how you think and hear.
- ✓ **Flooded means offline.** When stress is very high, listening and careful thinking get much harder. Pause, settle, then come back.
- ✓ **Rest is a skill.** Different kinds of tired need different kinds of rest.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Two · Chapter III · Full tanks and different angles
The stress tank in a shared home — read online

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words
Your weather before you speak — read online

Part Two · Chapter I · Why we get out of tune
How stress knocks two people out of tune — read online

Part Three · Chapter 16 · Worry, low mood and trauma
When stress turns into worry or low mood — page 250

PUT IT TO USE



The Calm-Down Kit
Your plan for heated moments
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11



The Nervous System Ladder
A thirty-second self-check
spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks

3

PART THREE · CHAPTER 3

How we see each other: perception, bias, and the stories we tell

Why two people can watch the same moment and come away with two different stories, and how to see others, and yourself, a little more fairly.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Seeing is a best guess
2. You see what you're looking for
3. We fill the gaps with stories
4. We judge ourselves by our reasons, and others by their actions
5. Quick shortcuts can lead us astray
6. Everyone feels like the one who sees clearly
7. "Us" and "them" changes what we see
8. Ask, don't guess
9. In everyday life
10. Common mix-ups
11. If you want to help someone else with this
12. When to get more help
13. Tools and reading on this site
14. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Seeing is a best guess.** Your brain fills in a lot of what you think you see and hear.
- **We fill gaps with stories,** and the story often feels like a fact.
- **We judge ourselves by our reasons and others by their actions.** That gap causes a lot of hurt.
- **Ask, don't guess.** Asking is kinder and more accurate than reading minds.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **Who did what** (the Preface to Part Two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/preface)) works because everyone sees their own effort more clearly than other people's. Two honest guesses of "I do about 60%" can add up to more than 100%. Writing it down replaces two best guesses with one shared page. Big idea: *see the whole load.*
- **Rewind the talk: see their side** (Part Two, Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3)) slows down a habit everyone has: judging ourselves by our reasons and other people by their actions.
- **The Chat analyzer (also called the Signal Translator)** follows this chapter's last idea: ask, don't guess.

WEDNESDAY, 12:15PM

You wave at a coworker across the canteen. She looks straight through you and walks off. All afternoon you wonder what you did. At four, she messages: "Sorry I didn't stop, I'd just had a call about my dad." She never saw you. The whole story was yours.

The first two chapters of Part Three looked inside: feelings, and the stress that shapes them. This chapter looks outward, at how we see other people. It explains why misunderstandings are so common, even between kind and clever people, and what helps.

01

Seeing is a best guess.

Your eyes and ears take in far less than you think. Your brain fills in the rest from what it expects. Most of the time this works well and fast. But it means what you see is partly what you expected to see. Two people can watch the same moment and honestly see different things.

For example: Two parents watch their son at a football match. One sees him "giving up." The other sees him "being careful with a sore ankle." Same boy.

Different guesses.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This is what I see. It might not be all there is." "What else could this be?"

TRY THIS:

Next time you're sure what someone meant by a look, think of two other things it could have meant.

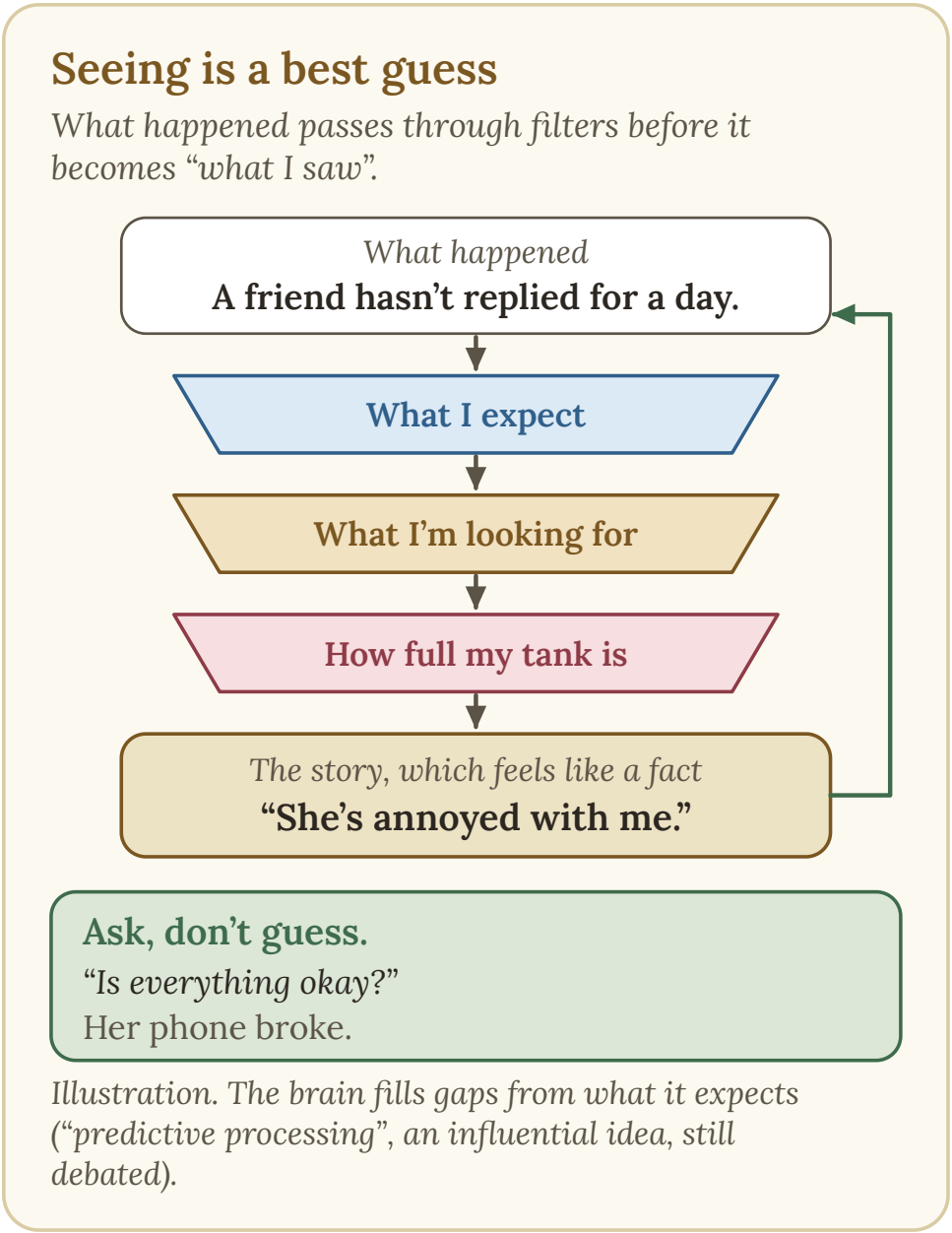


FIGURE 6 Seeing is a best guess. The story that comes out feels like a fact; asking is kinder and more accurate than reading minds.

02

You see what you're looking for.

Attention is like a torch in a dark room. What it lights up, you see. What it doesn't, you can miss, even if it's right in front of you. If you're looking for proof that someone doesn't care, you'll notice every missed call and none of the little kindnesses.

For example: A woman decides her new manager "doesn't like her." For a month she notices every short email. She misses that he gave her the best project.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What might I be missing?" "If I were looking for the opposite, what would I see?"

TRY THIS:

For one week, write down one kind thing a person you're struggling with does each day. Just notice.

03

We fill the gaps with stories.

When we don't know why someone did something, the mind makes up a reason, fast. A late reply becomes "they're angry." A closed door becomes "they don't want me." The story arrives feeling like a fact. Memory works this way too: each time we remember something, we rebuild it a little, so two people can honestly remember the same evening differently.

For example: A friend doesn't reply for two days. You decide she's fed up with you. She was on a camping trip with no signal.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"The story I'm telling myself is that you're upset with me. Is that right?"

TRY THIS:

When you feel hurt by something someone did, write down the story you're telling yourself. Then write one other possible story.

04

We judge ourselves by our reasons, and others by their actions.

When you are late, you know why: the traffic, the phone call, the child who lost a shoe. When someone else is late, you only see that they're late, and it's easy to think "they're careless." We all tend to blame other people's character for things that are really about their situation.

For example: A driver cuts in front of you, and you think "what an idiot." Next week, rushing to the hospital, you cut someone up yourself, and you know you're not an idiot.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What might be going on for them that I can't see?" "If I did this, what would my reason be?"

TRY THIS:

When someone annoys you today, think of one situation that would explain it without making them a bad person.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

We know our own reasons and only see other people's actions. Writing out their side, in their words, is a fair way to even that up.

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

05

Quick shortcuts can lead us astray.

The brain uses shortcuts to save time. Many are useful. Some lead to unfair judgements: a first impression that colours everything after it, a bad moment that outweighs ten good ones, or a quick guess about someone based on their age, accent, looks or group. Having these shortcuts doesn't make you a bad person. Not noticing them can make you an unfair one.

For example: A housemate decides on day one that the new tenant is "messy" because of one box in the hall. Every bit of mess after that is "proof," while her own mess goes unseen.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Am I looking for proof of what I already think?" "Would I judge this the same if someone I like did it?"

TRY THIS:

Pick one person you've made your mind up about. Look for one thing that doesn't fit your view of them.

06

Everyone feels like the one who sees clearly.

Most of us feel we see things as they really are, and that anyone who disagrees must be missing something, biased or not thinking straight. The other person feels exactly the same about you. Neither of you can see your own lens, only theirs.

For example: Two adult siblings argue about how their parents raised them. Each says, "I'm just being realistic." Both are telling the truth about what they lived through.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think we're both seeing this from where we stand. Can you tell me how it looks from yours?"

TRY THIS:

In your next disagreement, explain the other person's view back to them until they say, "Yes, that's it." Then give yours.

07

"Us" and "them" changes what we see.

People quickly split into groups, even over tiny things. We tend to see our own group as varied and full of individuals, and other groups as "all the same." We give our own side the benefit of the doubt. Spending real time with people from the other group, as equals, is one of the best ways to soften this.

For example: At work, the night shift calls the day shift "lazy," and the day shift calls the night shift "sloppy." After a joint team day, they start saying names

instead of “them.”

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
“Would I say this about one of ‘us’?” “Who in that group do I actually know?”

TRY THIS:
Have one real conversation this month with someone from a group you tend to see as “other.” Ask about their day, not their views.

08

Ask, don’t guess.

Imagining yourself in someone’s shoes is a kind start. But research suggests it doesn’t make us much more accurate about what they think. Asking does. A simple, curious question beats the cleverest guess. “What was that like for you?” is a better tool than “I know exactly how you feel.”

For example: A grandmother thinks her teenage grandson hates visiting because he’s on his phone. She asks. He’s messaging a friend who is having a hard time, and he likes being at her house because it’s calm.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
“Can I check what you meant?” “What was going on for you?” “I might have this wrong. How did it look from your side?”

TRY THIS:
Once today, swap a guess for a question.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 3

Chat analyzer (also called the Signal Translator)

Zoe, texting her oldest friend, who moved abroad

Chat analyzer

Mode

I'm about to send this Someone sent me this

Type your sentence

You always cancel on me last minute. Can we pick a time for a call on Sunday?

Relationship

Friends

Channel

Text / chat

THE READ

How it may land for most listeners

Some words may hurt. How it may sound: sharp in places.

What stands out

The word "always" (words like "always" and "never" leave no room for the times it went fine).

A clearer way to say it

Lately it's felt like you cancel on me last minute. Can we pick a time for a call on Sunday?

What changed, and why

always → lately it's felt like. "Always" and "never" erase every exception, so the listener argues the exception.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The ask stayed; only the word that would start an argument changed.

Fill in your own: Chat analyzer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator)

THURSDAY, 12:20PM

You see your coworker in the canteen again. This time you go over: "How's your dad?" She tells you. You sit together. Yesterday's story about what you did wrong is gone. It was only ever a guess.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** We tell stories about ourselves too. "I always mess things up" is a story built from a few bright memories. Look for the ones it leaves out. See Know your own wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/know-yourself).
- **With a partner:** After years together, we stop checking and start assuming. "I know what you meant" is the most dangerous sentence in a long relationship.
- **With friends:** A friend going quiet is rarely about you. Ask before you decide. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Parents and children:** Children are often labelled early: "the difficult one," "the easy one." Labels can become lenses that only see what fits. See For parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents).
- **At work:** Short emails, flat faces and different working styles are easy to misread. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **In your community:** People from other backgrounds, faiths or generations are easiest to see as "all the same." See Two faiths, one family (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths).
- **With ADHD:** Attention is pulled by what is new or urgent, and can lock on hard. Someone may truly not have seen or heard. Not seeing isn't the same as not caring. Get attention first, and put requests in writing. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-3-seeing-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"I just see things as they are."** Everyone sees through a lens. Knowing that is where fairness starts.
- **"Being biased means being a bad person."** Everyone uses mental shortcuts. What matters is noticing them and checking.
- **"If I imagine their side hard enough, I'll understand."** Imagining is a start. Asking is usually more accurate.
- **"My memory is a recording."** Memory is rebuilt each time. Two honest people can remember the same event differently.
- **"Giving the benefit of the doubt means ignoring what happened."** No. It means checking the story before deciding. If something hurtful keeps happening, that matters.
- **"Their face or tone told me what they meant."** Faces and tones vary a lot between people and cultures, and between neurotypes. They are clues, not proof.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Don't argue with their story first.** Make sense of how they feel, then gently ask, "Is there any other way to see it?"
- **Offer information, not verdicts.** "I know she had a hard week" helps more than "You're being unfair to her."
- **Model asking.** Let people see you check your own guesses out loud: "I assumed he was annoyed. I'll ask."
- **Be careful with labels.** Labels for children, coworkers or family members stick, and then shape what everyone sees.
- **Believe people about their own experience.** Seeing other angles never means telling someone their experience didn't happen.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"That sounds really hurtful. Do you know what was going on for them?"
"It might be worth asking. Want to plan what to say?"

When to get more help

Seeing other people's side is a strength. It should never mean doubting yourself when you know something is wrong. If someone often tells you that what you saw, heard or remember didn't happen, that you're "too sensitive" or "imagining it," and you find yourself unsure of your own mind, take that seriously. It can be part of controlling behaviour. Signs to look out for (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) and Not safe at home? can help, privately.

It may also help to talk to a counsellor or other trained professional if you notice you often feel others are against you, find it hard to trust anyone, or keep getting stuck in the same painful stories about yourself. Those patterns are common, understandable and often change with support.

This chapter is general education, not diagnosis or therapy.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Rewind the talk: see their side (spreadloveandacceptance.com/perspective-shifter): a free perspective-taking tool.
- Chat analyzer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator): how a sentence might land before you say it.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Wired differently (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wired-differently): how different minds hear the same words.
- Philosophy stories on seeing the other person (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth): the cave, the elephant, the fish and the empty boat.
- The library: the fundamental attribution error (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/thinking), confirmation bias, negativity bias, naive realism, mind-reading and how memory is rebuilt.

More for your situation

- Back: Stress and the nervous system (page 31) · Next: How communication works (page 61)
- Part One, Then: where your lens came from (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then)
- Part Two, Chapter III: full tanks and different angles
- Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts), Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting) and For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children)
- Communication between different minds (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens) and For parents
- The whole book (spreadloveandacceptance.com/contents) · Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Seeing is a best guess.** Your brain fills in a lot of what you think you see and hear.
- ✓ **We fill gaps with stories,** and the story often feels like a fact.
- ✓ **We judge ourselves by our reasons and others by their actions.** That gap causes a lot of hurt.
- ✓ **Ask, don't guess.** Asking is kinder and more accurate than reading minds.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Then · Where your lens came from
Where your lens came from — read online

Preface to Part Two · The work nobody sees
Why the other person doesn't see the work — read online

Part Two · Chapter III · Full tanks and different angles
Seven angles on the same moment — read online

Part Three · Chapter 17 · Groups, influence and culture
Us and them, and the stories groups tell — page 267

PUT IT TO USE

Rewind the talk: see their side
A free perspective-taking tool
spreadloveandacceptance.com/perspective-shifter

Chat analyzer
How a sentence might land before you say it
spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator

4

PART THREE · CHAPTER 4

How communication works: meaning, listening, repair and messages

Talking feels simple, because we do it all day. But every message has to travel from one mind to another, and a lot can change on the way. This chapter explains how that journey works, and what helps a message arrive the way you meant it.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Meaning is made between two people
2. Every message says two things
3. Listening is something you do, not something that happens
4. Check, don't guess
5. Hard things land better when they start soft
6. Mix-ups are normal. Repair is the skill
7. Messages lose their tone on the way
8. Different styles aren't wrong styles
9. Small talk has a job, and it can be short
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Meaning is made between two people.** What you say and what they hear can be different, and nobody has to be wrong.
- **Every message says two things:** the words, and what they seem to say about the two of you.
- **Check, don't guess.** A short question saves a long misunderstanding.
- **Mix-ups are normal. Repair is the skill.** And small talk is allowed to be short.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **Say it so it lands** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) uses fact, feeling and one clear ask, because every message carries the content and a second message about the relationship. Big idea: *tune how you send and receive.*
- **The 90-second daily check-in and "go back in with a clear sentence"** (Part Two, Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1)) work because mix-ups are normal. Small, frequent repairs keep you in tune better than rare big talks.
- **The Chat analyzer's whole-conversation view (once called the Conversation Reader)** shows where a written conversation lost its tone, because messages lose tone on the way.

THURSDAY, 8:15AM

"Can you call me when you're free?" Ana meant: no rush, I have a small question about the weekend. Her brother read it on the bus and spent the whole ride wondering who was ill. Nobody did anything wrong. The message just arrived carrying something it was never meant to carry.

This chapter explains how a message travels from one mind to another, what can change on the way, and the small habits that help it arrive: listening, checking, starting soft, repairing, and a few ready-made lines for small talk.

01

Meaning is made between two people.

Words don't carry meaning on their own. The person speaking has a meaning in mind. The person listening builds their own meaning from the words, the tone, the timing and everything they already expect. Most of the time the two match well enough. Sometimes they don't, and neither person can see the gap from where they stand.

For example: A manager writes "Let's chat tomorrow" to a new coworker. She means a friendly catch-up. He spends the evening sure he is in trouble.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think what I meant and what you heard might be two different things. Can we check?"

TRY THIS:

Today, notice one moment when someone took your words differently from how you meant them. Just notice. No blame.

02

Every message says two things.

There is *what* you say, and there is what it says about the two of you. "You're late" is a fact about time. It can also say "I was worried," or "I don't matter to you." People often argue about the fact when the hurt is in the second layer.

For example: Two housemates. "Did you use my pan?" is about a pan. Underneath, it may be "Do you respect my things?" Talking only about the pan won't settle that.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I don't really mind about the pan. I think I wanted to know my stuff matters here."

TRY THIS:

Next time a small thing stings, ask yourself: what did that seem to say about *us*?

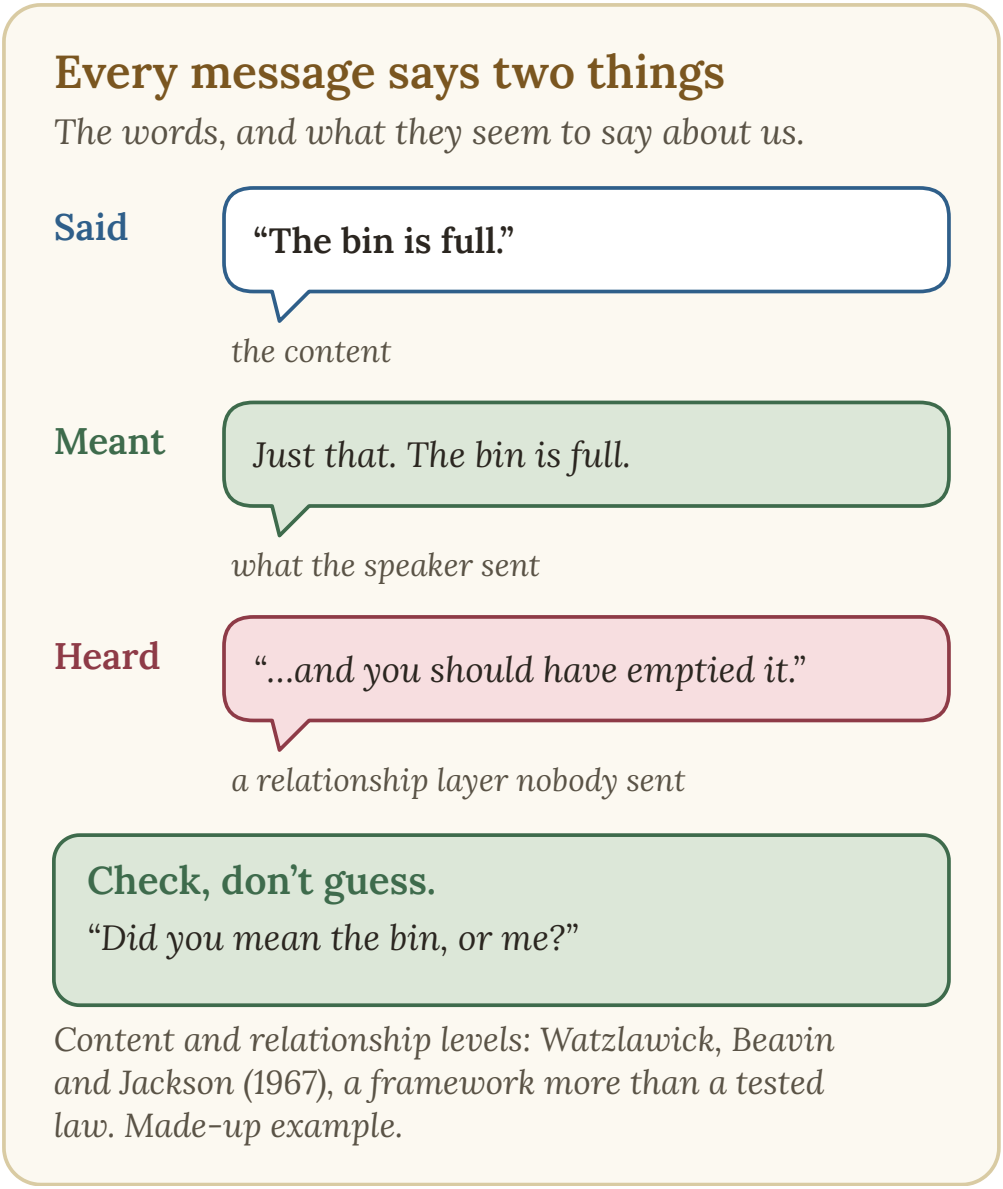


FIGURE 7 Every message says two things: the words, and what they seem to say about the two of you. Check, don’t guess.

03

Listening is something you do, not something that happens.

Hearing is automatic. Listening is a choice. Most of us listen partly to reply: to fix, defend, advise or tell our own story. Real listening means following what the other person is trying to say, and letting them know you got it, before you add anything of your own.

For example: A teenager says school is "pointless." Her dad starts to explain why it isn't. She stops talking. Next time, he tries "Pointless how? Tell me about today." She talks for twenty minutes.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "So what I'm hearing is... Have I got that right?" "Do you want ideas, or do you want me to just listen?"

> TRY THIS:
> In one conversation today, wait until the other person has finished, then say back what you heard before you reply.

04

Check, don't guess.

Once we know something, it's hard to imagine not knowing it. So we leave out steps, assume the other person can tell what we mean, and guess what they meant instead of asking. We do this most with people we know well. A short check costs a sentence. A wrong guess can cost a whole evening.

For example: Two friends plan "something low-key" for a birthday. One pictures a takeaway on the sofa. The other books a quiet restaurant. Both are disappointed, and both thought it was obvious.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Just so I've got it right, you mean...?" "When you say soon, do you mean today or this week?"

TRY THIS:

Pick one person you know well and check one meaning with them today, even if you feel sure.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Checking takes ten seconds and saves an evening. When you're ready to reply, this workpaper helps you say it so it lands.

WORKPAPER WP-09 **Say it so it lands** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-09

05

Hard things land better when they start soft.

How a hard talk begins often shapes how it ends. A complaint about one thing ("The bins weren't taken out") is easier to hear than a criticism of the person ("You never help"). A simple shape works for most hard things: what happened, how you feel, and what you'd like.

For example: A woman wants her elderly father to stop driving at night. Instead of "You're not safe anymore," she says: "You had two near-misses last month. I lie awake worrying. Could I drive us in the evenings?"

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"What happened was... I felt... Could we...?"

TRY THIS:

Write one fact, feeling and ask sentence about something small that has been bothering you. You don't have to send it yet.

Say it so it lands

A simple shape for most hard things.

What happened
One specific fact, not a verdict.
"The bins didn't go out on Tuesday."

How I feel
Your feeling, in a word or two.
"I felt let down, because I'd asked."

What I'd like
A small, doable ask.
"Could you set a reminder for next week?"

✕ **Not: "You never help."**
That's about the person, so it starts a defence.

This book's plain-language shape, a cousin of I-messages and Nonviolent Communication; research on such scripts is mixed, and tone matters most.

FIGURE 8 Say it so it lands: what happened, how I feel, what I'd like. A complaint about an action can be heard; a criticism of the person starts a defence.

06

Mix-ups are normal. Repair is the skill.

Even close, kind people misunderstand each other all the time. What keeps a relationship steady isn't never getting it wrong. It's noticing and fixing it: "That came out wrong," "I think I misread you," "Can we start again?" Small repairs, made often, build trust.

For example: At the supermarket, a stranger snaps "Excuse me!" when you block the aisle. You snap back. A second later you add, "Sorry, long day." They smile: "Me too." A tiny repair, and the moment is gone.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Can I try that again?" "I think I took that the wrong way. What did you mean?"

TRY THIS:

The next time something comes out wrong, repair it within a minute, out loud. Notice how small it can be.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: a mix-up isn't the end of anything. Come back, sit close, and go through it step by step.

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

07

Messages lose their tone on the way.

A text or email carries the words but not your face, your voice or your timing. So the reader fills in the tone, and they fill it in with however *they* feel right now. A tired reader hears a tired, cross message. Short replies, missing greetings and late-night timing all get read as meaning something.

For example: A group chat for a school fundraiser. One parent replies "Fine." to a plan. Two others decide she is annoyed. She was typing one-handed while cooking.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Quick reply, not a cross one!" "This isn't urgent. Any time this week is fine."

TRY THIS:

Before you send your next tricky message, read it out loud in the grumpiest voice you can. If it sounds harsh, add a warm word or a time frame.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 4

Chat analyzer: a whole conversation (once called the Conversation Reader)

Dana and Raj, coworkers on the same project

Chat analyzer: paste a conversation

01 Paste the conversation

Dana: Did the slides go to the client?
Raj: Not yet, still waiting on the numbers from finance
Dana: I needed them by 10. This always happens.
Raj: I can't make finance go faster.
Dana: Forget it. I'll do it myself.

02 Which one is you?

Dana (3 messages) Raj (2 messages)

03 THE READ

What happened
Ends shut down. 5 messages: 3 from you, 2 from Raj. The words don't make it clear what it's mostly about, so the Reader won't guess. It starts calm. There's no one big turn, but some tension creeps in. By the end someone has pulled back. That isn't the same as calm: it can mean they're overwhelmed, or hurt.

Your part · always / never
I said "This always happens", and that isn't fair: it isn't every time. What I meant was: [one recent time, and how it felt].

04 Check your reply before you send it

Your reply
Sorry, that last line wasn't fair. When the numbers weren't in by 10, I felt worried about the client. Could you ask finance for them by 9 next time? I'll chase them with you.

THE CHECK

✓ Says what you need or how it landed · ✓ Makes one clear ask · ✓ No verdicts, always/never, dismissals, sarcasm, jabs, comparisons or shutting the door · ✓ Stays on one topic

Nothing in the wording is likely to add heat. Read it once more as if you were them, then send it when you're calm.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The Reader looks at one side's part without blaming anyone.

Fill in your own: Chat analyzer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator)

08

Different styles aren't wrong styles.

Some people say exactly what they mean. Others hint and expect you to read between the lines. Some talk fast and overlap; others need a pause to think. Families, cultures and different kinds of minds all shape this. A clash between two styles is usually a translation problem, not a character flaw.

For example: An autistic employee answers "Is this report ready?" with "No, I need two more days." Her manager hears blunt. She was simply being clear and honest. Once they talk about it, he finds her clarity a relief.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm quite direct, so if I sound blunt, I'm not cross." "It helps me if you say exactly what you need."

TRY THIS:

Write one sentence about how you like to be spoken to, and share it with one person this week.

09

Small talk has a job, and it can be short.

Small talk ("Cold today, isn't it?" "Busy weekend?") isn't really about the weather. Its job is to say "I see you, I'm friendly, we're okay." The anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski called this kind of talk "phatic communion" in 1923: talk whose main purpose is bonding, not information. Small moments like this matter more than people expect. Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) found that people who had a short, friendly exchange with a coffee-shop barista felt more belonging and a better mood than people who kept it purely efficient.

But small talk is hard work for many people, including many autistic people, shy or anxious people and people speaking a second language. The rules are unwritten, it can feel pointless, and it uses energy. A few ready-made lines, sometimes called social scripts, take the guesswork out. Keeping it short is allowed.

For example: A dad who dreads the school gate keeps three lines ready: "Morning! How's your week going?" then "Oh, nice," then "Right, I'd better get going. See you Friday." He no longer dreads it, and the other parents think he's lovely.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

To open: “Morning! How’s your week been?” “How do you know Nico?” To keep it going: “Oh, how was that?” To close: “Lovely to see you. I’d better get on.” “I’ll let you get on. Have a good day.” To opt out kindly: “I’m not great at chit-chat, but it’s really nice to see you.”

TRY THIS:

Write your own three lines: one to open, one follow-up question, one to close. Use them once this week. If you’d rather skip ahead to a real topic, that’s fine too: “Can I ask you about something I’m actually curious about?”

THURSDAY, 9:02AM

Ana’s brother rings the moment he’s off the bus. “Who’s ill?” Ana laughs. “Nobody! I just wanted to ask if you’re free on Saturday.” He laughs too, a bit shakily. Next time, Ana texts: “No rush and nothing’s wrong. Quick question about Saturday, call when you’re free.” Six more words. They save him a whole bus ride of worry.

In everyday life

On your own: how you talk to yourself

Communication isn’t only between people. You also send yourself messages all day: “Typical, I always mess this up,” or “That was hard, and I handled it.” The same ideas apply. Notice the tone, check whether the message is fair, and repair it when it’s harsh.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

“Is that what I actually mean, or just how it came out?” “What would I say to a friend who did this?”

TRY THIS:

Catch one harsh sentence you say to yourself today, and rewrite it in the way you'd speak to someone you like.

With other people

The same few ideas show up everywhere people talk:

- **Partners:** "We never go out anymore" sounds like a complaint about evenings. Underneath, it may be "I miss you." Answering the second layer ("I miss you too, let's plan something") goes further than defending the calendar.
- **Parent and young child:** "Stop that!" tells a child what not to do, but not what to do instead. "Feet on the floor, please" is easier to follow, and easier to hear.
- **Coworkers:** In a meeting, silence is taken as agreement. Later, a quieter colleague says she never agreed. A round of "Anyone see it differently?" catches this.
- **Housemates:** A note on the fridge saying "PLEASE clean up" reads as shouting, even if it was written in a hurry. A face-to-face chat, or a kinder note, works better.
- **Grown-up child and parent:** "Are you eating properly?" is care in one generation's language and checking-up in another's. Both people can say what they mean and what they hear.
- **Strangers and services:** On a support call, saying "I'm frustrated, but not with you" often changes how the whole call goes.
- **Feedback at work:** Talk about the work, not the person, with one recent example and what good looks like. Then ask, "What's been getting in the way?" When you're the one receiving it, "Thanks. Can I think about it and come back tomorrow?" is a fine first answer. More, with a performance conversation (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-4-communication-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"If they loved me, they'd just know."** Closeness makes us check *less*, not understand more. Saying it clearly is a kindness, not a failure.
- **"I said it clearly, so it's their fault they got it wrong."** Meaning is built by both people. You can be clear and still be misheard.
- **"Listening means agreeing."** You can fully understand someone and still see it differently. Understanding comes first; your view can come after.
- **"Being direct is rude."** Directness is a style. It can be warm and direct at the same time.
- **"Repairing means admitting I'm the bad one."** A repair just says "that didn't go how I wanted." Either person can make one.
- **"Small talk is fake."** It's a way of saying "we're okay with each other." You're allowed to keep it short, or to skip to a real topic.
- **"Texts are safer for hard things."** They feel safer to send, but they are easier to misread. For tender things, add warmth, or talk.

If you want to help someone else with this

Maybe a friend keeps having the same argument with their partner, or your teenager feels nobody listens. You can't communicate for them, but you can help.

- **Listen first.** The most useful thing is often to be the person who really hears them, without fixing.
- **Help them separate the two layers.** "What was it about? And what did it seem to say about you two?"
- **Offer the simple shape.** What happened, how they feel, what they'd like. Let them find their own words.
- **Don't take sides on the other person's character.** You only hear one side, and they may make up next week.

- **Notice if it's more than a mix-up.** If they seem afraid of the other person, gently share Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety)

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Do you want me to just listen, or help you think about what to say?"

When to get more help

Most mix-ups can be eased with the ideas here. Some situations need more.

- **When talking makes things worse every time,** a couples or family counsellor can slow conversations down and help both people be heard.
- **When you're afraid of how someone will react,** that isn't a communication problem. Clearer words are not the fix, and you don't have to keep trying. Not safe at home? lists free, private help, and signs to look out for may help you name what's happening.
- **When someone is always "misunderstanding" you** in ways that make you doubt your memory or your sense of what happened, talk with someone you trust outside the relationship.
- **When speaking or understanding is hard for you every day,** because of anxiety, a hearing or language difference, or how your mind works, a doctor, speech and language therapist or counsellor may help. Needing support is not a failing.
- **If you're overwhelmed right now,** start with Upset right now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now).

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

> PRACTICE:
> try one tool this week, with one real conversation.

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Chat analyzer: calm replies after a fight.

- Communication style quiz (spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz): a playful look at your own style.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Effective communication (spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication): the site's complete, plain guide, from listening and timing to hard talks, repair and each kind of relationship.
- Check-ins (spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins): how to hold a hard conversation kindly.
- In the book: Chapter I: Why we get out of tune looks at the same ideas at home.

More for your situation

- At work: messages and meetings (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work)
- Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends)
- For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens) and for parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents)
- Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting)
- Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room)
- Long distance (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance)
- Two faiths or cultures, one family (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths)
- Neurodivergent relationships: communication (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- Find it by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Meaning is made between two people.** What you say and what they hear can be different, and nobody has to be wrong.
- ✓ **Every message says two things:** the words, and what they seem to say about the two of you.
- ✓ **Check, don't guess.** A short question saves a long misunderstanding.
- ✓ **Mix-ups are normal. Repair is the skill.** And small talk is allowed to be short.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Two · Chapter I · Why we get out of tune
Pace, tone and getting back in tune — read online

Part Two · Chapter IV · Two kinds of fair
Letting a comment land — read online

Part Three · Chapter 11 · Healing after hurt
Repair after it goes wrong — page 174

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words
How you like to be spoken to — read online

PUT IT TO USE



Chat analyzer
Calm replies after a fight
spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator



Communication style quiz
A playful look at your own style
spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz

5

PART THREE · CHAPTER 5

Attachment, trust and belonging

Why we need each other, how the bonds we had early on shape what we expect today, and how trust and belonging are built, lost and rebuilt, one small moment at a time.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Belonging is a basic need
2. Early bonds teach us what to expect
3. Patterns, not boxes
4. Trust is built in small moments
5. Feeling safe with someone calms the body
6. Fitting in isn't the same as belonging
7. When trust breaks, rebuilding takes time
8. You can start building connection from wherever you are
9. If you're a teenager
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Belonging is a basic need.** Feeling lonely or left out is a signal, like hunger, not a flaw.
- **Early bonds set expectations, not a sentence.** What we learned about being cared for can soften and change.
- **Trust grows in small moments.** Doing what you said, again and again, matters more than big gestures.
- **You can start small.** One friendly exchange, one kept promise, one kind word to yourself.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **One owner per job** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) works because trust is built from small promises kept. A named owner turns a vague hope ("someone will do it") into a promise others can rely on. Big idea: *fix the setup, not the person.*
- **The monthly look-back** (Part Two, Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5)) is "not a review of either person". Feeling safe with someone is what lets people say what went wrong without bracing for blame.

SUNDAY, 9:30PM

Kai sent a long message to a friend at lunchtime. It's been read, but there's no reply. By evening, Kai has gone from "she's busy" to "she's annoyed with me" to "nobody really likes me." The friend, meanwhile, is at her nephew's birthday, phone in a coat pocket. One silence, two very different nights.

01

Belonging is a basic need.

People need to feel connected, the way we need food and sleep. When we feel left out, it can hurt in a way that feels almost physical (Naomi Eisenberger and colleagues, 2003). That isn't weakness. It's a signal, like hunger, telling us to reach for connection.

For example: Rhea moves to a new city for work. She's busy and doing well, but by the third month she feels flat and teary on Sundays. Nothing is wrong with her. She's lonely, and loneliness is a real need asking to be met.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Feeling lonely doesn't mean I'm unlikeable. It means I need connection, like anyone."

TRY THIS:

This week, reach out to one person, even with a short "thinking of you" message.

02

Early bonds teach us what to expect.

As children, we learn from the people who cared for us whether others will come when we need them. If help usually came, we tend to expect it. If it came sometimes, or rarely, we may learn to cling harder or to stop asking. These lessons are a starting point, not a life sentence. This is the idea of attachment, first described by John Bowlby (1969) and studied by Mary Ainsworth and colleagues (1978).

For example: A toddler at the park runs off to explore, then runs back to check his grandmother is still on the bench, then runs off again. She is his safe base. Knowing she's there makes him brave enough to explore.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

(to a child) "I'm right here. Go and look, and come back whenever you want."

TRY THIS:

Think of one person who was a safe base for you, at any age. What did they do that helped?

03

Patterns, not boxes.

As adults, some of us worry a lot about being left, and reach out more when we feel unsure. Some of us pull back when things get close, and need more space. Many of us feel mostly secure, and most of us mix all three.

These are patterns that can soften and change, especially in steady, kind relationships. Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver (1987) first described them in adults, and later work, such as R. Chris Fraley and colleagues (2015), suggests they are sliding scales, not boxes.

For example: When things feel tense, Ronan wants to talk it through right now. His wife Clara needs to go quiet first. He reads her quiet as "she's leaving." She reads his questions as pressure. Once they see the pattern, they agree: Clara says "I need an hour, and I'm coming back," and Ronan waits.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

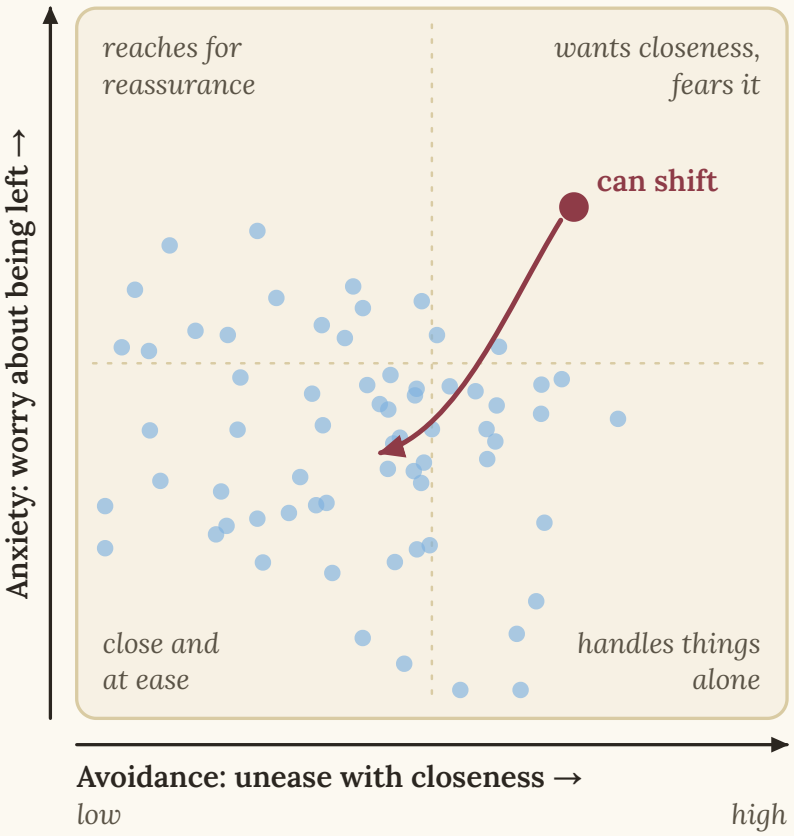
"I'm not going anywhere. I just need some quiet. Let's talk at eight."

TRY THIS:

Notice what you do when you feel unsure of someone: reach out more, or pull back? No judgement, just notice.

Patterns, not boxes

Two scales. Everyone sits somewhere, and can move.



After Brennan, Clark and Shaver (1998) and Fraley and colleagues (2015): adult attachment is best measured as two scales, not types. Dots are illustrative, not data.

FIGURE 9 Attachment as two scales, not four boxes: worry about being left, and unease with closeness. Everyone sits somewhere, and can move. Dots are illustrative.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 5

Our pause plan

Imani and Kwame, married ten years

Our pause plan

Fill this in together on a calm day, or fill it in yourself and send it to your partner to change.

Our pause word or sentence

"Pause. I'll be back at …", with a hand on the heart

Shortest break, so our bodies can settle

30 minutes

Whoever pauses names a clock time to come back, no later than

the same evening

If one of us can't come back on time

Send one text with a new time. No silence.

The first sentence when we come back

"I'm back. You first: what do you most want me to hear?"

YOUR PLAN, READY TO SEND

Our pause plan

Pause word: “Pause. I’ll be back at …”, with a hand on the heart

Shortest break: 30 minutes

Return time: whoever pauses names a clock time, no later than the same evening

If one of us can’t come back on time: Send one text with a new time. No silence.

When we come back, we start with: “I’m back. You first: what do you most want me to hear?”

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. For relationships where everyone feels safe.

Fill in your own: Our pause plan (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw)

04

Trust is built in small moments.

Trust doesn’t usually come from big gestures. It grows from small, ordinary things done again and again: doing what you said, turning towards someone when they reach out, being the same person on a hard day as on a good one.

For example: A new team member says she’ll send the figures by Thursday, and she does. The next week, she flags early that something will be late. By the third month, her manager trusts her completely, not because of one big moment, but dozens of small ones.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“I said I’d do it by Friday. I’m running late, so here’s where it’s at.”

TRY THIS:

Keep one small promise today, and notice how it feels to be someone who does what they said.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Trust grows in small moments that repeat. This workpaper helps you notice the little rituals you already have, and keep them going.

WORKPAPER WP-15 **Keep your little rituals alive** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-15

05

Feeling safe with someone calms the body.

Being with someone we trust can settle our nervous system. In one study, holding a trusted partner's hand calmed the brain's response to threat (James Coan and colleagues, 2006). A calm voice, a hand to hold, or just someone nearby can make a hard moment easier to bear. This works both ways: we can be that safe presence for others too, often without saying much.

For example: After a panic attack, Kieran's friend doesn't try to fix anything. He sits next to him on the step and says, "Take your time. I'm here." Kieran's breathing slows.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"You don't have to talk. I'll just sit with you." "What would help right now: company, quiet, or both?"

TRY THIS:

Notice who helps you feel calmer. Tell them, simply: "I always feel better after seeing you."

06

Fitting in isn't the same as belonging.

Fitting in means changing yourself to be accepted. Belonging means being accepted as you are. Groups like teams, families, clubs and communities can offer both. Being left out of a group hurts, even when the group doesn't matter much to us. Real belonging grows where people feel safe to be themselves and to speak up.

For example: At a new job, Ola laughs at jokes she doesn't find funny and hides that she doesn't drink. She's fitting in, and she's exhausted. At a book

club, she says what she really thinks and people ask her to say more. That's belonging.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
(in a group) "I see it a bit differently. Is it okay if I say why?" "Has everyone had a chance to say something?"

TRY THIS:
Think of one place where you can be fully yourself. How could you spend a little more time there?

07

When trust breaks, rebuilding takes time.

When someone lets us down badly, trust doesn't come back with one apology. It returns slowly, as words are matched by actions over time. The person who broke trust can own what happened and be patient. The person who was hurt can decide, at their own pace, whether and how much to trust again.

For example: Two adult sisters fall out after one shares a private story at a family dinner. The apology is a start. What rebuilds trust is the months afterwards, when the story never comes up again and the sister checks before sharing anything.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I know sorry isn't enough. I'll show you, and you can take whatever time you need."

TRY THIS:
If you've broken someone's trust, name one specific thing you'll do differently, and do it.

08

You can start building connection from wherever you are.

If you feel alone right now, big friendships can feel out of reach. But belonging starts small: a chat with a neighbour, a regular class, an online group about something you love, a kind word to yourself. Even small, light contact with people we barely know can lift our mood (Gillian Sandstrom and Elizabeth Dunn, 2014).

For example: After his divorce, Martin starts saying more than "thanks" to the man at the coffee stall. A few weeks later they talk football every morning. It isn't a deep friendship, but it makes Mondays easier, and it reminds him he can still connect.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm new around here. Is there anything you'd recommend?" "I loved what you said in the group. Would you like to get a coffee sometime?"

TRY THIS:

Have one small, friendly exchange with someone you don't know well this week.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: one small hello is a great start! Want an idea? There's a tool that picks one for you.

TOOL **Stay close: one small idea** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding

MONDAY, 8:10AM

Kai's phone buzzes. "Sorry! Phone was in my coat all day at my nephew's party. Loved your message. Coffee Thursday?" Kai notices how far last night's story had run: from "she's busy" all the way to "nobody likes me." Next time a reply is slow, Kai decides to send a light "No rush, just thinking of you," and let the silence be just a silence.

If you're a teenager

A *made-up example.* Ezra, 16, sees a photo of his three closest friends at the cinema, and finds out there's a group chat he isn't in. It hurts like a punch. Being left out really does register a bit like pain. Instead of posting something sharp, he messages one friend: "Bit gutted not to be asked. Did I do something?" It turns out they thought he'd be at football. One friendship really is drifting, though, and that's allowed to hurt too.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Bit gutted not to be asked. Did something happen?" "I'd like to come next time, even if I can't always make it." "I miss how we used to be. Are we okay?"

In everyday life

- **Partners:** One partner texts a lot when apart; the other forgets. Agreeing on one goodnight message keeps both feeling connected.
- **Parents and children:** A child who acts up at pick-up may simply be releasing a long day with the safest person they know.
- **Friends:** A friend who always cancels may be overwhelmed, not uncaring. Asking "Is it easier if we do something short?" keeps the door open.
- **Coworkers:** A team where mistakes can be admitted without blame builds trust faster than one where everyone hides them.
- **Housemates:** A weekly shared meal, even a simple one, can turn people who share a kitchen into people who look out for each other.
- **Community:** A neighbour who waves every morning is a small, real part of feeling at home.

On your own: belonging with yourself

Belonging isn't only about other people. It also includes how you treat yourself. If you're kind to yourself on a bad day, you carry a little safe base wherever you go. People who learn to comfort themselves often find it easier to let others in, too, because they're less afraid of being let down.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I'm allowed to need people." "Today was lonely. That's hard, and it won't always be like this."

More for people on their own: On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).

Common mix-ups

- **"Needing people means I'm needy."** Needing connection is human. Everyone has this need, even those who hide it well.
- **"My attachment style is fixed for life."** Patterns can change, especially through steady, kind relationships and reflection.
- **"An 'anxious' or 'avoidant' label explains everything."** Labels can help you notice patterns, but people are more than a type. Use them for curiosity, not judgement.
- **"Jealousy and checking up show how much they love me."** Reaching for reassurance is human, and so is asking for something out of care for the relationship. Controlling who someone sees, or checking their phone without agreement, is not love and is not an attachment style. See signs to look out for (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety).
- **"If I forgive, I have to trust again straight away."** Forgiving and trusting are different. Trust can return slowly, or not at all, and that's your call.
- **"Belonging means everyone likes me."** Belonging usually means a few people who know you as you are. That's enough.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Be a steady presence.** Reliability matters more than big gestures. Turn up when you said you would.
- **Take loneliness seriously.** If someone says they feel alone, don't rush to "But you have so many friends!" Listen first.

- **Invite, and keep inviting.** People who feel left out may say no a few times. A warm, no-pressure invitation still matters.
- **Make room in groups.** Notice who is on the edge, and ask their view.
- **Don't diagnose.** Avoid telling someone they're "so avoidant" or "so clingy." Ask what would help instead.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere." "We're having a few people over on Friday. No pressure, but I'd love you to come."

When to get more help

- **If loneliness has lasted a long time,** or comes with low mood, hopelessness or thoughts of not wanting to be here, please talk to a doctor or a mental health service. If you are in danger right now, call your local emergency number or see Upset right now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now).
- **If fear of being left, or of getting close, keeps hurting your relationships,** a counsellor or therapist can help you understand where it comes from and how to change it.
- **If someone uses your need for them against you,** by cutting you off from friends, checking where you are, or threatening to leave to get their way, that is not about attachment. Not safe at home? lists free, private help.
- **If trust was broken in a way that frightened you,** you don't owe anyone a second chance. Your safety comes first.

Reading on the website

> PRACTICE:
> pick one small way to turn towards someone this week.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Bonding: how closeness grows (spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding): what research says about closeness, with small ideas for partners, kids, friends, family, coworkers and you.
- Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends): when a friendship drifts, and how to reach out.
- The languages of connection (spreadloveandacceptance.com/languages-of-connection): the different ways people show care.
- Complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency): why good things fade, and how to keep them alive.

More for your situation

- On my own after a breakup
- Friends
- Parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents) and foster, adoptive and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship)
- Long distance (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance)
- Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts)
- Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out)
- At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work)
- Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief)
- Find it by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Belonging is a basic need.** Feeling lonely or left out is a signal, like hunger, not a flaw.
- ✓ **Early bonds set expectations, not a sentence.** What we learned about being cared for can soften and change.
- ✓ **Trust grows in small moments.** Doing what you said, again and again, matters more than big gestures.
- ✓ **You can start small.** One friendly exchange, one kept promise, one kind word to yourself.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Then · Where your lens came from
Early trust and the rules from home — read online

Part Three · Chapter 15 · Closeness and love
Being known, at every age — page 235

Part Three · Chapter 17 · Groups, influence and culture
Belonging to groups, and their pull — page 267

Part Three · Chapter 8 · Loss, grief and big life changes
When a bond is lost — page 122

PUT IT TO USE

Bonding: how closeness grows
What research says about closeness, with small ideas for partners, kids, friends, family, coworkers and you
spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding

Friends
When a friendship drifts, and how to reach out
spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends

6

PART THREE · CHAPTER 6

Habits and change: why change is hard and how small steps work

Why it's so hard to change, even when we really want to, and what actually helps: small steps, a kinder setup, patience with slips, and remembering that other people's change belongs to them.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Change is hard for good reasons
2. Habits run on cues
3. Start smaller than feels useful
4. Change the setup, not just your willpower
5. Being in two minds is normal
6. Slips are part of change
7. Change sticks when it fits who you want to be
8. You can support change, but not force it
9. In everyday life
10. Common mix-ups
11. If you want to help someone else with this
12. When to get more help
13. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
14. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Change is hard for good reasons.** Habits save effort, so the old way is always the easy way.
- **Small and set up beats big and willpower.** Make the first step tiny and change the setup around you.
- **Slips are part of change.** A missed day is information about the plan, not proof about you.
- **Other people's change is theirs.** You can support it. You can't force it.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **One small step a week** (the six-week program; Part One, Next (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next)) works because change that lasts starts smaller than feels useful, and an if-then plan does the deciding ahead of time.
- **The setup score and One owner per job** (Part Two, Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2); Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) change the setup instead of asking for more willpower. Habits follow cues and easy paths. Big ideas: *fix the setup, not the person* and *notice the quiet incentives*.
- **What keeps coming back?** (Part Two, Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5)) treats a repeat as information, not failure, because slips are a normal part of change.

MONDAY, 7:05AM

The plan was a walk before work. The trainers are by the door. But the phone is in your hand, and somehow it's 7:40 and you're scrolling with cold coffee. By evening, a quiet voice says: "See? You never stick to anything." That voice is wrong. You aren't weak. You've met a habit.

01

Change is hard for good reasons.

Much of what we do each day runs on autopilot. That saves energy, which is why habits exist. The downside is that the old way is always quicker and easier than the new one. Change asks your brain to do something effortful, again and again, until the new way becomes the easy one.

For example: Jodie wants to stop snapping at her kids in the morning rush. She means it every night. Every morning, the same rush brings the same snap. She isn't a bad parent; the morning is a well-worn groove.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This is hard because it's a habit, not because I'm failing." "Old grooves take time to fill in."

TRY THIS:

Pick one thing you'd like to change and write: "When does it usually happen? Where? What's going on just before?"

02

Habits run on cues.

Most habits have a trigger: a time, a place, a feeling, a person, or the thing you just did. The cue starts the routine, and some kind of reward (relief, comfort, a little buzz) keeps it going. If you know the cue, you can plan for it.

For example: A man notices he reaches for snacks not when he's hungry but when he opens his laptop after dinner. The cue is the laptop. He starts making tea first instead.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

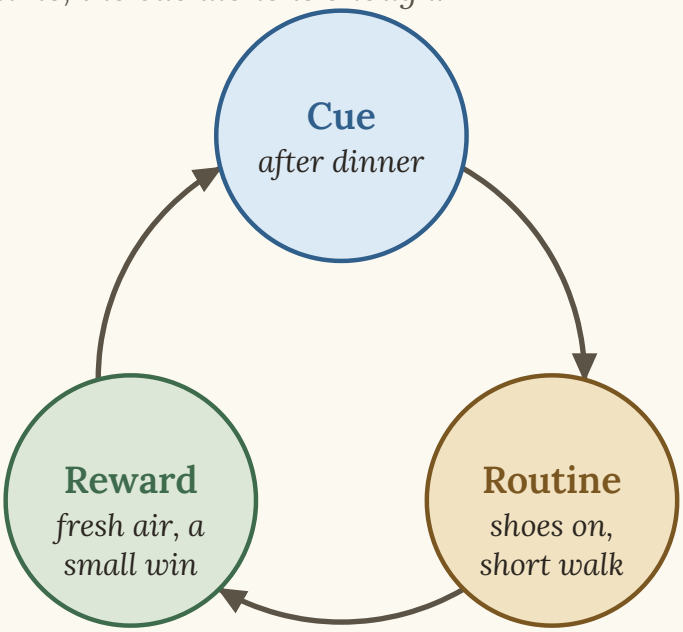
"What happened right before I did that?" "What was I getting from it?"

TRY THIS:

For three days, each time the habit happens, jot down the cue: time, place, feeling, or what you were doing.

Habits run on cues

Over time, the cue alone is enough.



Change the setup, not just your willpower: *move the cue, make the step tiny.*

The cue, routine and reward loop is a popular simplification; the core idea, that context triggers habits, is well supported (for example Neal, Wood and colleagues, 2011).

FIGURE 10 Habits run on cues. Over time the cue alone is enough, so change the setup, not just your willpower.

03

Start smaller than feels useful.

Big goals are inspiring but easy to drop. Tiny steps feel almost silly, and that's why they work: they're easy enough to do on a bad day. Tie the new step to something you already do: "After I put the kettle on, I'll..." Once it sticks, you can grow it.

For example: Two housemates want a tidier kitchen. Instead of a big weekly clean they never do, they agree: "After dinner, we each wipe one surface." It takes two minutes, and the kitchen stays nicer.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Let's start with something tiny, and see if it sticks." "After I ..., I will ..."

TRY THIS:

Shrink your change until it takes two minutes or less. Write it as "After I ___, I will ___."

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 6

Your done list

Bernie, 71, living on his own

Your done list

Write down one small thing that went right, however small.

A small win

Went to the Thursday quiz with Rita and Joe

Who it was with

With a friend

THIS WEEK: 4 SMALL WINS

Went to the Thursday quiz with Rita and Joe · Thu, Oct 8 · With a friend

Cleared one shelf in the spare room · Wed, Oct 7

Rang my brother back · Tue, Oct 6 · With family

Walked to the post office instead of driving · Mon, Oct 5

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. A done list is for encouragement, not proving who does more.

Fill in your own: Your done list (spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins)

04

Change the setup, not just your willpower.

Willpower runs low when we're tired, hungry or stressed. Your surroundings don't. Make the new habit easier (put it in sight, get things ready the night before) and the old one a little harder (move it out of reach, add a step). Small changes to your setup can do more than any amount of trying harder.

For example: A teenager wants to sleep better. Instead of "trying not to scroll," he charges his phone in the kitchen. It works far better than willpower ever did.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

(to yourself or a partner) "What could we change about the setup so this gets easier?"

TRY THIS:

Make one small change to your space today that makes the new habit easier or the old one harder.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Changing the setup is often easier than changing a person. At home, that can be as simple as one owner for each job.

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

05

Being in two minds is normal.

Part of you wants to change. Part of you doesn't, and that part usually has its reasons: the old habit gives comfort, saves effort, or protects you from something. Pushing harder against that part rarely works. Listening to it often does.

For example: Asif wants to drink less, but he also loves the Friday pub with his team. Instead of "never again," he asks what Friday gives him: friends, laughing, unwinding. He keeps the Friday, and switches to alcohol-free after the first drink.

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "What does the old habit give me?" "What would make the change worth it to me, not just to others?"

> TRY THIS:
> Write two lists: "What I like about how things are" and "What I'd like about changing." Both lists are allowed.

06

Slips are part of change.

Nearly everyone who changes something slips back sometimes. One slip doesn't undo your progress. What often does is the thought that follows: "I've blown it, so why bother?" Treating yourself kindly after a slip makes it more likely you'll start again, not less.

For example: After three calm weeks, a dad shouts at his son over homework. That night he says, "I shouted, and I'm sorry. I'm working on it." The next day he's back on track. The slip became a repair, not a reason to give up.

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "A slip is a moment, not a verdict." "What made today harder, and what can I plan for next time?"

TRY THIS:

Decide now what you'll do after a slip: one kind sentence to yourself, and one small step to start again.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: a slip is a stumble, not a fall. Shake it off and try the tiny step again tomorrow. A game for small kind acts makes practising more fun!

TOOL **Gentle games: the Re-check Drive (calm football)** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/recheck-drive

07

Change sticks when it fits who you want to be.

Change done only to please others, or out of shame, is hard to keep. Change that connects to what you care about, the kind of person, parent, friend or colleague you want to be, has deeper roots. Each small action is a vote for that person.

For example: A woman who wants to "be better at keeping in touch" reframes it: "I'm someone who shows up for my friends." Sending one voice note a week becomes part of who she is, not a chore.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Who am I becoming with this step?" "This matters to me because..."

TRY THIS:

Finish this sentence for your change: "I want to do this because I care about..."

08

You can support change, but not force it.

It's natural to want people we love to change: to drink less, tidy more, look after themselves. But other people's change belongs to them. Pressure tends to make people dig in. What helps more: saying clearly what you need, asking what would help, and noticing their small steps out loud.

For example: A coworker keeps missing deadlines. Instead of "You need to be more organised," his teammate asks, "What would make the handover easier for you?" They set up a shared checklist, and the deadlines improve.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I can't change this for you, but I'd love to help if you want me to." "I noticed you did that this week. That really helped."

TRY THIS:

Notice one small positive change someone else made this week, and tell them.

TWO WEEKS LATER, 7:05AM

The trainers are still by the door, but the phone now charges in the kitchen overnight. The plan has shrunk too: shoes on and out to the end of the road. Some mornings that's all. Most mornings it turns into a walk. On the day you miss, the voice says "See?" and you answer it: "A missed day is a slip, not a verdict. Tomorrow, the end of the road."

In everyday life

- **Partners:** One partner wants to spend less time on phones in the evening. They agree on a basket for both phones after nine, not a rule for one person.
- **Parents and children:** A picture chart of the bedtime steps makes a new routine easier for a young child than reminders ever did.
- **Friends:** Two friends who want to move more meet for a Saturday walk. The friendship is the reward that keeps the habit going.
- **Coworkers:** A team that keeps forgetting actions starts ending every meeting with "Who does what by when?" It's a tiny habit with a big effect.
- **Housemates:** A shared list on the fridge works better than anyone trying to remember.

- **Big life changes:** A move, a new baby or a new job breaks old routines. That's disruptive, and it's also a good moment to start new habits.
- **If you have ADHD:** Make the cue impossible to miss, do the step the moment it appears, and make the reward come now. Expect novelty to wear off and swap the method, rather than blaming yourself. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-6-change-in-depth).

On your own: a kind plan for change

If you're working on something alone, put the ideas together in one small plan:

- **One change.** Not five. Pick the one that would make the most difference, or the one that feels most doable.
- **One cue.** "After I ___, I will ___."
- **One setup tweak.** Make it easier to start.
- **One tired-day version.** The smallest version you can still do on a bad day.
- **One kind sentence for slips.** Written down, ready to use.

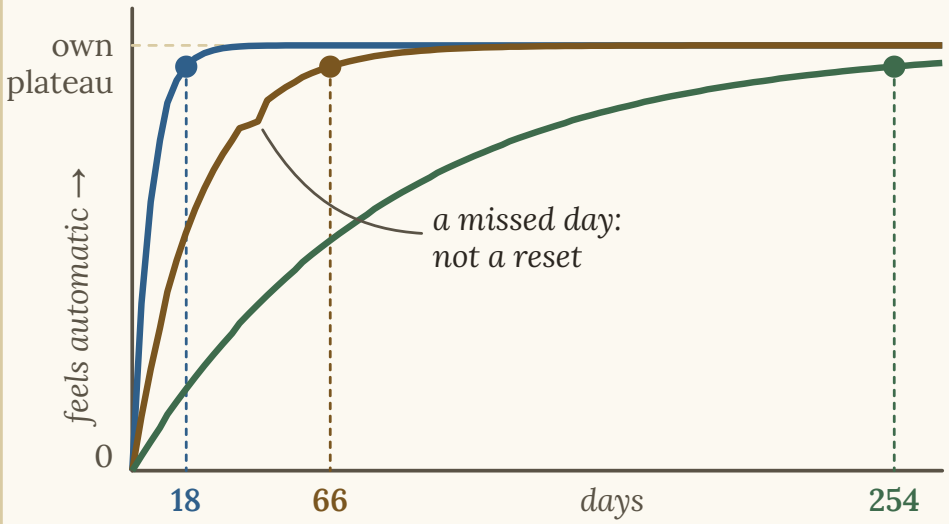
The individual program walks through this step by step: The self path (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) and Know yourself, next.

Common mix-ups

- **"If I really wanted it, I'd just do it."** Wanting is only the start. Habits, setup, tiredness and stress all matter.
- **"It takes 21 days to form a habit."** There's no magic number. In one study, led by Phillippa Lally (2010), it took about two months on average, with a very wide range.
- **"One slip means I've failed."** Slips are normal. Starting again is the skill.
- **"Being hard on myself will keep me on track."** Harshness tends to make people give up. Kindness makes it easier to try again.
- **"If I nag enough, they'll change."** Pressure often makes people dig in. Ask, support and notice instead.
- **"Routines mean being rigid."** For many people, especially autistic people, routines are what make life manageable. Change can respect that.

About two months, give or take a lot

How automatic a new daily habit feels, over time.



- Fastest in the study: about 18 days
- Middle (median): about 66 days
- Slowest: about 254 days

Illustrative shapes, not the raw data. Lally and colleagues (2010) followed 96 volunteers; reaching 95% of each person's own plateau took 18 to 254 days, median 66. Simpler habits formed faster.

FIGURE 11 How long a new habit takes to feel automatic: about two months on average, with a very wide range. Illustrative shapes based on Lally and colleagues (2010).

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Ask before advising.** "Would ideas help, or would you rather just talk it through?"

- **Help them find their own reasons.** "What would be different for you if this changed?"
- **Help with the setup.** Offer practical things: a lift to the gym, a shared calendar, a quieter evening.
- **Notice small steps out loud.** Encouragement for small wins often helps more than pointing out what's still missing.
- **Be kind about slips.** "That's okay, tomorrow's a new go" helps more than "I knew it."
- **Look after yourself.** You can care deeply and still set limits on what you'll put up with.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm on your side with this. What would help?" "You've done this three days running. That's not nothing."

When to get more help

- **If a habit is harming your health or life,** such as drinking, drugs, gambling, eating or self-harm, please talk to a doctor or a specialist service. Needing help with this is common and nothing to be ashamed of.
- **If you can't stop even though you've tried many times,** professional support can make a real difference. It isn't a sign of weakness.
- **If change feels impossible because you're exhausted or low most days,** that may be burnout or depression. A doctor or counsellor can help.
- **If someone is demanding you change in ways that frighten you,** or punishing you when you don't, that isn't support. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help.
- **If you're overwhelmed right now,** start with Upset right now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now).

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

PRACTICE:

pick one tiny change and try it for a week.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Know yourself, next: values, one small goal, tiny steps and if-then plans.
- Complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency): why good habits fade, and how to keep them alive.

More for your situation

- On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own)
- New parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent)
- When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids)
- Neurodivergent relationships (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- Gaming, phones and time together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together)
- At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work)
- Coming home after time apart (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home)
- Find it by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship)

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Change is hard for good reasons.** Habits save effort, so the old way is always the easy way.
- ✓ **Small and set up beats big and willpower.** Make the first step tiny and change the setup around you.
- ✓ **Slips are part of change.** A missed day is information about the plan, not proof about you.
- ✓ **Other people's change is theirs.** You can support it. You can't force it.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming
One small goal and tiny steps — read online

Part Two · Chapter V · The monthly look-back
The monthly look-back — read online

Part Two · Chapter II · Is the split working?
Changing the setup, not the person — read online

Part Three · Chapter 14 · Personality, temperament and change
How much people really change — page 220

PUT IT TO USE



Know yourself, next
Values, one small goal, tiny steps and if-then plans
spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next



Complacency
Why good habits fade, and how to keep them alive
spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency

7

PART THREE · CHAPTER 7

Self-worth, shame and self-compassion

Why your worth isn't a score you keep earning, how shame is different from guilt, and how being kind to yourself makes it easier, not harder, to grow.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Your worth isn't a score
2. Guilt says "I did a bad thing." Shame says "I am bad."
3. Shame makes you want to hide
4. The inner critic is trying to protect you
5. Self-compassion isn't letting yourself off
6. Comparing yourself pulls your worth outside you
7. You can own a mistake without drowning in it
8. Worth is learned between people, and we can give it
9. In everyday life
10. Common mix-ups
11. If you want to help someone else with this
12. When to get more help
13. Tools and reading on this site
14. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Your worth isn't a score.** It doesn't rise and fall with each day's results.
- **Guilt and shame are different.** Guilt says "I did a bad thing." Shame says "I am bad." Guilt is easier to put right.
- **Self-compassion isn't letting yourself off.** Being kind to yourself after a mistake makes it easier to own it and grow.
- **Worth is something we can give.** How we treat each other teaches people what they are worth.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **"Writing it down isn't keeping score"** (the Preface to Part Two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/preface)) and **"It judges the setup, never a person"** (Part Two, Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2)) matter because shame makes people hide and defend. Tools that measure the setup, not anyone's worth, keep shame out of the room. Big idea: *fix the setup, not the person.*
- **"Covering is kind. Say it out loud"** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) is the everyday version of owning a slip without drowning in it.

THURSDAY, 11:20PM

You sent the wrong file to the whole team. Someone noticed, fixed it, and said "no worries." Hours later you are still awake, replaying it. The voice in your head isn't saying "that was a mistake." It's saying "you're useless. They all know it now."

This chapter is for anyone: on your own, at home, with friends, at work or in your community. It teaches how self-worth and shame work first, then what you can do. Nothing here is a diagnosis. Take what helps and leave the rest.

01

Your worth isn't a score.

Many of us carry a quiet scoreboard: I'm worth something when I'm useful, liked, slim, busy, top of the class or never a bother. Psychologists call these "conditions of worth." The trouble is that any score can drop. If your worth rises and falls with each day's results, every bad day feels like a verdict on you.

For example: A retired teacher feels lost since she stopped working. She's fine. But for forty years, "I'm needed" was how she knew she mattered.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Today went badly. That's about today, not about my worth." "I matter on days I achieve nothing."

TRY THIS:

Finish the line "I feel okay about myself when I..." three times. Those are your scores. Just notice them.

02

Guilt says "I did a bad thing." Shame says "I am bad."

Guilt is about something you did, so it points towards fixing it: saying sorry, making it right. Shame is about who you are, and that feels impossible to fix. So shame tends to make people hide, freeze, blame someone else or lash out. Research on the two feelings, such as June Tangney and Ronda Dearing's (2002), suggests guilt is more likely to lead to repair.

For example: A teenager breaks his mum's favourite mug. Guilt says, "I should tell her and help pay for a new one." Shame says, "I ruin everything," and he hides the pieces in the bin.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What exactly did I do? What would make it right?" "I made a mistake. I am not a mistake."

TRY THIS:

Next time you feel bad about something, ask: is this about what I did, or who I am? If it's who you are, turn it into one thing you did.

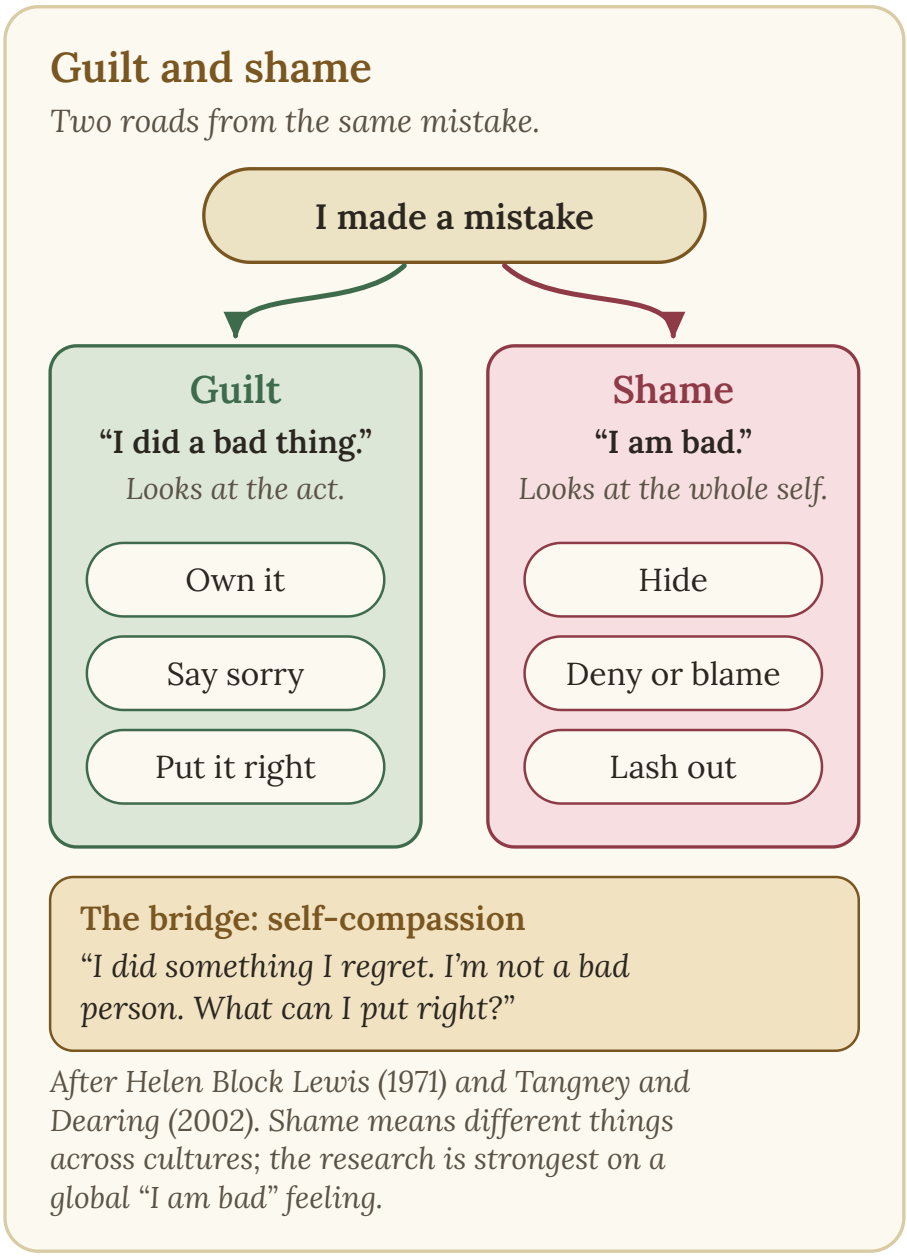


FIGURE 12 Guilt says "I did a bad thing." Shame says "I am bad." Guilt is easier to put right, and self-compassion helps you cross over.

03

Shame makes you want to hide.

Shame shows up in the body first: a hot face, eyes down, a sinking stomach, wanting the floor to swallow you. It can also come out sideways, as sudden anger or a cold, closed face. That's why a small comment can start a big fight: it touched shame, and shame defends.

For example: A coworker says in a meeting, "Didn't we already cover this?" His colleague snaps back. Later she realises the snap wasn't about the question. She felt stupid in front of everyone.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think I felt embarrassed just then, and it came out sharp. Can I try again?"

TRY THIS:

Learn your own shame signs. Next time you suddenly want to disappear or snap, name it quietly: "That's shame."

04

The inner critic is trying to protect you.

That harsh voice usually started as protection. If you criticise yourself first, maybe nobody else can hurt you. If you're hard on yourself, maybe you'll never fail again. It meant well. But a voice that only threatens keeps your body on alert, and it is tiring to live with.

For example: A young dad tells himself "idiot" every time he forgets something for the baby. His own father used that word. The voice is old, borrowed and not his.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Thanks for trying to protect me. I can take it from here." "Whose voice is that, really?"

TRY THIS:

Write down one thing your inner critic says often. Then ask: would I say this to a friend I love? What would I say instead?

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 7

Flip it

Hamish, 44, after a mistake at work

Flip it

What's on your mind?

I got the figures wrong in the client report and my manager had to fix it. I'm hopeless at this job.

What kind is it?

A complaint about someone · A worry · *Being hard on myself* · Anger

THE FLIP

What a good friend might say

"That sounds like a hard moment. One mistake is not the whole of you. You're not hopeless. You're a person having a hard day."

Kinder words for yourself

"I had a hard moment. I'm human. Next time I'll [one thing]."

One next step

[one small thing, like a short sorry, a reminder on your phone, or some rest]

Talking to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend is a simple form of self-compassion. Being harsh rarely makes the next try easier. This is a starting point. Change any words you like.

Hamish's own words, after changing the flip

I got two figures wrong and it was caught before the client saw it. I'm human. Next time I'll ask a colleague to check the numbers before it goes out.

His next step

Send my manager a two-line sorry and the checking plan, today, then go home on time.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The flip is a starting point: Hamish changed the words until they were true and sounded like him.

Fill in your own: Flip it (spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins)

05

Self-compassion isn't letting yourself off.

Self-compassion means treating yourself the way you would treat a good friend who is struggling. One well-known model has three parts: kindness instead of attack, remembering that everyone struggles, and noticing the pain without drowning in it. Studies, such as one by Juliana Breines and Serena Chen (2012), suggest people who are kind to themselves after a failure are often *more* likely to try to improve, not less.

For example: A woman fails her driving test for the third time. Instead of "I'm hopeless," she tries: "This is hard. Lots of people need more goes. What will I practice before the next one?" She books another lesson.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This is a hard moment." "Other people feel this too." "What do I need right now?"

TRY THIS:

Put a hand on your chest or arm, if that feels okay, and say those three lines slowly to yourself once today.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: speak to yourself the way you'd speak to a friend having a hard day, slowly and kindly. Writing it down first can help.

TOOL **Write it through** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/write-it-through

06

Comparing yourself pulls your worth outside you.

We all measure ourselves against others. It's how humans work out where they stand. But feeds full of other people's best moments make that measuring unfair. Self-esteem that depends on being better than others goes up and down a lot. Self-compassion doesn't need you to win.

For example: Two old friends meet up. One has a new house, the other is renting a room. The renter spends the evening quietly ranking herself, and misses that her friend is lonely and wanted to talk.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I'm comparing my inside to their outside." "Their good news doesn't take anything from me."

TRY THIS:

Notice one comparison today. Then swap it for a question about the other person: "How are you, really?"

07

You can own a mistake without drowning in it.

Owning a mistake is easier when it doesn't mean you're worthless. A simple shape helps: say what you did, say the effect, say what you'll do now. Then stop. You don't need to beat yourself up as proof that you're sorry.

For example: A housemate forgot to pay her share of the bill, and the internet was cut off. "I forgot to pay. That left you without internet all weekend. I've paid it and set a reminder." Done, without a speech about being a terrible person.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I did this. I can see it affected you like this. Here's what I'm doing about it."

TRY THIS:

Think of one small thing you still feel bad about. Write the three-part sentence. Decide whether to send it, say it or simply let it rest.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Owning a mistake can be short and plain: what happened, that it was yours, what you'll do. If it went wrong in a talk, Rewind the talk helps you find the words.

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

08

Worth is learned between people, and we can give it.

Children learn their worth from how they are treated, and adults keep learning it. How we talk to each other matters: "you did a careless thing" leaves room to change; "you're so careless" doesn't. Praise for effort and for who someone is, not only for results, helps people feel they matter on bad days too.

For example: A team lead starts each project review with "what did we learn?" instead of "who got it wrong?" Over time, people own up to problems earlier.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm glad you're here, whatever happened today." "That didn't work. You're still welcome here."

TRY THIS:

Say one thing to someone today that isn't about their results: "I like how you…" or "I'm glad I know you."

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can't control how other people judge you, or what you were taught about your worth growing up. You can control how you speak to yourself now, whether you repair what you can, and where you spend your time. Give your energy to people who treat you as someone who matters. More in Part One: who you are today (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)

FRIDAY, 9:15AM

You write one line to the team: "Sorry for the mix-up with yesterday's file, the right one is attached." Then you notice the old voice and talk back to it the way you would to a friend: "You made a mistake. You fixed it. That's what a decent colleague does." The voice gets quieter. Nobody mentions the file again, and by lunch you've stopped thinking about it too.

In everyday life

- **Partners:** "You forgot to call" lands as "you're a terrible partner," and the reply comes out as a defence instead of a sorry.
- **Parents and children:** A child who is told "you're so naughty" hears who they are. "That was a naughty thing to do" leaves them a way back.
- **Friends:** One friend always says yes to everything, then quietly burns out, because saying no feels like risking being dropped.
- **Work:** Someone hides a small error for weeks because owning it feels like proving they don't belong there.
- **Community:** A newcomer at a club makes one mistake, feels everyone saw, and never comes back.

On your own: a kinder voice to keep

You don't need anyone else to start this. You only need to notice how you talk to yourself, and to practice one gentler sentence.

- Catch the critic's favourite words: "always," "useless," "pathetic," "should."
- Swap one of them for a fact: "I was late twice this week" instead of "I'm hopeless."
- Keep a short list of things you did well, or simply did, on hard days. Getting up counts.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I'm allowed to be a work in progress." "I can be disappointed in what I did and still be on my own side."

Common mix-ups

- **"Self-compassion is self-pity."** Self-pity says "only me, poor me." Self-compassion says "this is hard, and other people go through it too." It connects you to others.
- **"If I'm kind to myself, I'll get lazy."** Research suggests the opposite is more common: fear of your own attack makes people avoid trying and hide mistakes.
- **"Self-worth means thinking I'm great."** It doesn't. It means you matter even on the days you're not great.
- **"Feeling shame means I'm a bad person."** Shame is a feeling, not a fact. Almost everyone feels it.
- **"Owning a mistake means agreeing I'm worthless."** The opposite. You can only really own a mistake when it doesn't threaten your whole self.
- **"I should just feel confident."** Confidence comes and goes. Kindness towards yourself is something you can practice on the days it's gone.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Separate the person from the act.** Talk about what happened, never about what kind of person they are.
- **Don't argue with their shame.** "You're not useless!" can feel like being told they're wrong to feel it. Try: "It sounds like you feel really low about it. I don't see you that way."
- **Make repair easy.** Help them find one small thing they can do, so the feeling has somewhere to go.
- **Notice them on ordinary days.** Kindness when nothing has gone wrong teaches worth best.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "That sounds like it's weighing on you. Want to work out one thing that would help?" "You don't have to earn being cared about."

When to get more help

Everyone feels shame and self-doubt sometimes. It's worth talking to a doctor, counsellor or therapist if harsh thoughts about yourself are there most days, if they stop you working, eating, sleeping or seeing people, or if you feel you deserve to be hurt. Therapies such as compassion-focused therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy are built to help with exactly this.

If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself or not wanting to be here, please tell someone today. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. If you are in danger right now, call your local emergency number.

If someone close to you keeps telling you you're worthless, stupid or lucky to have them, that isn't a self-esteem problem. It can be a way of controlling someone. Signs to look out for (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) and Not safe at home? have free, private help.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now) for a feeling that is too big to think through
- Ask Professor Puddles (spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask), the site's chat host, to help you find a kinder sentence

Reading pages to read on the website

- Shame and guilt (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions), in the site's library of research notes
- Self-compassion (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection) and self-esteem (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/motivation)
- Perfectionism and social comparison (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/life)

- Masking (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/wiring), for anyone who has spent years trying to seem "normal"
- Where your lens came from (spreadloveandacceptance.com/growing-up), for where an old inner voice might have started

More for your situation

- **On your own:** Part One: where you came from (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then) · Your self-discovery path (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path) · On my own after a breakup (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own)
- **Teens:** For teens: feelings (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)
- **Neurodivergent:** Wired differently (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wired-differently) · Neurodivergent relationships (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships)
- **At work:** At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work)
- **Coming out:** Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out)
- **Carers and parents:** Caring for someone you love (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers) · When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids)
- **More in Part Three:** Loss, grief and big life changes (page 122) · Minds that work differently (page 136)

Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Your worth isn't a score.** It doesn't rise and fall with each day's results.
- ✓ **Guilt and shame are different.** Guilt says "I did a bad thing." Shame says "I am bad." Guilt is easier to put right.
- ✓ **Self-compassion isn't letting yourself off.** Being kind to yourself after a mistake makes it easier to own it and grow.
- ✓ **Worth is something we can give.** How we treat each other teaches people what they are worth.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Then · Where your lens came from
Old rules that taught you your worth — read online

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming
Kindness when a goal slips — read online

Part Three · Chapter 11 · Healing after hurt
Guilt, apology and forgiveness — page 174

Part Three · Chapter 16 · Worry, low mood and trauma
When the inner critic gets loud — page 250

PUT IT TO USE



Upset right now?
For a feeling that is too big to think through
spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now



Ask Professor Puddles
The site's chat host, to help you find a kinder sentence
spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask

8

PART THREE · CHAPTER 8

Loss, grief and big life changes

What grief is, why it comes in waves, how it shows up in the body, and how to carry a loss, or a big change, without having to "get over it."

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Grief is love with nowhere to go
2. Grief comes in waves, not neat stages
3. Grief lives in the body, too
4. Some losses nobody sees
5. People grieve in different ways
6. You don't have to let go
7. Big changes are losses too, even the good ones
8. Most people find a way through, and support helps
9. Losing a partner in later life
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Grief is love with nowhere to go.** It hurts because the person, place or life mattered.
- **It comes in waves, not stages.** A good week and then a bad day is normal, not going backwards.
- **You don't have to let go.** Many people keep a bond with the person they lost, and that's healthy.
- **Most people find a way through.** Support helps, and some losses need more help. Both are normal.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **Who did what and the setup score** (the Preface to Part Two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/preface); Part Two, Chapter II (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-2)) help after a death, an illness, a move or a new baby, because a big change quietly moves jobs from one person to another. Looking at the month again lets you share the new load on purpose. Big idea: *see the whole load.*
- **"A full tank means later, not never"** (Part Two, Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3)) fits grief: grief fills the tank, so some talks wait for a better day, with a time named.
- **Where your lens came from** (Part One, Then (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then)) looks at older losses that still shape how you react today.

SATURDAY, 9:05AM

Six months on, you're doing fine. Then, in the supermarket, you see the cereal your dad always bought, and you have to leave your trolley in the aisle and sit in the car. Nobody around you knows. It feels like day one again.

This chapter is for anyone who has lost someone or something: a person, a pet, a marriage, a friendship, health, a home, a job, a country or a future you had pictured. It explains how grief works first, then what can help. There is no right way to grieve, and nothing here is a timetable.

01

Grief is love with nowhere to go.

Grief is what we feel when something we were attached to is gone. It isn't only for deaths. A divorce, a miscarriage, a diagnosis, a move, a friend who drifted, or children leaving home can all bring real grief. The size of the grief usually matches the size of the bond, not what other people think the loss "should" mean.

For example: A man is surprised how hard he takes his dog's death. His friends say "it was just a dog." But that dog walked with him every morning for twelve years.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This hurts because it mattered." "My grief doesn't need anyone's permission."

TRY THIS:

Name one loss you've been carrying that you haven't called grief. Say it to yourself: "I'm grieving…"

02

Grief comes in waves, not neat stages.

You may have heard of five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. They came from listening to dying patients, and were never meant as steps everyone follows in order. Most people swing back and forth: some hours deep in the loss, some hours getting on with life. That back-and-forth is healthy. Laughing at a funeral, or having a good day, doesn't mean you've stopped caring.

For example: A widow feels guilty that she enjoyed lunch with her sister. Then she cries all evening. Both were grief doing its work.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

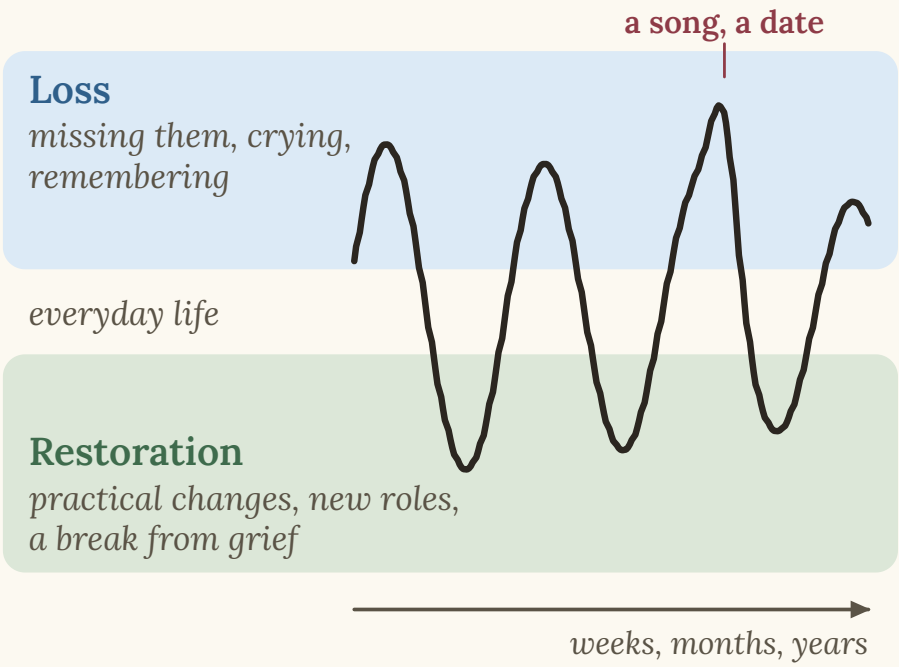
"A good hour isn't a betrayal." "This is a wave. Waves pass."

TRY THIS:

Let yourself have one small break from grief today, without guilt: a walk, a show, a meal with a friend.

Grief comes in waves

Moving back and forth between loss and life is part of it.



Waves, not neat stages. A good week, then a bad day, is normal, not going backwards.

After Stroebe and Schut's dual process model (1999), a widely used framework rather than a precise prediction. Illustrative line.

FIGURE 13 Grief comes in waves, not neat stages. Moving back and forth between loss and everyday life is part of healthy grieving.

03

Grief lives in the body, too.

Grief can bring tiredness, poor sleep, no appetite or extra appetite, aches, a tight chest, forgetfulness and a foggy head. Your brain is slowly learning that someone or something it expected to be there isn't. That takes time, and it uses energy.

For example: A teacher whose mother died keeps losing her keys and forgetting meetings. She worries something is wrong with her memory. It's grief fog, and it eases as the months pass.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm grieving, so I'm slower than usual. Could you send me a reminder?"

TRY THIS:
Pick three basics to protect this week: one regular meal, a set bedtime, and a short walk outside.

04

Some losses nobody sees.

Some losses are hard to explain. Someone is still alive but changed, through dementia, addiction or illness. Someone is gone but not dead, like an estranged parent or a missing relative. Some losses aren't recognised by others: an ex-partner's death, a pregnancy loss, a friend you met online. Grief without a ceremony, or without other people noticing, can feel very lonely.

For example: A woman's father has dementia. He's still here, and she still visits, but the dad who knew her is fading. She's grieving someone who hasn't died.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm grieving something people might not see as a loss. It is one for me."

TRY THIS:
If a loss of yours had no ceremony, make a small one: light a candle, write a letter, plant something, visit a place.

05

People grieve in different ways.

Some people grieve by talking and crying. Others grieve by doing: fixing, organising, working, building something. Neither is more loving. Families often clash because one person thinks the other "isn't grieving" when they are just grieving differently. Culture, faith, age and how your mind works all shape it, too.

For example: After their son's death, one parent wants to talk about him every evening. The other spends weekends restoring his old bike. Each feels the other is getting it wrong. Both are grieving him.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think we grieve differently. Can you tell me what helps you, and I'll tell you what helps me?"

TRY THIS:

Ask someone who shares your loss: "What has helped you most, even a little?" Listen without correcting.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 8

Write it through

Edith, 74, seven months after her husband died, writing to her son and daughter

Write it, wait, then send

Who is it to?

Partner · Co-parent or ex · *Family* · Friend · Housemate · Coworker · More than one person · Someone else

Their name (optional)
Malcolm and Fiona

Your name (optional)
Mum

What kind of message?

Raise something · Reply to something · *Make a plan* · Say sorry · I need a pause

What we need to plan (one thing)

How often we ring and visit. Since your dad died in March, I've had a call every evening at seven and a visit every Sunday.

How I feel about it

tired · rushed · frustrated · unseen · taken for granted · overwhelmed · stretched thin · worried · hurt · disappointed · left out · alone with it · confused · embarrassed · annoyed · sad · on edge · hopeful · *grateful*

What I suggest (one clear suggestion)

Could we change to a call on Wednesdays and Sundays, and I'll ring you if I need you in between?

What I'm NOT saying (optional, but it helps)

I'm not pushing you away. I love hearing from you, and I miss your dad too.

When I'd like a reply

Today · Tomorrow · *By the weekend* · No rush

A GENTLE CHECK

House rules: ✓ One topic · ✓ Facts, not verdicts · ✓ No always or never · ✓ No sarcasm or ALL CAPS · ✓ No "you" accusations · ✓ Says what you're asking for · ✓ A reply-by time

No sharp words found. It reads as calm and clear.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Fiona rang the same evening: "Of course. Will you still tell us on a bad day?" Edith said she would.

Fill in your own: Write it through (spreadloveandacceptance.com/write-it-through)

06

You don't have to let go.

An older idea said healthy grief meant "moving on" and cutting ties. Many grief researchers now see it differently: people often keep a bond with who they lost, in memories, rituals, conversations in their head, and values they carry forward. The relationship changes shape. It doesn't have to end.

For example: A teenager wears her grandfather's watch to exams. She doesn't believe in luck. It just feels like he's with her.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What would they say about this?" "I carry this part of them with me."

TRY THIS:

Choose one way to keep a bond: cook their recipe, tell a story about them, or keep one of their habits.

07

Big changes are losses too, even the good ones.

A new baby, a promotion, retirement, moving country, a child starting school, coming out, or getting well after a long illness can all bring grief for the old life. Change often has three parts: an ending, a confusing in-between time, and a new beginning. The middle part is the hardest, and the easiest to rush.

For example: A couple moves to a new city for a great job. Six months in, one of them feels low and guilty: "We wanted this." They also lost friends, a favourite café and a whole way of life.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I can be glad about this and still miss what came before." "I'm in the in-between. It's supposed to feel unsettled."

TRY THIS:

For one change you're going through, write: what ended, what feels unclear, and one small thing that's new and good.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

When a change is hard to talk about, writing can come first. This is a quiet place to put the words down, at your own pace, and to send them only if you want to.

TOOL **Write it through** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/write-it-through

08

Most people find a way through, and support helps.

Research suggests that many people, over time, find they can live with a loss and still feel joy, even though they never forget. Being with people who let you talk, or not talk, helps. For some, though, grief stays stuck at full strength for a long time and makes daily life very hard.

Doctors call this **prolonged grief**: a strong longing for the person, or being taken over by the loss, most days, still going many months after the death (usually a year or more for adults) and getting in the way of life. That isn't weakness, and there is specific help for it.

For example: A year after his wife died, a man still can't go into their bedroom or see friends. His doctor refers him to a grief counsellor. Slowly, things begin to move.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "It's been a long time and it isn't getting any easier. I think I need more help."

TRY THIS:
Write down two people you could text on a hard day, and one place you could call if those people aren't enough.

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can't control the loss, how long grief lasts, or how other people react to it. You can control small things: eating something, resting, telling one person how you are, and saying no to what you can't manage right now. That is enough for a hard season. More in Part One: who you are today (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)

SATURDAY, 9:40AM

You sit in the car for ten minutes and let the wave come. Then you go back in, and you buy the cereal. At home you text your sister: "Saw Dad's cereal in the shop and cried in the car park." She replies straight away: "Same thing happened to me with his aftershave. Call tonight?" The wave doesn't mean you're back at day one. It means he's still part of your Saturdays.

Losing a partner in later life

After a long marriage, the loss is in everything: the empty chair, the jobs that were always theirs, the paperwork done alone, the first birthday and anniversary without them. Do one small thing at a time. One drawer counts. Ask someone to sit with you for the forms.

Your grown-up children have lost a parent, and you have lost a partner. You may grieve on different timetables. If they start checking on you every day, that comes from love and worry, not control. You can still say what helps: "I love that you ring. Could we make it two evenings a week, and I'll ring you if I need you?"

In everyday life

- **Partners:** After a miscarriage, one partner wants to talk and the other goes quiet. Each worries the other doesn't care.
- **Parents and children:** A child laughs and plays the day after a funeral, then cries at bedtime. Both are grief.
- **Friends:** A friend stops calling after your diagnosis, not from coldness but because they don't know what to say.
- **Work:** A colleague returns after a death and everyone avoids the subject. She feels her loss has been erased.
- **Community:** A neighbourhood loses its library, or a town loses its factory, and many people grieve the same thing together.

On your own: carrying it gently

Grief can be lonely, even with people around. Some things help when you're carrying it alone:

- Give the day a small shape: one meal, one walk, one person you message.
- Expect harder days around dates, and plan something gentle for them.
- Write to who you lost, or about what you lost. Nobody else needs to read it.

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "I don't have to do this fast." "Today I only need to get to tonight."

IF SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU HAS DIED: Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief) goes further, with family after a loss, coming back to people, and a new chapter on your own. On a heavy night, try For a hard evening.

Common mix-ups

- **"There are five stages, in order."** Most people go back and forth. There is no correct order.
- **"After a year you should be over it."** Grief changes over time, but there's no deadline. Anniversaries and birthdays often bring it back.
- **"If I'm not crying, I'm not grieving."** Some people grieve by doing, thinking or staying busy. That counts.
- **"Moving on means forgetting."** You can build a new life and keep a bond with who you lost.
- **"Good changes shouldn't make me sad."** Every change ends something. Missing the old life is normal.
- **"I shouldn't mention their name, it'll upset them."** Many grieving people say hearing the name is a comfort. Ask.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Show up, and keep showing up.** Support often floods in for two weeks and then stops. A text at three months, or on a birthday, can mean a great deal.
- **Offer something specific.** "Can I drop off dinner on Thursday?" is easier to say yes to than "let me know if you need anything."
- **Say the name.** Share a memory. Let them talk, or not.
- **Don't fix or explain.** Skip "everything happens for a reason" and "at least…". Try "I'm so sorry. I'm here."
- **Comfort in, vent out.** If you're upset too, lean on people further from the loss, not on those closest to it.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I don't know what to say, but I'm here." "I was thinking about your mum today. I remember her laugh." "I'm going to the shop, what can I bring you?"

When to get more help

Grief is not an illness. But it's worth talking to a doctor or a grief counsellor if, after many months, the pain isn't easing at all, you can't manage daily life, you feel life has no meaning without the person, or you are drinking or using other things to get through. Many hospices, faith communities and charities offer free bereavement support, including for children.

If you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, please tell someone today. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. If you are in danger right now, call your local emergency number.

If a loss involved violence, or you are grieving a relationship you left because you weren't safe, Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) has free, private help, including after you separate.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now) for a wave that feels too big

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- Calm sounds (spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes) for a quiet few minutes
- Grief and later life: loss, family and a new chapter, with a page for a hard evening
- Grief and change (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions) and ambiguous loss (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/life), in the site's library of research notes
- Moving and life transitions and writing about hard things
- After a loss (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path), in your self-discovery path

More for your situation

- **After a breakup or divorce:** On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own)
- **Families after a loss:** Grief and family · Family rifts after a loss or a will (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts)
- **Children and teens:** Helping children grieve · For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)
- **Big changes:** Empty nest (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest) · Retired together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/retired-together) · Coming home after time apart (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-home) · New parent (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent)
- **Illness and caring:** When one of you is ill (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill) · Caring for someone you love (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers)
- **Friendships:** When a friendship drifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends)

- **More in Part Three:** Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page 108) · Minds that work differently (page 136)

Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Grief is love with nowhere to go.** It hurts because the person, place or life mattered.
- ✓ **It comes in waves, not stages.** A good week and then a bad day is normal, not going backwards.
- ✓ **You don't have to let go.** Many people keep a bond with the person they lost, and that's healthy.
- ✓ **Most people find a way through.** Support helps, and some losses need more help. Both are normal.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 5 · Attachment, trust and belonging page 78
Why losing a bond hurts so much

Part Three · Chapter 12 · Helping others well page 189
Supporting someone who is grieving

Part Three · Chapter 16 · Worry, low mood and trauma page 250
When grief turns into low mood

Part One · Then · Where your lens came from read online
Losses that shaped your lens

PUT IT TO USE

Upset right now?
For a wave that feels too big
spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now

Calm sounds
For a quiet few minutes
spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes

9

PART THREE · CHAPTER 9

Minds that work differently

How autistic, ADHD, sensory and learning differences work, why they are differences and not character flaws, and how people with different minds can meet in the middle.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Brains vary, like bodies do
2. Autism is a different way of sensing and connecting
3. ADHD is about steering attention, not lacking it
4. Everyone has a sensory profile
5. Learning differences aren't about intelligence
6. Masking costs energy
7. Autistic burnout is more than being tired
8. Meltdowns and shutdowns aren't choices
9. Stimming helps, so let it be
10. Deep focus makes switching hard
11. Deep interests are a source of joy and rest
12. Meet in the middle, out loud
13. Labels are tools, and they belong to the person
14. Finding out later in life
15. Getting things started and finished is a skill of its own
16. When demands feel like a threat
17. Not recognising faces isn't rudeness
18. Not speaking isn't the same as having nothing to say
19. Telling friends and dates is your choice
20. Finding your people
21. In everyday life
22. Common mix-ups
23. If you want to help someone else with this
24. When to get more help
25. Tools and reading on this site
26. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Brains vary, like bodies do.** Different isn't broken, and differences can still be disabling in a world built for one kind of mind.
- **Overload isn't a choice.** Meltdowns, shutdowns and burnout are what happens when a nervous system has had too much.

- **Some things help a lot:** less masking, room to stim, time for deep interests, and real rest.
- **Meet in the middle, out loud.** Ask what helps, say what helps you, and use the words each person chooses.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The "How to talk to me" card and "know how you like to be spoken to"** (Part One, Now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)) work because different minds need different input. Saying things plainly is an adjustment that helps almost everyone. Big idea: *tune how you send and receive.*
- **One owner per job and the written job list** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) move memory out of anyone's head and onto paper. That helps ADHD and autistic minds most, and everyone a little. Big idea: *fix the setup, not the person.*

MONDAY, 8:15AM

"Can you just put your shoes on?" For the third time. Your child is lying on the hall floor, hands over his ears, because the new socks "feel wrong." You're late. He's not being difficult. To him, the sock seam feels like sandpaper, and the alarm clock is still ringing in his head.

This chapter is for anyone: neurodivergent people, diagnosed or not, and the people who live, work and learn with them. It explains how these minds work first, then what helps. It can't diagnose anyone, and only you get to choose the labels you use for yourself.

01

Brains vary, like bodies do.

People's brains differ in how they take in the world, focus, move, read, remember and connect with others. "Neurodiversity" is the idea that this variety is natural. "Neurodivergent" describes people whose minds work

differently from what is treated as typical. Different isn't broken. And at the same time, differences can be disabling, especially when the world is built for one kind of mind.

For example: A man who struggled all through school finds out at 40 that he is dyslexic. He's relieved: he was never lazy or stupid. His brain just processes written words differently.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Maybe this isn't a flaw. Maybe it's a difference that needs a different setup."

TRY THIS:

Think of one thing that's hard for you that's easy for others. Ask: is it effort, or is it a different kind of brain?

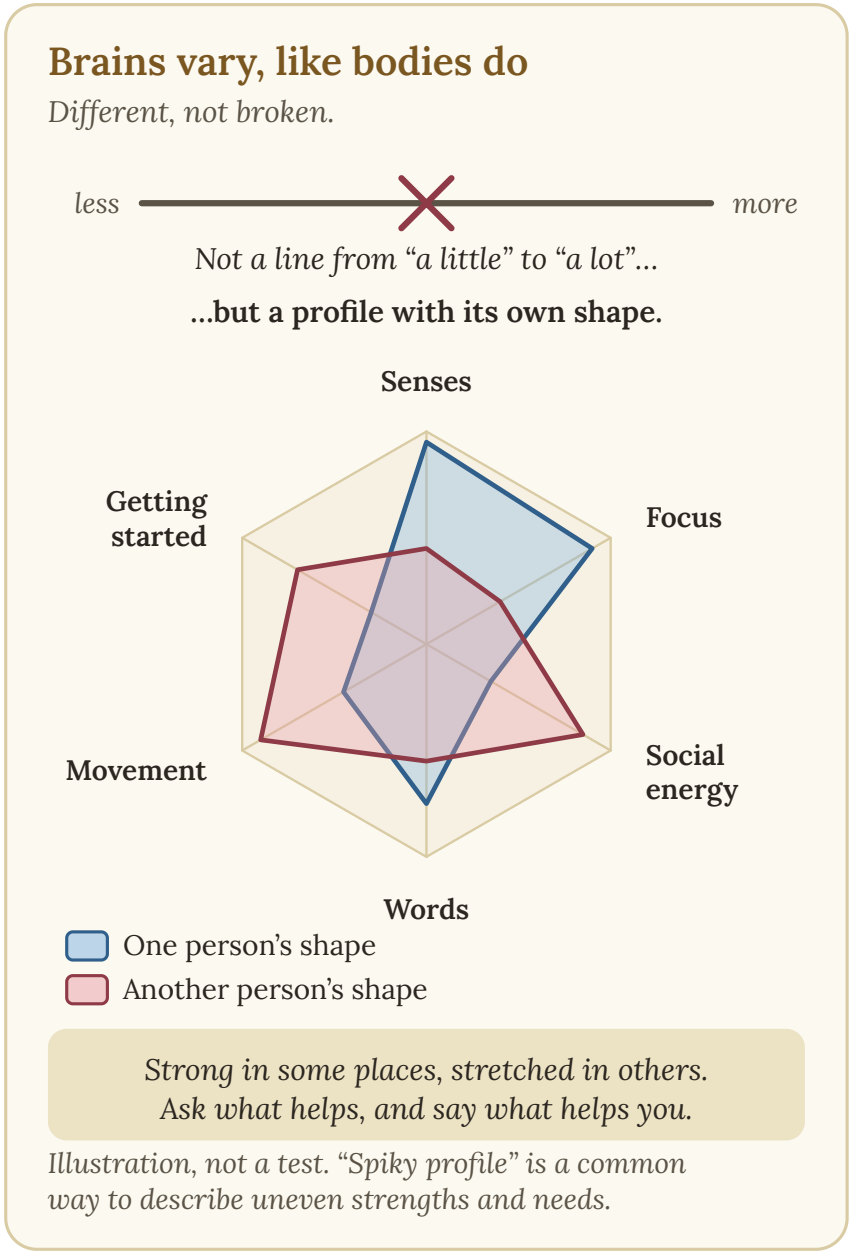


FIGURE 14 Brains vary, like bodies do. A mind has a profile with its own shape, not a place on a line from "a little" to "a lot". Different, not broken.

02

Autism is a different way of sensing and connecting.

Autistic people often communicate more directly and literally, have deep and focused interests, feel senses more (or less) intensely, and find predictability calming. Autism isn't a line from "mild" to "severe." Each autistic person has their own mix of strengths and needs, which can change day to day. Misunderstandings between autistic and non-autistic people usually run both ways.

For example: An autistic coworker says, "Your slides have three typos." She means it as help. Her colleague hears criticism. Neither is wrong; they're using different rules for what kind means.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I like it when people say exactly what they mean. You can be direct with me." "Do you want my honest view, or just support right now?"

TRY THIS:

In one conversation today, say exactly what you mean, with no hints. Notice whether it makes things easier.

03

ADHD is about steering attention, not lacking it.

People with ADHD often have plenty of attention, but find it hard to point it where they choose. Boring tasks can feel impossible; interesting ones can swallow hours. Time can feel slippery ("now" and "not now"), and feelings can come fast and big. It's a real difference in how the brain manages itself, not a lack of effort or care.

For example: A woman with ADHD forgets her friend's birthday, then spends six hours making her an amazing handmade card. The forgetting and the focus come from the same brain.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I care about this. My brain drops things. A reminder really helps, and it doesn't annoy me."

TRY THIS:

Move one thing you keep forgetting out of your head and into the world: an alarm, a note on the door, or a basket by the exit.

04

Everyone has a sensory profile.

We all take in sound, light, touch, smell, taste, movement and signals from inside the body. Some people feel these strongly and get overloaded by noise or scratchy clothes. Others need more input: movement, strong flavours, pressure. Overload isn't being fussy. It's a body at its limit.

For example: Two housemates argue about the kitchen radio. One finds silence eerie; the other finds the radio painful. A rule helps: radio on mornings, headphones in the evening.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"It's not you. The noise in here is too much for me right now. Can we move somewhere quieter?"

TRY THIS:

Notice one sound, light or texture that drains you, and one that calms you. Make one small change today.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Knowing your own sensory profile is useful information, not a complaint. A one-page card lets you share what helps, in your own words.

TOOL **How you connect: how to talk to me** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card

05

Learning differences aren't about intelligence.

Dyslexia (reading and spelling), dyscalculia (numbers), dyspraxia (coordination and planning movement) and language disorders are specific differences, not a measure of how clever someone is. Many people have a "spiky" profile: very strong in some areas, struggling in others. The right tools, like audiobooks, spoken notes or extra time, can level the ground.

For example: A teenager with dyspraxia is called clumsy at football. In drama, he writes and directs the school play. Same boy, different task.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I learn better when I can listen than when I read. Could you send a voice note instead?"

TRY THIS:
Ask someone you live or work with: "What's the easiest way for you to take in information?" Then use it.

06

Masking costs energy.

Many neurodivergent people learn to hide their differences: copying others, forcing eye contact, holding back movements, rehearsing small talk. This is called masking. It can help someone get through a day, but it uses a lot of energy, and over years it can lead to exhaustion, anxiety and burnout.

For example: A student seems fine all day at college, then comes home and can't speak for an hour. She's not being rude. She's recovering from a day of performing.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I need some quiet time after work. It's how I recharge, not a sign I'm upset with you."

TRY THIS:
Notice one place where you can drop the mask a little, and one person you can be fully yourself with. Spend a bit more time there.

07

Autistic burnout is more than being tired.

Autistic burnout is a deep, long-lasting exhaustion. Working with autistic adults, Raymaker and colleagues (2020) described it as long-term exhaustion, loss of skills (like speech, planning or self-care) and lower tolerance of noise, light and other input. It comes from long stress without enough support, and

often lasts months. Rest, fewer demands and less masking help. Pushing harder usually makes it worse.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I'm in burnout. I need fewer demands for a while, not a pep talk." "I can't do phone calls at the moment. Can we message instead?"

TRY THIS:
If you think you might be in burnout, list three demands you could drop, delay or share for a month. If it goes on, or you feel hopeless, talk to a doctor.

08

Meltdowns and shutdowns aren't choices.

A **meltdown** is an involuntary loss of control when overwhelm gets too much: crying, shouting, running off or lashing out. A **shutdown** is the quiet version: going still, losing speech, not being able to respond. Neither is a tantrum. In interviews by Phung and colleagues (2021), autistic young people described meltdowns and shutdowns as separate experiences, both linked to overload. What helps is less: less noise, fewer words, fewer questions, more space and safety. Talking can wait.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
(to someone else) "You're safe. I'm right here. No need to talk." (for yourself) "I'm overloaded. I need quiet for twenty minutes."

TRY THIS:
On a calm day, agree a simple signal for "I'm overloaded" and a quiet place to go.

09

Stimming helps, so let it be.

Stimming means repeated movements or sounds, like rocking, flapping, tapping, humming, pacing or fiddling with something. Most people stim a little (think of a jiggling foot). For many autistic people it matters a lot. In interviews by Kapp and colleagues (2019), autistic adults described stimming

as a way to cope with overwhelming emotions and sensations, and objected to efforts to stop harmless stimming. If it isn't hurting anyone, it doesn't need stopping.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Rocking helps me think. It doesn't mean anything's wrong." "You don't need to stop. It's fine with me."

> TRY THIS:
> Notice what your own hands or body do when you're stressed, focused or happy. That's your stim.

10

Deep focus makes switching hard.

Some minds, often autistic and ADHD ones, focus deeply on one thing at a time. That focus can be a gift: real expertise, flow and joy. It also makes switching tasks hard, so being interrupted can feel like being pulled out of water. Warnings before a change, and routines, help a lot.

For example: A dad calls his daughter to dinner three times and gets more frustrated each time. Then he tries a ten-minute warning, and a five. She comes to the table calm.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Dinner is in ten minutes. I'll come and get you at five to." "Can you give me a warning before we switch?"

> TRY THIS:
> Before you interrupt someone who's focused, give a heads-up and a time. See if it goes more smoothly.

11

Deep interests are a source of joy and rest.

Many autistic people have deep, intense interests, often called special interests. The theory of monotropism (Murray, Lesser and Lawson, 2005) describes autistic attention as pulled strongly into a few things at a time. In a

survey of autistic adults by Grove and colleagues (2018), people who were more motivated by and engaged with their special interests reported higher wellbeing, though very intense engagement went with lower wellbeing.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Can I tell you about this for five minutes? It's how I unwind." "Tell me more. What's the best bit?"

TRY THIS:

Ask someone about their favourite subject, and let them talk for five minutes without steering.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: this site can change to fit your mind too, with bigger text, calmer pages and fewer surprises. Ooh, try it!

TOOL **Read your way** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/how-you-take-things-in

12

Meet in the middle, out loud.

When two kinds of mind live or work together, neither should have to do all the adjusting. Clear, explicit words help everyone: say what you mean, give times, write things down, ask what helps. Changes made for one person, like quiet spaces, written agendas or flexible hours, often help many others too.

For example: A team starts sending meeting agendas a day early. It was for one autistic colleague. Soon everyone says meetings are shorter and better.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"What would make this easier for you?" "Here's what helps me. What helps you?"

TRY THIS:

Swap one "how I work best" fact with someone today: one thing that helps you, and ask for one that helps them.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 9

“How to talk to me” card, for work

Tom, autistic, for his new manager

Your card

Who it’s for

A partner Family A friend *Work (a manager or coworker)*

Name on the card, optional

Tom

WIRING CARD · NOT A DIAGNOSIS

How I receive things best
A written list.

I take words
Literally.

Give me time to answer
Write it down so I can answer later.

Please avoid
A hard topic with no warning. Correcting me in public.

A request lands best as
"Could you ___ by ___?"

Also good to know about me
If I go quiet, I'm processing, not upset. Tell me the plan, and tell me if it changes. Noise, light or touch can wear me out.

Sensory needs
Short breaks in long talks.

Sent with one line: "Here's a short card about how I work best. It's not a request for anything big; it just helps us avoid crossed wires."

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Sharing a card is always the person's own choice.

Fill in your own: "How to talk to me" card (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card)

13

Labels are tools, and they belong to the person.

A diagnosis can bring understanding, support and community. Some people find their way to a label through self-discovery first. Many autistic adults prefer "autistic person"; others prefer "person with autism." The kindest rule is simple: ask, and use the words the person chooses. And never try to diagnose someone else, especially in an argument.

For example: During a row, a partner says, "You're so autistic." It lands as an insult and ends the talk. Later, he apologises and asks what his partner

actually needs.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"How do you like to describe yourself?" "I'm wondering if I might be neurodivergent. I'd like to find out more."

TRY THIS:
If you've wondered about yourself, write down what you've noticed, and decide one small next step: reading, talking to someone, or asking a doctor.

14

Finding out later in life.

More and more adults are finding out they are autistic, or have ADHD, in their thirties, fifties or seventies. Many were missed as children, especially women. In interviews by Leedham and colleagues (2020), women diagnosed at forty or older described how exhausting it had been to go so long without an explanation, and how much the diagnosis changed how they understood their lives. Relief, grief and joy can all come together.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I've just found out I'm autistic. I'm still working out what it means." "That explains so much about my life."

TRY THIS:
If you've found out later in life, look for one autistic-led group, book or online space, and give yourself time to make sense of it.

15

Getting things started and finished is a skill of its own.

Planning, starting, switching, remembering what you were doing and keeping track of time are called **executive function**. Many autistic and ADHD people find some of these harder, on some days more than others. A review of 235 studies by Demetriou and colleagues (2018) found differences in executive function in autism on average, with a lot of variation between people. It isn't

laziness. It's the brain's self-management system working differently, and it often helps to move the managing out of your head and into the world.

For example: A woman can write a brilliant report but can't get herself to post a parcel. Putting the parcel by the door, with a sticky note and a phone alarm, gets it done.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Could you send me that as a list? Spoken steps fall out of my head." "I'm not ignoring it. Starting is the hard bit for me."

TRY THIS:

Pick one task that keeps not happening. Make the first step tiny and visible: a note, an alarm, or the thing left where you'll trip over it. See routines that help (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids) and Wired differently (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wired-differently).

16

When demands feel like a threat.

Some people, often autistic, feel strong anxiety when asked or expected to do things, even things they want to do. Avoiding the demand can look like refusing, joking, distracting or a meltdown. The profile was first described as "pathological demand avoidance," or PDA, by Newson and colleagues (2003).

It is not in the main diagnostic manuals, and researchers disagree about it: a review by Kildahl and colleagues (2021) found the evidence limited and mostly based on parent reports. Many people who identify with it prefer the phrase "persistent drive for autonomy." Whatever it is called, what helps tends to be the same: less pressure, more choice, and requests that feel like invitations.

For example: A boy who refuses "Put your coat on now" happily puts it on when his dad says, "It's cold out. Coat or jumper, your choice."

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I wonder if we could…" "No rush. Which would you rather?" (for yourself) "Being told makes it harder. Can I choose when?"

TRY THIS:

Turn one daily instruction into a choice or an invitation this week, and see what changes.

17

Not recognising faces isn't rudeness.

Prosopagnosia, or face blindness, means finding it hard to recognise people's faces, sometimes even close friends out of context. It can be something you're born with, and it often runs in families (NHS). Many autistic people also find remembering faces harder, as a review by Weigelt and colleagues (2012) found. People who don't recognise you may be relying on voices, hair, clothes or where they usually see you.

For example: A man walks past his neighbour in the supermarket without a word. She feels snubbed. Later he explains he didn't recognise her without her dog. Now she says hello first, with her name.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm bad with faces, so please say who you are when you say hi." (to someone else) "Hi, it's Jo from next door."

TRY THIS:

If faces are hard for you, tell one or two people you see often. If not, try saying your name when you greet someone out of context.

18

Not speaking isn't the same as having nothing to say.

Some autistic people speak rarely, sometimes, or not at all, and some lose speech when stressed. Many communicate through **AAC** (augmentative and alternative communication): typing, letter boards, picture cards, apps or sign. Using AAC doesn't stop speech developing; a review by Millar, Light and Schlosser (2006) found it did not hold speech back, and may help it. The safest starting point is to presume competence: assume the person understands and has something to say, and give them the time and tools to say it.

For example: At a family meal, a non-speaking teenager types on her tablet. Her uncle used to talk about her in front of her. Now he waits, reads her reply, and answers her directly.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Take your time. I'll wait." "Would you rather type or point?" (for yourself) "I can't talk right now. I can type."

TRY THIS:

Talk to the person, not about them. Wait longer than feels natural for an answer.

19

Telling friends and dates is your choice.

Whether to tell someone you're autistic or ADHD, and when, is up to you. Telling can bring understanding: in a study by Sasson and Morrison (2019), people formed better first impressions of autistic adults when they knew they were autistic, especially if they knew more about autism.

But people don't always respond well, and interviews by Au-Yeung and colleagues (2025) describe autistic adults weighing hope for support against fear of not being believed. Many people share a little at a time, starting with what helps rather than a label.

For example: On a second date, a woman says, "I'm autistic, so I'm pretty direct, and I'd rather walk than sit in a loud bar." Her date says, "Honestly, same."

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm autistic. For me that means…" "I won't always pick up hints, so please just tell me." (if someone shares with you) "Thanks for telling me. What helps?"

TRY THIS:

Write one sentence about what helps you, without a label. Practise it. You can add the label later if and when you want to.

20

Finding your people.

Many autistic people describe finding other autistic people as a turning point: not having to translate, explain or mask. Research backs this up. Cooper, Smith and Russell (2017) found that autistic people who felt more connected to other autistic people had higher self-esteem, and through that, less anxiety and depression. Being autistic can be an identity and a community, not only a diagnosis.

For example: After a late diagnosis, a man joins an online group for autistic adults who love maps. For the first time, a conversation doesn't tire him out.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"There are people who work like me." "I can belong somewhere without masking."

TRY THIS:
Look for one autistic-led group, book, podcast or online space about something you love.

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can't change how your brain, or anyone else's, is wired. You can learn how yours works, say what helps, and ask others what helps them. Meeting in the middle means both people move a little. If you're always the one adjusting, it's fair to say so. More in Part One: who you are today

MONDAY, 8:30AM

You stop asking. You sit on the hall floor next to him and say quietly, "Socks feel wrong?" He nods. You switch off the alarm clock that's still beeping in the bedroom and fetch the old seamless pair. Two minutes later his shoes are on. You're ten minutes late, and nobody shouted. That evening you order three more pairs of the seamless socks, and he chooses the colours.

In everyday life

On your own

Knowing how your mind works helps you build a life that fits it, and spot burnout early. See Get to know your wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path).

- **With a partner:** Swap "how I work best" notes: how you like plans, messages, touch and time alone. See Neurodivergent relationships (spreadloveandacceptance.com/neurodivergent-relationships).
- **Parents and children:** Behaviour often has a sensory or overload reason. Ask "What's too much right now?" before "Why are you doing this?"
- **With friends:** A friend who cancels at the last minute may be out of energy, not out of care. Offer easy options, like a walk or a message.
- **At work:** Written agendas, clear deadlines and quiet spaces help many people, not only neurodivergent ones. See Neurodiversity at work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **If you have ADHD and share a home:** Make the chore tools lighter. Log three days, not seven, with a tally on the fridge. Own a few jobs completely, each with a labelled alarm, instead of helping a bit with everything. Forgetting is a setup problem to fix together. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-9-minds-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"Everyone's a bit autistic."** Everyone has some traits in common, but autism is a whole pattern, present across life. The phrase can make real needs sound small.
- **"ADHD just means you can't sit still."** Many people with ADHD, especially girls and women, are mostly inattentive or restless on the inside.
- **"They seem fine to me."** Masking can hide a lot. Seeming fine isn't the same as being fine.
- **"Adjustments are special treatment."** They remove barriers so people can do what's expected. Glasses aren't special treatment either.
- **"Autistic people lack empathy."** Many feel others' feelings strongly. Differences in how empathy is shown run both ways.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Believe them** about what's hard, what hurts and what helps, even if it's different for you.
- **Be clear.** Say what you mean, give times, and write down anything important.
- **Ask, don't assume.** Every neurodivergent person is different. "What helps you?" beats any list.
- **Protect their energy.** Quiet time, warnings before changes and a way out of loud places aren't extras.
- **Enjoy their interests.** Listening to someone talk about what they love is one of the warmest things you can do.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Is there anything about this place, or this plan, that would make it hard for you?" "You don't have to explain. Just tell me what you need."

When to get more help

If you wonder whether a difference is part of ongoing difficulties at school, work or home, for you or someone you care for, a doctor, school support staff or a psychologist can talk you through an assessment. Waiting lists can be long, so start early and write down what you notice.

Burnout, depression and anxiety are more common among neurodivergent people, often because of the stress of living in a world that doesn't fit. If you're exhausted most days, losing skills you used to have, or feeling hopeless, please talk to a doctor. **If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself,** please tell someone today.

In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines.

A difference never excuses harm, and it never makes someone deserve harm. If someone uses your differences to control or belittle you, Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) has free, private help.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- Communication style quiz (spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz) for a friendly look at how you send and receive words

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- The wiring card (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card): a one-page "how I communicate" card to share
- Wired differently: neurodiversity and communication, including the double empathy problem
- Know your own wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/know-yourself)
- Research notes: autism (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/wiring), ADHD, monotropism, masking, sensory profiles and sensory load (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/stress)

More for your situation

- **Couples:** Neurodivergent relationships
- **Parents and grandparents:** When a child has ADHD · Neurodivergent families
- **At work:** Neurodiversity at work · Autistic at work
- **Teens:** For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)
- **Sharing a home:** Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room)
- **On your own:** Get to know your wiring · Part One: who you are today
- **More in Part Three:** Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page 108) · Loss, grief and big life changes (page 122)

Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

FOR AUTISTIC READERS. If you're autistic, or wondering, these are written with you in mind: masking and autistic burnout earlier in this chapter; the double empathy problem, on why misunderstandings run both ways; when feelings are hard to name (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-1-feelings-in-depth) (alexithymia) in Chapter 1; the wiring card, a one-page "how I work best" card to share; and Autistic at work, with words for asking for what you need.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Brains vary, like bodies do.** Different isn't broken, and differences can still be disabling in a world built for one kind of mind.
- ✓ **Overload isn't a choice.** Meltdowns, shutdowns and burnout are what happens when a nervous system has had too much.
- ✓ **Some things help a lot:** less masking, room to stim, time for deep interests, and real rest.
- ✓ **Meet in the middle, out loud.** Ask what helps, say what helps you, and use the words each person chooses.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words
Getting to know your own wiring — read online

Part Two · Chapter I · Why we get out of tune
Pace, tone and meeting in the middle — read online

Part Three · Chapter 14 · Personality, temperament and change
Dials, not boxes — page 220

Part Three · Chapter 4 · How communication works
Saying it so it lands for different minds — page 61

PUT IT TO USE



Communication style quiz
For a friendly look at how you send and receive words
spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz



The wiring card
A one-page "how I communicate" card to share
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card

10

PART THREE · CHAPTER 10

Values, meaning and a good life: what philosophy offers everyday life

What matters to you, how to find it, what to do when two good things pull against each other, and what a few very old ideas can offer an ordinary, busy week.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Values are directions, not finish lines
2. Your strong feelings point to what you value
3. Two good things can pull in different directions
4. Put your effort where it can land
5. A good life is more than a good mood
6. Meaning comes from ordinary places
7. Different values aren't wrong values
8. Values live in small, everyday acts
9. In everyday life
10. Common mix-ups
11. If you want to help someone else with this
12. When to get more help
13. Tools and reading on this site
14. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Values are directions, not finish lines.** You never "complete" kindness. You keep turning towards it.
- **Strong feelings point to what you value.** Anger often guards fairness; hurt often guards closeness.
- **Meaning comes from ordinary places.** People, care and everyday work give most of us most of our meaning.
- **Values live in small acts.** One small thing this week, done because it matters, counts.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **"Two kinds of fair"** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) works because people value different good things. Agreeing which kind of fair you mean stops two good values fighting. Big idea: *notice the quiet incentives.*
- **"Start with what matters to you"** (Part One, Next (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next)) turns a value into one small goal, because values are directions, not finish lines.

SUNDAY, 9PM

The week ahead is full, and none of it feels like yours. You're not sad, exactly. You just can't remember the last time you did something because it mattered to you, and not because it was next on the list.

This chapter is about values: the things you care about, the direction you want your life to face, and what makes a life feel good and worth living. It borrows from psychology, and from philosophy, which has been asking "how should I live?" for more than two thousand years. You don't need to have read any of it. Everything here is in plain words.

01

Values are directions, not finish lines.

A goal is something you can tick off: run a 5k, paint the hall, pass the test. A value is a direction you keep walking in: looking after your health, making your home feel cared for, being a fair friend. You never "finish" kindness. That's why values still work on the days when goals fall apart.

For example (on your own): Bethan planned to go to the gym three times this week and went once. She felt like a failure. Then she asked what the goal was for: "looking after my body, so I have energy for my kids." She walked for twenty minutes at lunch. The goal slipped. The direction didn't.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What is this goal for? What do I care about underneath it?" "I can't do the big thing today. What's one small step in the same direction?"

TRY THIS:

Pick one goal you have. Ask "what is this for?" three times in a row, and write down where you end up.

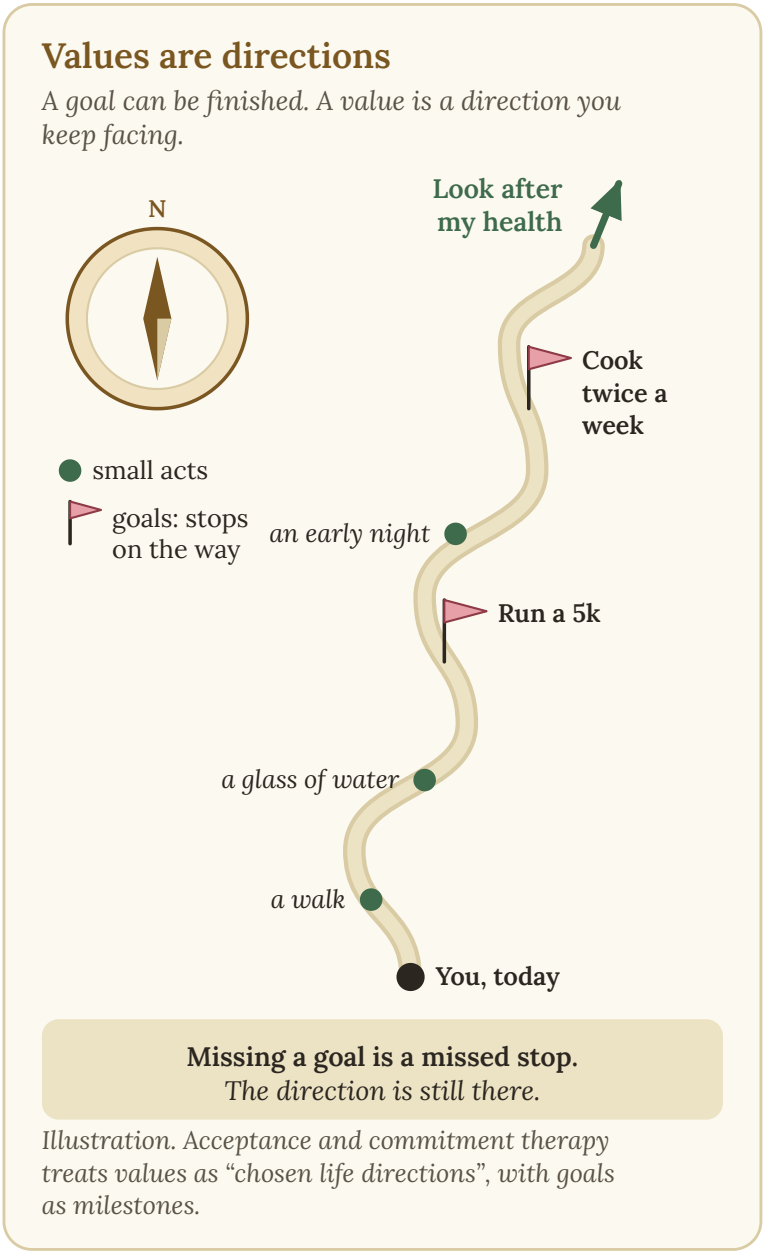


FIGURE 15 Values are directions, not finish lines. Goals are stops on the way; missing one doesn't change the direction.

02

Your strong feelings point to what you value.

You don't have to invent your values from nothing. They show up in your strongest reactions. Anger often means something you care about has been stepped on. Envy can point to something you want for yourself. Sadness often shows what you love. A feeling is a signal, and a value is often what it's pointing at.

For example (a coworker): Sacha is furious when a colleague takes credit for the team's work. Under the anger is a value: fairness, and seeing people's effort. Once Sacha names it, he can talk about fairness in the next meeting, instead of just being angry at one person.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I think I'm upset because fairness really matters to me. It isn't about wanting to win."

> TRY THIS:
> Think of the last time you felt strongly, good or bad. Finish this sentence: "That mattered to me because I care about…"

03

Two good things can pull in different directions.

Most hard choices aren't good against bad. They are good against good: honesty and kindness, freedom and safety, family and rest. Feeling torn doesn't mean you're confused or weak. It means you care about more than one thing. Even when you choose well, it's normal to feel a little sad about the side you didn't choose.

For example (a parent and child): A mum cares about being honest and about protecting her eight-year-old. When the family dog is very ill, she doesn't pick one. She tells the truth, gently, in words a child can hold: "Biscuit is very poorly. The vet is helping, and we'll look after him together."

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "Which two good things are pulling at me here?" "Can I honour some of both, even if I can't have all of either?"

TRY THIS:

Name a choice you feel stuck on. Write the good thing on each side. Notice how it feels to see that you're torn between two goods, not between right and wrong.

04

Put your effort where it can land.

About two thousand years ago, a teacher called Epictetus, who had been born into slavery, taught that some things are up to us and some aren't. Your own choices, effort and how you treat people are up to you. Other people's choices, the weather and the past are not. Worry often goes to the second pile. Values live in the first.

For example (a partner): Ingrid wants her partner to enjoy Christmas with her family. She can't make him enjoy it. She can plan a shorter visit, include a walk he'll like, and be warm herself. That's her part, and it's enough.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I can't make this go well. I can choose how I show up."

TRY THIS:

Write one worry in two columns: the parts that are up to you, and the parts that aren't. Pick one small thing from the first column and do it.

05

A good life is more than a good mood.

Feeling good matters. But many thinkers, from the Greek philosopher Aristotle to psychologists today, describe a second kind of wellbeing: growing, using your strengths, being a good friend, and doing things that matter even when they're hard. Aristotle called it flourishing. He thought we build it the way we build any skill: by practice, a little at a time.

For example (a friend): Jade spent a month helping a friend move out of a bad flat. It was tiring and not much fun. But looking back, she says it was one of the best months of her year. It wasn't pleasant. It was worthwhile.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Was today a good day, or a worthwhile day? Both count."

TRY THIS:

Tonight, write down one thing that felt good today and one thing that felt worthwhile. Notice whether they are the same thing.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

If you enjoy big questions, try putting philosophy next to psychology and see what they share. It's one of my favourite rainy-day games.

TOOL **Learn by doing: connect two fields of study** ·
spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath

06

Meaning comes from ordinary places.

Researchers who study meaning often describe three parts. Your life makes some sense to you. You are heading somewhere. And your life matters to someone. Most meaning doesn't come from big moments. It comes from people, from work done with care, and from small roles that others count on.

For example (in the community): Walter is retired and lives alone since his wife died. His days went quiet. Now he reads to children at the library one morning a week. It gives him a reason to iron a shirt, and people who notice when he isn't there.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Who would notice if I didn't show up? Who do I show up for?"

TRY THIS:

List three roles you play, big or small: neighbour, sister, the one who waters the office plants. Next to each, write who it matters to.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 10

Keep your little rituals alive

Lachlan and Sunita, who lead a hybrid team of nine together

Keep your little rituals alive

Person A
Lachlan

Person B
Sunita

Date
2 October 2026

Part A: Our rituals, big and small

Ritual or habit	How often	How it's doing	What it gives us, or what got in the way
Monday coffee call, cameras optional	*Weekly*	*Fading*	*Half the team stopped coming when it moved to 8:30*
Friday "one good thing" round in the team chat	*Weekly*	*Alive*	*Five minutes; people notice each other's work*
A card and lunch when someone leaves	*Now and then*	*Alive*	*People leave feeling thanked*
Office day with lunch together	*Monthly*	*Stopped*	*Stopped when the office moved; the three who work from home felt like guests*
Hello and goodbye in the chat, start and end of day	*Daily*	*New idea*	*So nobody wonders who's around*

PART B: WHERE YOUR RITUALS STAND

Your rituals
5 rituals listed. Alive: 2 · Fading: 1 · Stopped: 1 · New idea: 1.

Fading or stopped
Monday coffee call, cameras optional, Office day with lunch together.

New ideas
Hello and goodbye in the chat, start and end of day.

Rituals lapse for ordinary reasons: a new job, a baby, a move, an illness, a hard year. A stopped one isn't a failure. Pick one to restart below, or let it go on purpose.

Part C: One to restart, or start

The ritual
Monday coffee call

The smallest version that still counts
Ten minutes at 9:15, no work talk, cameras optional

The first time: when, and who will suggest it
Next Monday; Sunita sends the invite

What would make it easy to skip, and how we'll protect it (optional)
A busy week. We keep it then too, just shorter.

Part D (optional): One to let go, with thanks

The ritual
Office day with lunch together

What it gave us
A day all together, back when we all lived near the office

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The sheet is written for couples and families, and it works for a team: the rituals are what make a group feel like one.

Fill in your own: Keep your little rituals alive (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-15)

07

Different values aren't wrong values.

Two people can share a home, a family or a team and still put the same good things in a different order. One puts safety first; another puts adventure first. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin argued that there are many real goods in life, and they can't all be ranked on one scale. That leaves room to disagree without either person being bad.

For example (housemates): Jasper values a calm, tidy home. His housemate Darnell values an open door and friends dropping by. For months it was "messy" against "uptight." Once they named the values, it became a plan: open house on Fridays, quiet Sundays.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I think we care about different good things here. Can we each say what matters to us about it?"

TRY THIS:
In your next disagreement, ask: "What matters to you about this?" Listen for the value, not just the position.

08

Values live in small, everyday acts.

A good life is built mostly from small things done again and again: how you greet people, whether you keep small promises, how you talk about someone who isn't in the room. The Chinese teacher Confucius taught that small, everyday courtesies shape who we become. Later thinkers who wrote about care said that being good starts with paying attention to the person in front of you.

For example (a stranger): At the supermarket, an older man is struggling with the card machine. You wait without sighing, and say "No rush." It costs forty seconds. It might be the kindest moment of his day.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What would the person I want to be do in the next five minutes?"
"When I drift from my values, I don't need to punish myself. I just turn back."

TRY THIS:

Pick one value. Choose one tiny act that shows it, and do it each day this week.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: a value can be as small as a cup of tea made just the way someone likes it. A "What feels like care" card helps you learn what feels like care to each of you.

TOOL **How you connect: what feels like care** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/love-languages

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can choose your direction, notice when you drift, and turn back without shame. You can't choose other people's values for them, and you don't have to adopt theirs to love them. You can share what matters to you, listen to what matters to them, and look for the places where your directions overlap.

SUNDAY, 9:20PM

You write three words on the back of an envelope: "people, health, making things." Then one small thing for this week under each: call Gran, walk on Wednesday, finish the shelf. The week is still full. But now some of it is yours.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Three words on an envelope can be enough. Look at them on Sunday and pick one small thing for each. See Part One, Next.

- **With a partner:** You may rank the same values differently, like security and adventure. Say what each of you is protecting before you argue about the plan.
- **Family:** Two generations can both value "family" and mean different things by it: being close by, or being free to go. Ask what it means to them.
- **Friends:** Friendships often rest on one shared value, like loyalty or fun. Naming it can help when life pulls you apart. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **At work:** When a job keeps asking you to act against a value, the strain shows up as tiredness or cynicism. Naming the clash is a first step. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **In your community:** Volunteering, a faith group or a club can be a place to act on a value with other people.

Common mix-ups

- **"Values are rules."** Rules say what you must do. Values say what you care about. Rules can be handed to you. Values have to be yours to work.
- **"If I really valued it, I'd never fail at it."** Everyone drifts from their values. The value is the direction you turn back to, not proof that you never wandered.
- **"Meaning has to be something big."** For most people, most meaning comes from small, steady things: people, care, ordinary work.
- **"Happiness is the point of life."** Feeling good matters. So does doing things that matter. A worthwhile day can be a tiring one.
- **"My values should match my partner's, or my family's."** Close people often share some values and rank others differently. That's normal, and it can be talked about.
- **"Philosophy is only for clever people."** The old questions are everyone's questions: what matters, what's fair, what's up to me. You're already asking them.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Ask, don't tell.** "What matters most to you about this?" helps more than "Here's what you should care about."
- **Notice values out loud.** "You stayed late to help your friend. Loyalty really matters to you, doesn't it?" People often see their values for the first time in someone else's words.
- **With children,** name the value when you see it: "You shared, even though you wanted it. That was generous." It teaches more than a lecture.
- **Don't use values as a weapon.** "I thought you valued family" is a guilt trip, not a question. Ask what family means to them instead.
- **Respect a different order.** You can disagree with someone's choice and still see the good thing they were reaching for.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "What would a good outcome look like to you?" "What do you want to be able to say about how you handled this, a year from now?"

When to get more help

Feeling a bit lost or flat for a while is part of being human. But some signs mean it's worth talking to someone trained:

- Life has felt empty or pointless for more than two weeks, and things you used to enjoy don't reach you. That can be depression, which is common and treatable. A doctor or counsellor is a good first step.
- You have thoughts of not wanting to be alive. Please talk to someone today. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. If you are in danger now, call your local emergency number.
- Someone in your life is pushing you to give up what matters to you, cutting you off from friends, or making you afraid to disagree. That's about control, not values. The page When it's more than a rough patch (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) can help you think it through.

Some therapies, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), work directly with values. A counsellor can help you find yours when everything feels foggy.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Your self-discovery path (spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path), step by step, and Professor Puddles (spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask), the site's chat host, if you want to think out loud.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Part One, Next: start with what matters: a short values step from the self-discovery part of the book.
- Library: values, what matters most (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/motivation) and self-determination theory.
- Library: why new things stop feeling new (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/life) and comparing yourself to others.
- Stories from philosophy: What is up to us (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth), Three kinds of friendship and The circles of Hierocles.

More for your situation

- **On your own after a big change:** On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own) · Empty nest (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest) · A new chapter after loss (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief)
- **Couples with different priorities:** Money together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/money-together) · The Frequency Framework (spreadloveandacceptance.com/frequency-framework)
- **Families with different beliefs:** Two faiths, one family (spreadloveandacceptance.com/two-faiths) · Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out)
- **Friends and work:** Friends · At work

- **Teens working out who they are:** For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens) · Growing up (spreadloveandacceptance.com/growing-up)
- Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

More in Part Three

← Chapter 9: Minds that work differently (page 136) · Chapter 11: Healing after hurt → (page 174) · All chapters in the contents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/contents)

A limit to keep in mind: This chapter shares ideas to think with, not answers to follow. Your values are yours to find, and it's fine if they change as your life does.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Values are directions, not finish lines.** You never "complete" kindness. You keep turning towards it.
- ✓ **Strong feelings point to what you value.** Anger often guards fairness; hurt often guards closeness.
- ✓ **Meaning comes from ordinary places.** People, care and everyday work give most of us most of our meaning.
- ✓ **Values live in small acts.** One small thing this week, done because it matters, counts.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming
Turning values into one small goal — read online

Part Two · Chapter IV · Two kinds of fair
Two kinds of fair — read online

Part Three · Chapter 17 · Groups, influence and culture
Whose values a group rewards — page 267

Part Three · Chapter 7 · Self-worth, shame and self-compassion
Worth that is not a score — page 108

PUT IT TO USE

Your self-discovery path
Step by step, and Professor Puddles, the site's chat host, if you want to think out loud
spreadloveandacceptance.com/self-path

Part One, Next: start with what matters
A short values step from the self-discovery part of the book
spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next

11

PART THREE · CHAPTER 11

Healing after hurt: repair, forgiveness, and when to get help

How hurt heals: why it lingers, how small breaks get mended, what a real apology sounds like, what forgiveness is and isn't, and when it's time to get more help.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Hurt is real, and healing takes time
2. Every close relationship has breaks. Repair is what counts
3. Telling someone they hurt you
4. A real apology names it, owns it, and mends it
5. Forgiveness isn't forgetting, excusing or going back
6. You can heal even if they never say sorry
7. Trust comes back in small, kept promises
8. Going back is a choice. Safety comes first
9. Look after the hurt part of you
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Hurt is real, and healing takes time.** Replaying it doesn't mean you're weak. It means it mattered.
- **Repair is what counts.** Every close relationship has breaks. A real apology names it, owns it and mends it.
- **Forgiveness isn't going back.** You can forgive without forgetting, excusing or letting someone back in.
- **Safety comes first.** You can heal even if they never say sorry, and you never owe anyone a risk to your safety.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **"Get back in tune before you carry on" and "go back in with a clear sentence"** (Part Two, Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1)) are repair in small: breaks are normal, and coming back is the skill. Big idea: *tune how you send and receive*.
- **The monthly look-back** (Part Two, Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5)) includes "look back even when nothing is slipping", because small hurts repaired early don't harden into resentment.

> THURSDAY, 2AM
>
> *It was one sentence, three weeks ago. They've probably forgotten it. You haven't. It plays again, word for word, and you think of all the things you could have said back. You're tired of carrying it, and you don't know how to put it down.*

Everyone gets hurt, and everyone hurts other people, mostly without meaning to. This chapter explains how hurt works, how relationships mend, and how you can heal, with or without the other person. It's for small hurts and bigger ones. If someone is hurting you on purpose, or you feel afraid, start with safety first: Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety)

01

Hurt is real, and healing takes time.

Being hurt by someone shows that something mattered: the person, your trust, your sense of being respected. The mind replays hurts because it's trying to understand them and keep you safe. Healing isn't a straight line. The feeling can come back on an anniversary, or when something reminds you. That doesn't mean you've failed. It means you're still healing.

For example (on your own): Months after a friend said something cruel at a party, Kwesi feels a jolt when he hears that song again. He reminds himself: "That's an old bruise being pressed, not a new wound."

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This hurts because it mattered." "A feeling coming back doesn't mean I'm back at the start."

TRY THIS:

When a hurt replays, notice it, name it ("there's that memory again"), and gently bring your attention to something in the room you can see or touch.

02

Every close relationship has breaks. Repair is what counts.

No relationship is smooth all the time. People snap, forget, misread and let each other down. Research on parents and babies, on couples and on therapy all points the same way: breaks are normal. What matters most is whether they get mended. A small repair, done soon, often makes a relationship feel safer than if the break had never happened.

For example (a parent and child): Dad snaps at his son for spilling juice. Twenty minutes later he sits down next to him: "I was grumpy and I shouted. That wasn't fair. Spills happen. Want to help me make a new one?"

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

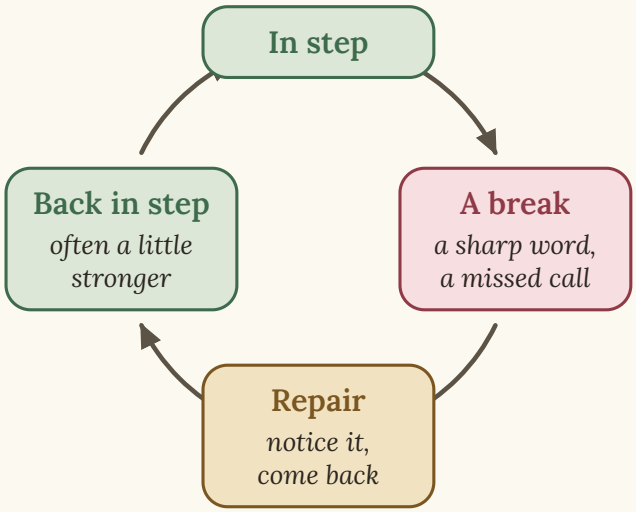
"Can I have a do-over? That came out badly." "I didn't like how I spoke to you earlier. I'm sorry."

TRY THIS:

Think of a small break this week, with anyone. Go back and repair it with one sentence.

Every close relationship has breaks

What counts is coming back.



A real apology

Name it	Own it	Mend it
say what you did	*no "but"*	*now and next time*

Trust comes back in small, kept promises.

Everyday breaks and repairs show up in parent and baby play (Tronick), in couples (Gottman's "repair attempts") and in therapy (Eubanks and colleagues, 2018).

FIGURE 16 Every close relationship has breaks; what counts is the repair. A real apology names it, owns it and mends it.

03

Telling someone they hurt you.

People can't mend what they don't know about. Saying "that hurt" is a risk, but it gives the relationship a chance. It works best when you describe what happened and how it felt, rather than what kind of person they are. Pick a calm moment, not the middle of an argument.

For example (a friend): Amara says to her friend: "When you told the group about my breakup before I was ready, I felt exposed. I'd like to be the one who shares my news." She didn't call her friend a gossip. She said what happened and what she needs.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"When... happened, I felt... What I'd like is..." "I'm telling you because I want us to be okay."

TRY THIS:

Write your sentence before you say it: what happened, how you felt, what you'd like. Keep it to three short lines.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 11

Write it through

Carys, writing to her brother Owen

Write it, wait, then send

Who is it to?

Partner · Co-parent or ex · *Family* · Friend · Housemate · Coworker · More than one person · Someone else

Their name (optional)
Owen

Your name (optional)
Carys

What kind of message?

Raise something · Reply to something · Make a plan · Say sorry · I need a pause

What happened (facts only, one thing)

At Dad's 70th on Saturday, you said to everyone at the table that I don't visit. I visited three times in September.

How it landed for me

tired · rushed · frustrated · unseen · taken for granted · overwhelmed · stretched thin · worried · *hurt* · disappointed · left out · alone with it · confused · *embarrassed* · annoyed · sad · on edge · hopeful · grateful

What I'm asking for (one clear ask)

Could we talk on the phone this week about how we share the visits?

What I'm NOT saying (optional, but it helps)

I'm not angry with you as a person.

When I'd like a reply

Today · Tomorrow · *By the weekend* · No rush

A GENTLE CHECK

House rules: ✓ One topic · ✓ Facts, not verdicts · ✓ No always or never · ✓ No sarcasm or ALL CAPS · ✓ No "you" accusations · ✓ Says what you're asking for · ✓ A reply-by time

No sharp words found. It reads as calm and clear.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Then the tool asks her to wait before she sends it.

Fill in your own: Write it through (spreadloveandacceptance.com/write-it-through)

04

A real apology names it, owns it, and mends it.

"Sorry if you were upset" doesn't heal much. A real apology says what you did, takes responsibility without excuses, shows you understand how it affected the other person, and offers to put it right or do things differently. Research, such as a study led by Roy Lewicki (2016), suggests owning it and offering repair are the parts that matter most.

For example (a coworker): Leila presented a shared idea in a meeting as if it were hers. The next day she tells her colleague: "I presented our idea as mine. That wasn't fair to you. I'll email the team today and say it was joint work."

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I did... That was my doing. I can see it left you feeling... Here's what I'll do."

TRY THIS:

Next time you say sorry, check for the four parts: what I did, it was mine, how it affected you, what I'll do now. See Apology languages (spreadloveandacceptance.com/apology-languages) for more.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

An apology lands best when it's plain: what happened, that it was yours, and what you'll do now. Rewind the talk can help you find those words.

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

05

Forgiveness isn't forgetting, excusing or going back.

Forgiveness is usually described as letting go of resentment and the wish to get even. It's something that happens inside you. It doesn't mean saying what happened was okay. It doesn't mean forgetting. And it doesn't mean you have to trust the person again or have them in your life. Forgiveness is a choice, often a slow one, and you never owe it on someone else's timetable.

For example (a grown-up child and a parent): Danielle forgave her father for missing much of her childhood. She still keeps visits short, and she still doesn't leave her kids alone with him when he drinks. Forgiving him and protecting her family both feel right.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I can let go of wanting to get even, and still keep my limits." "I don't have to forgive today. I can just stop feeding the anger today."

TRY THIS:

Write down what forgiving someone would mean to you, and what it would not mean. Seeing the difference can make it feel possible, or show you that you aren't ready, which is fine too.

06

You can heal even if they never say sorry.

Waiting for an apology that never comes can keep you stuck. The person may be gone, unwilling, or unable to understand. Healing doesn't have to depend on them. You can make sense of what happened, tell your story to someone safe, and decide what it means for you now.

For example (an ex-partner): After a hard breakup, Martha writes a letter she never sends. She says everything: what hurt, what she wished, what she's taking with her. Then she puts it away. Nothing changed for him. Something shifted for her.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I don't need them to understand for my healing to count."

TRY THIS:

Write about the hurt for fifteen minutes, three or four days in a row. Write about the facts and your feelings. If it ever makes you feel much worse, stop, and talk to someone instead.

07

Trust comes back in small, kept promises.

After trust is broken, one big apology rarely rebuilds it. Trust grows back slowly, in many small moments where someone does what they said they'd do. If you broke trust, being patient and consistent matters more than a grand gesture. If you were let down, it's fair to watch what someone does, not just what they say.

For example (partners): Declan hid a credit card debt from his partner. After it came out, he offered to share his bank statements each month, without being

asked. After a year of small, steady openness, his partner says she can breathe again.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I know my words aren't enough. I want to show you, over time." "I need to see it for a while before I can feel it."

TRY THIS:
If you're rebuilding trust, choose one small promise you can keep every week, and keep it.

08

Going back is a choice. Safety comes first.

After a hurt, you can mend the relationship, change its shape, or step away. All three can be healthy. If someone keeps hurting you after you've told them, if you feel afraid of them, or if they control, threaten or put you down, the work is to protect yourself, not to repair. Counselling together isn't advised when someone is afraid of their partner.

For example (housemates): Ellie's housemate borrowed money twice and didn't pay it back. Ellie forgave the first time. The second time, she said: "I won't lend money again. I still want us to get on in the house." A limit, not a war.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I'm not angry any more, and I'm not going back to how it was." "I need some distance while I work out what I want."

TRY THIS:
Ask yourself three questions: Is it safe? Has the hurt stopped? Do I want this relationship in my life? Your answers can guide what comes next. If you feel unsafe, see signs to look out for.

09

Look after the hurt part of you.

Hurt lives in the body as well as the mind: poor sleep, a tight chest, feeling jumpy. Healing goes better with basic care: rest, food, movement, people who are kind to you, and talking to yourself the way you'd talk to a hurting friend. Some people find they grow after something painful. That can happen, but it's not a test you have to pass.

For example (a stranger): A man shouted at Idris on the bus, calling him names. For days he felt shaky. He told a friend, went for long walks, and said to himself, "That was about him, not me. I'm safe now." Slowly, the shakiness faded.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"This was hard. Anyone would be shaken. What do I need right now?"

TRY THIS:

Pick one small act of care for today: an early night, a walk, a warm drink, a call to someone kind. Calm tools are in Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now)

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can say what hurt, apologise for what you did, and look after your own healing. You can't make someone apologise, understand or change, and you don't have to wait for them to start feeling better. Forgiveness, trust and going back are all yours to choose, in your own time.

SATURDAY, 11AM

You've written it all down, every word of it. Then a smaller version: "When you said that, I felt small. I'd like you to know." You haven't decided whether to send it. But the 2am replays have gone quieter, because now it's on paper, not just in your head.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Writing the hurt down, every word, then a shorter version, can quieten the replays. You don't have to send it.
- **With a partner:** Small breaks happen daily. A quick "That came out wrong. Can I try again?" mends most of them. See How to apologise so it counts.
- **Family:** Old family hurts often need a different talk from new ones, and sometimes more time apart. See Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).
- **Friends:** A friend may not know they hurt you. "Can I tell you something that stung? I'd rather say it than drift." keeps the door open.
- **At work:** Keep it to the facts and what you need next time. A short note afterwards helps both of you remember the same thing.
- **After someone has died:** You can still heal a hurt with someone who is gone, by writing to them or talking it through with someone you trust. See Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief).
- **After an affair:** The shock is real for both people. Couples can recover, and some decide to part; both can be done with care. Trust returns through kept promises over months, and a couples therapist can help. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-11-healing-in-depth).
- **If you decide to separate:** Part as kindly as you can. Tell children together, without blame, and never ask them to choose. Write decisions down, and consider family mediation where it's safe. More in the full chapter.

Common mix-ups

- **"If I forgive, I'm saying it was okay."** Forgiving isn't excusing. You can forgive and still say it was wrong.
- **"If I forgive, I have to let them back in."** Forgiveness and going back are separate choices.
- **"A good relationship never has breaks."** Every close relationship has them. Mending them is what builds safety.
- **"Saying sorry means it's fixed."** An apology opens the door. Trust comes back through what happens next.
- **"I should be over this by now."** Healing has no deadline. Feelings returning doesn't mean you're back at the start.
- **"I can't heal unless they admit it."** Their apology can help, but your healing can go ahead without it.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Listen before you advise.** "That sounds really painful" helps more than "You should just let it go."
- **Don't rush forgiveness.** Pushing someone to forgive can feel like being told their hurt doesn't matter.
- **Don't push them to cut someone off, either.** It's their relationship and their choice, unless they're in danger.
- **If you caused the hurt,** give a real apology and then give them time. Don't ask them to make you feel better about it.
- **If they mention fear, threats or control,** take it seriously and share Not safe at home?

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "Do you want to talk it through, or would it help more to take your mind off it?" "Whatever you decide about them, I'm on your side."

When to get more help

Some hurts are too heavy to carry alone, and getting help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Think about talking to a doctor, counsellor or therapist if:

- More than a month after something frightening, you still have flashbacks, nightmares, feel constantly on edge, or avoid places and people that remind you of it. These can be signs of trauma, and there are well-tested treatments for it, such as trauma-focused talking therapies.
- The hurt is taking over: you can't sleep, work or enjoy anything, or you're drinking or using more to cope.
- The hurt came from abuse or violence, now or in the past. The page Free, private people to talk to includes specialist lines.
- You're having thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else. Please reach out today. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. If anyone is in danger now, call your local emergency number.

If you and someone else both want to mend things, a couples or family counsellor can help, as long as nobody is afraid of the other.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- Upset right now? for calming down in the moment, and the Nervous System Ladder (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks) for checking your state.

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- Apology languages: how to say sorry so it lands, and asking for forgiveness.
- Library: forgiveness (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/conflict), what research says about apologies and repair attempts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/relationships).

- Library: rumination (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions), expressive writing and self-compassion (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection).
- Stories from philosophy: the Second Arrow (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth).

More for your situation

- **Families:** Adult siblings and family rifts · For grown-up children (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grown-up-children)
- **After a breakup:** On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own) · Co-parenting (spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting)
- **Friends:** When a friendship drifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends)
- **Children who have been hurt:** Foster, adoptive and kinship families (spreadloveandacceptance.com/foster-and-kinship)
- **After a loss:** Grief and later life
- Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

More in Part Three

← Chapter 10: Values, meaning and a good life (page 158) · Chapter 12: Helping others well → (page 189) · All chapters in the contents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/contents)

A limit to keep in mind: This chapter is for everyday hurts and for thinking about bigger ones. It isn't therapy, and it isn't a reason to stay somewhere unsafe. If you're afraid of someone, the most healing step is getting safe. Not safe at home?

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Hurt is real, and healing takes time.** Replaying it doesn't mean you're weak. It means it mattered.
- ✓ **Repair is what counts.** Every close relationship has breaks. A real apology names it, owns it and mends it.
- ✓ **Forgiveness isn't going back.** You can forgive without forgetting, excusing or letting someone back in.
- ✓ **Safety comes first.** You can heal even if they never say sorry, and you never owe anyone a risk to your safety.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Two · Chapter IV · Two kinds of fair — read online
Covering kindly and saying it out loud

Part Three · Chapter 4 · How communication works — page 61
Repair in everyday talk

Part Three · Chapter 13 · Anger — page 205
When anger did the damage

Part Three · Chapter 7 · Self-worth, shame and self-compassion — page 108
Guilt without shame

PUT IT TO USE



Upset right now?
For calming down in the moment, and the Nervous System Ladder for checking your state
spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now



Apology languages
How to say sorry so it lands, and asking for forgiveness
spreadloveandacceptance.com/apology-languages

12

PART THREE · CHAPTER 12

Helping others well: support without fixing, boundaries, and not burning out

How to help someone without taking over: asking what they need, listening first, caring without drowning, keeping kind limits, what to do in a crisis, and how to keep going without burning out.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Ask what kind of help they want
2. Listening is a kind of help
3. Fixing it for them can take away their power
4. Care without drowning in their feelings
5. Your limits make your help last
6. Notice when you're running on empty
7. In a crisis, stay with them and bring in help
8. Don't wait for someone else to step in
9. Let other people help you too
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Tools and reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Ask what kind of help they want.** "Ideas, or just someone to listen?" saves a lot of misfires.
- **Listening is help.** Fixing it for someone can take away their power.
- **Your limits make your help last.** Caring from a steady place helps more than drowning in their feelings.
- **In a crisis, stay and bring in help.** It's okay to ask directly about suicide, and to call for help.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **One owner per job: sharing the care** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) works because help lasts when it is shared and named. Carers burn out when everything is "just helping" and nobody else owns a job. Big idea: *see the whole load.*
- **How much are you carrying?** (Part Two, Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3)) helps you notice when you are running on empty before you snap or stop.

WEDNESDAY, 7:15PM

Your friend is telling you about her awful week. You have five good ideas before she's finished her first sentence. You share them all. She goes quiet, then says, "Yeah, maybe." You both hang up feeling a bit worse, and you're not sure why.

Most of us want to help the people around us. But helping well is a skill, and good intentions don't always land. This chapter explains how support works, why "fixing" can backfire, and how to care for others in a way you can keep up. It's for friends, partners, parents, coworkers, carers, neighbours, and anyone who has ever wanted to help and didn't know how.

01

Ask what kind of help they want.

Help comes in different kinds. Some people want ideas. Some want someone to listen. Some want a practical hand, like a meal or a lift. Some just want company. Giving the wrong kind, even kindly, can leave someone feeling unheard. The simplest fix is to ask.

For example (a friend): In the scene above, a better start would have been: "That sounds like a rotten week. Do you want ideas, or do you just want to vent?" She would have said "vent," and the call would have gone very differently.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Do you want ideas, a listening ear, or a hand with something?" "What would help most right now?"

TRY THIS:

Next time someone tells you about a problem, ask what kind of help they want before you give any.

Ask what kind of help they want

The wrong kind of help can feel like not being heard.

"Ideas, or just someone to listen?"

Listening
comfort, company

Practical
a lift, a meal

Ideas
advice, if asked

Making sense
thinking it through

- Fixing it for them can take away their power.
- Care from a steady place. Your limits make your help last.
- In a crisis, stay with them and bring in help.

Kinds of support after House (1981). Support helps most when it fits what the person needs (Cutrona and Russell, 1990), though the evidence for exact matching is mixed.

FIGURE 17 Ask what kind of help they want. Fixing it for them can take away their power, and your limits make your help last.

02

Listening is a kind of help.

Being truly heard is powerful. It helps people calm down, think more clearly, and often find their own answers. Good listening means paying attention, not interrupting, checking you understood, and showing that their feelings make sense, even if you'd feel differently.

For example (partners): Ravi comes home upset about his boss. Instead of "Just quit," his partner says: "So he criticised you in front of everyone, after you stayed late all week. No wonder you're furious." Ravi's shoulders drop. Ten minutes later, he has his own plan.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "So what happened was… Have I got that right?" "That makes sense. Anyone would feel that way."

TRY THIS:
In one conversation today, listen for two whole minutes without giving advice. Then sum up what you heard.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: sometimes the best help is sitting close and listening, no fixing needed. Listening takes energy too, so check your own tank now and then.

WORKPAPER WP-02 **How much are you carrying?** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-02

03

Fixing it for them can take away their power.

When we love someone, we want to make the problem go away. But doing things for people that they could do themselves can leave them feeling less capable. Helping well often means helping someone do it, not doing it for them. It respects that it's their life and their choice.

For example (a parent and a grown-up child): Rosalind's 24-year-old son is struggling with a job application. She wants to rewrite it. Instead she asks,

"Want me to read it and tell you what stands out?" He makes the changes himself, and feels proud when he gets the interview.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"Is this mine to fix, or theirs to solve with my support?" "What do they want to do here?"

TRY THIS:
Notice the urge to fix. Before acting, ask: "Would you like me to do that, or help you do it?"

04

Care without drowning in their feelings.

Feeling someone's pain as if it were your own can wear you out fast. Researchers separate this "empathic distress" from compassion: warm concern from a steadier place. Compassion still cares deeply. It just doesn't require you to sink with the other person. A steady helper is more useful than a second person drowning.

For example (housemates): When Abi's housemate went through a breakup, Abi cried every night with her and couldn't sleep. After a week she was exhausted. She changed approach: kind and present, but also taking breaks, and reminding herself, "This is her pain. I can care without carrying all of it."

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"I can be with them in this without making it mine." "I care, and I'm steady."

TRY THIS:
After a heavy conversation, do something that brings you back to yourself: a walk, a shower, five slow breaths. It isn't abandoning them. It's refilling.

05

Your limits make your help last.

Saying yes to everything isn't kindness in the long run. It leads to resentment, exhaustion and, eventually, not being able to help at all. Limits tell people what you can give, so your yes means something. A kind no, with a suggestion of what you can do, is still help.

For example (siblings): Kojo's sister keeps asking to borrow money. He loves her and he's running out. He says: "I can't lend money any more. I can help you go through your bills on Sunday, if you'd like."

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I can't do that, but I can do this." "I want to help, and I need to stop at nine tonight."

TRY THIS:

Write down one thing you're giving that you can't keep giving. Plan a kinder, smaller version you could offer instead.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Your limits keep your help going for longer. When you need to say "not this time", the Chat analyzer's "Help me write it" helps you say no kindly, with something to offer instead.

TOOL **Chat analyzer: Help me write it (say no kindly)** ·
spreadloveandacceptance.com/refusals

06

Notice when you're running on empty.

People who help a lot, like carers, parents, nurses, teachers and the friend everyone calls, can burn out. Signs include feeling exhausted most of the time, feeling numb or cynical about the people you help, getting ill more often, or dreading the next call. It doesn't mean you're a bad helper. It means you need help too.

For example (a carer): Helen has looked after her husband since his stroke. She snaps at him, then feels terrible. Her doctor says it sounds like carer

strain. A local carers' group and a few hours of respite each week give her back a little of herself, and she's gentler at home.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"Looking after myself is part of looking after them."

TRY THIS:
Rate your energy from 1 to 10 each evening for a week. If it's often 3 or lower, ask someone for one specific kind of help. See Caring for someone you love (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers).

07

In a crisis, stay with them and bring in help.

If someone tells you they're thinking of ending their life, or you're worried they might be, it's okay to ask them directly. Research, such as a review led by Tim Dazzi (2014), suggests asking about suicide doesn't put the idea in someone's head; it can bring relief. You don't have to be their therapist. Your job is to listen, stay with them, and help them reach trained support.

For example (a coworker): A colleague says, "Sometimes I think everyone would be better off without me." Kirsty says gently: "I'm really glad you told me. Are you thinking about ending your life?" She says she's had thoughts. Kirsty stays with her and they call a crisis line together.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"Are you thinking about suicide?" "I'm glad you told me. You don't have to go through this alone. Let's call someone together."

TRY THIS:
Save a crisis number in your phone now, so you have it if you ever need it. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines. If someone is in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.

08

Don’t wait for someone else to step in.

When lots of people see something go wrong, each person can assume someone else will act. Psychologists call this the bystander effect. Knowing about it helps you break it. You don’t have to be a hero. Small, safe actions count: asking “Are you okay?”, getting staff, or calling for help.

For example (a stranger): On a train, a man is making a young woman uncomfortable. Yvonne doesn’t confront him. She sits next to the woman and asks loudly, “Hi! Is this the train to Leeds?” The woman joins in the chat, and the man moves away.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Are you okay? Do you need anything?” To someone else nearby: “Can you get the driver? I’ll stay here.”

TRY THIS:

Think of one safe thing you could do if you saw someone in trouble in a public place: distract, get help, or check in afterwards. Having a plan makes it easier to act.

09

Let other people help you too.

Helping goes both ways. People who are good at giving help are often bad at receiving it. But letting others help is a gift to them, too: most people like being useful to someone they care about. Relationships where only one person ever helps tend to feel uneven over time.

For example (on your own, as a new parent): Nkechi kept saying, “We’re fine, thanks,” to every offer after the baby came. When she finally said yes to a neighbour’s offer of a meal, the neighbour was delighted, and they became friends.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

“Yes, thank you. That would really help.” “Could you do one thing for me this week?”

TRY THIS:

Say yes to the next small offer of help you get, even if you could manage without it.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 12

One owner per job: sharing the care

Margaret and Alan, with their daughter Sue

One owner per job: sharing the care

Person A
Margaret

Person B
Alan

Person C
Sue

Date of this list
6 October 2026

Who owns each job

Job	How often	Roughly how long?	Owner	Helper or backup	Notes
Medicines and the pill box (as the care team directs)	*Weekly*	0.5	*Margaret*	*Sue*	*Sue checks it on Sundays*
Book and go along to medical appointments	*As needed*	3	*Sue*	*Margaret*	*Sue drives; Mum comes too*
Insurance and paperwork	*Monthly*	1	*Alan*	*Sue*	*Dad can do this from his chair*
Night care and night-time calls	*Daily*	1	*Margaret*		*Ask the nurse about a night sitter*
Sunday call with the family	*Weekly*	0.5	*Alan*		
Book respite: a break for the main carer	*Monthly*	0.5	*Sue*		*Mum's Thursday afternoon off*

Job	How often	Roughly how long?	Owner	Helper or backup	Notes
Groceries and meals	*Weekly*	*2*	*Sue*	*Margaret*	*Online shop, Sue orders*

DOES EVERY JOB HAVE AN OWNER?

Jobs with an owner

7 of 7. Every job has an owner.

Who's carrying more right now

Margaret 63% · Alan 9% · Sue 28%. Does this match what you agreed? If it doesn't match, ask which job could move first. It's a starting point for a talk, not a scorecard.

Changes to the list

Date	What changed	Who
6 Oct 2026	*Sue takes Tuesday nights from next week, so Margaret gets one full night's sleep.*	*Margaret, Alan and Sue*

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. This is about who owns each job, not medical advice.

Fill in your own: One owner per job (sharing the care)
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-03)

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can offer help, listen well, and be honest about your limits. You can't make someone accept help, take your advice or get better on your timetable. Their life and their choices are theirs. If someone is in danger, your part is to bring in help, not to carry it alone.

THE NEXT WEDNESDAY, 7:15PM

Your friend calls again. This time you say, "Rough week? Do you want ideas, or just to talk it out?" She laughs and says, "Just talk." You listen. At the end, she says, "I think I know what I'm going to do." You didn't give her a single idea, and it was the most helpful call you've had in months.

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Helping yourself counts too. Ask yourself the same question: "Do I need ideas right now, or just some rest?"
- **With a partner:** "Do you want me to help, or just to hear it?" works at home as well as anywhere.
- **Family:** Caring for a parent or a child with extra needs is long-haul help. Share the load early. See Caring for someone you love.
- **Friends:** The friend everyone calls needs someone to call too. Notice who that might be.
- **At work:** Covering for a struggling coworker is kind for a week. Longer than that, it needs a real conversation with the team. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **With strangers:** In an emergency, point to one person: "You in the blue coat, please call for help." A crowd often waits for someone else.
- **If you have ADHD:** Helping is interesting and urgent, so a fast "yes" is easy. Try "I'd like to help. Let me check my week and come back to you tonight." And ask for the practical help you need too. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-12-helping-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"Helping means solving the problem."** Often, helping means listening, being there, or helping someone find their own answer.
- **"If I really cared, I'd feel everything they feel."** Caring from a steady place helps more and lasts longer.
- **"Good helpers never say no."** Good helpers last because they know their limits.
- **"Asking about suicide might give them the idea."** Research suggests it doesn't, and asking can help someone open up.
- **"I'll make it worse if I step in."** There are small, safe ways to help. Doing nothing often feels worse for the person in trouble.
- **"I should be able to manage without help."** Everyone needs help sometimes. Receiving it is part of a healthy relationship.

If you want to help someone else with this

This whole chapter is about helping others, so here's help for the helpers around you:

- **Notice the helpers.** The carer, the friend everyone calls, the coworker who always covers. Ask them how they are, and mean it.
- **Offer specific help.** "Can I take the kids on Saturday morning?" is easier to accept than "Let me know if you need anything."
- **Give them permission to rest.** "You're allowed a night off. I've got this."
- **If a helper seems burned out,** share Caring for someone you love or suggest they talk to a doctor.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "You look after everyone. Who looks after you?" "I'd love to do something for you this week. What would help?"

When to get more help

- **If someone is in danger now,** call your local emergency number.
- **If someone talks about suicide,** stay with them and contact a crisis line together. In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines.
- **If someone tells you they're being hurt or controlled at home,** believe them, don't confront the other person yourself, and share Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety)
- **If you're burned out as a helper or carer,** talk to your doctor, a carers' organisation or a counsellor. Respite and support are not luxuries.
- **If helping someone is becoming unsafe for you,** step back and bring in professionals. You can still care from a safer distance.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Check-ins (spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins), for tender conversations, and Professor Puddles (spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask) if you want help finding words.

Reading pages to read on the website

- Library: active listening (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/communication), advice or support? and validation.
- Library: empathic distress and compassion (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection) and social support.
- Library: burnout (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/stress) and caregiver strain.
- Library: saying no and boundaries.
- Stories from philosophy: the circles of Hierocles (spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth).

More for your situation

- **Carers:** Caring for someone you love · When one of you is ill (spreadloveandacceptance.com/when-one-is-ill)
- **Friends:** Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends)
- **Parents and grandparents:** For parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents) · For grandparents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents) · When a child has ADHD (spreadloveandacceptance.com/adhd-kids)
- **At work:** At work · For counsellors, coaches and group leaders (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-counselors)
- **After a loss:** Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief)
- Find your own starting point: Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship).

More in Part Three

← Chapter 11: Healing after hurt (page 174) · Chapter 13: Anger → (page 205) · All chapters in the book's contents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/)

A limit to keep in mind: This chapter is about everyday helping. It isn't training in crisis care or therapy. When someone's safety is at risk, the most helpful thing you can do is bring in people trained to help.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Ask what kind of help they want.** "Ideas, or just someone to listen?" saves a lot of misfires.
- ✓ **Listening is help.** Fixing it for someone can take away their power.
- ✓ **Your limits make your help last.** Caring from a steady place helps more than drowning in their feelings.
- ✓ **In a crisis, stay and bring in help.** It's okay to ask directly about suicide, and to call for help.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Preface to Part Two · The work nobody sees
The care work nobody sees
read online

Part Two · Chapter II · Is the split working?
Sharing the load so it lasts
read online

Part Three · Chapter 8 · Loss, grief and big life changes
Helping someone through grief
page 122

Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress and the nervous system
Noticing your own stress first
page 31

PUT IT TO USE

Check-ins
For tender conversations, and Professor Puddles if you want help finding words
spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins

Stories from philosophy: the circles of Hierocles
spreadloveandacceptance.com/learn/index-in-depth

13

PART THREE · CHAPTER 13

Anger: what it's for and what to do with it

What anger is for, what to do in the hot minutes, how to repair afterwards, and how to tell when anger has turned into harm. For anyone, in any kind of relationship, or on your own.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Anger is a signal about something that matters
2. Anger often guards a softer feeling
3. Anger rises in the body fast
4. In the hot minutes: slow the body first
5. Letting rip doesn't empty it
6. Step back and look from the outside
7. Say it, don't throw it
8. After anger, repair
9. When anger becomes harm
10. If you're a teenager
11. In everyday life
12. Common mix-ups
13. If you want to help someone else with this
14. When to get more help
15. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
16. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Anger is a signal** that something seems unfair, blocked or threatening. The feeling is allowed. What you do with it is the part you choose.
- **The first minutes are about the body.** Slow down, breathe out long, and step away with a time to come back.
- **Letting rip doesn't empty anger.** Shouting tends to feed it. Calming the body, then putting it into words and repairing any sharp moments, helps more.

- **Anger that frightens, controls or hurts someone has become harm.** That needs more help, and safety comes first.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The Calm-Down Kit** (Part One, Now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)) works because anger rises in the body first. Slowing the body is what makes the words possible. Big idea: *read your state first.*
- **"Let a comment land before you react" and "Notice, name, decide"** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) are the step back this chapter describes: look from the outside, then choose.

TUESDAY, 6:10PM

Your brother texts: "Can't take Mum to the hospital on Thursday after all. Sorry!!" It's the third time this month. Your jaw sets and your thumbs start typing fast: "TYPICAL. You never…" Your heart is pounding, your face is hot, and the message is nearly sent.

Many of us were taught anger was rude or dangerous, or grew up around anger that was frightening. But anger itself is a normal human feeling, and it often points at something real. This chapter explains how anger works first, and what to do with it second.

01

Anger is a signal about something that matters.

Anger usually says "That's not fair," "You're in my way" or "Someone crossed a line." It pushes us *towards* a problem, to change it. It can also land on the wrong person, or be far bigger than the problem.

For example: A woman keeps finding her lunch gone from the office fridge. Her anger tells her a line has been crossed, and gets her to raise it.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What is this anger trying to protect?" "Is this about fairness, a blocked plan, or feeling unsafe?"

TRY THIS:

Next time you feel angry, finish this sentence privately: "I'm angry because something I care about, which is ___, seems ___."

02

Anger often guards a softer feeling.

Anger can arrive first because it feels stronger and safer than what sits under it: hurt, fear, shame, worry or plain tiredness. In Chapter 1 (page 16) we called this layers. Finding the layer underneath often shows what you actually need.

For example: A man snaps at his teenage daughter for coming home an hour late. Under the anger is a cold hour of fear: "What if something happened?" When he says that part, she hears it, and apologises.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm angry, and I think underneath I was really scared." "I came across cross. I think I'm actually hurt."

TRY THIS:

After the next angry moment, when you're calm, ask: "Was there hurt, fear or tiredness under it?"

03

Anger rises in the body fast.

A hot face, a tight jaw, a pounding heart, a louder voice, fists or shoulders tensing. This is the body getting ready for a fight, and it can happen in seconds. When anger is high, careful thinking and listening get much harder. Chapter 2 (page 31) calls this being flooded: so stirred up that the thinking part of you goes quiet for a while.

For example: Arguing about the bins, a woman notices her hands shaking and realises she can't hear a word her housemate says. That's her sign to stop.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"My body is ready for a fight. That doesn't mean I have to have one."
"Where is this in my body?"

TRY THIS:

Learn your own early signs. Write down two or three, like "jaw tight" or "talking faster." They are your cue to slow down.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Anger moves faster than words. The Calm-Down Kit is a plan you make on a calm day, for the hot minutes.

WORKPAPER WP-11 **The Calm-Down Kit** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11

04

In the hot minutes: slow the body first.

When anger is high, settle your body before you try to sort anything out. Simple steps help: stop talking or typing, breathe out slowly (longer out than in), unclench your hands, and if you can, move away for a while. A large review of 154 studies by Kjærvik and Bushman (2024) found that activities which calm the body, like slow breathing, relaxation and mindfulness, reduced anger, while ones that rev you up showed little or no benefit.

For example: A dad feels his temper rising while helping with homework. He says, "I'm getting frustrated, and that's not your fault. I'm going to get a glass of water and come back in five minutes." He does. The homework gets done.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

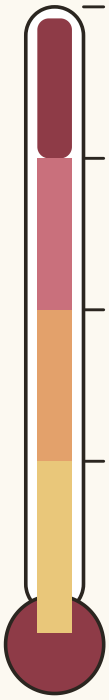
"I'm too angry to talk well right now. I'll come back at eight." "I need ten minutes. I'm not leaving the conversation, I'm coming back to it."

TRY THIS:

Make a three-step plan on a calm day: your early sign, the words you'll say, and where you'll go for ten minutes. Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now) has steps for the hottest moments.

Anger rises fast

What helps depends on how hot it is.



Hot minutes
Slow the body first: long out-breaths. Step away, with a time to come back.

Angry
Don't solve it now. Problems can wait; sharp words are hard to take back.

Annoyed
Notice the body: hot face, tight jaw, clenched hands.

Irritated
Say it early, plainly and kindly.

✕ **Letting rip doesn't empty it. It feeds it.**

Once cooler: say it, don't throw it.
Then repair any sharp moments.

In a review of 154 studies (Kjærvik and Bushman, 2024), activities that calm the body reduced anger; revving it up did not help. If anger frightens or controls someone, safety comes first.

FIGURE 18 Anger rises fast, and what helps depends on how hot it is. In the hot minutes, slow the body first; letting rip feeds it.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 13

The Calm-Down Kit

Pat, a grandmother raising her grandson Jay, 13

The Calm-Down Kit

Whose kit is this? (your name)
Pat (Nan)

Date
4 October 2026

Part A: What tends to start it

What tends to start it	How it shows up in my body first
Door slammed after a call with his mum	*Shoulders up by my ears*
Being shouted at in front of the neighbours	*Hot face, can't find words*

Part A: My two defaults

First default
Gating (lower the lights, step out)

Second, if the first isn't available
Low, steady sound

Part A: My pause line

In my words
I'm too wound up to listen well. I'm putting the kettle on for twenty minutes. I'll come and find you at half past.

Our pause plan (agree it together, and share it)

Our pause word or signal
"Kettle time"

The shortest break we take
20 minutes

How we set the time to come back
Whoever pauses says a time before they go

The first sentence when we come back
"I'm back. Let's start again, slower."

Part B: In the moment

Say your pause word or line, then do your first calming step. Nothing in this kit works by cold, pain or shock, and none of it is treatment.

Part C: Coming back

Time	What I did	How I feel now
5:10 pm	*Gating (lower the lights, step out)*	*Settled enough*

WHERE THAT LEAVES YOU

Next
Settled enough: go back to the conversation, at the time you named. When you come back, start with one small, simple task, like putting the dishes away.

Next small action
Sit with Jay and agree one screen-time rule

If you put the conversation off: when you'll pick it back up
After tea, at 6

☑ I'm going with this

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Jay agreed the pause plan with her on a calm Sunday. "Gating", one of the kit's calming steps, means cutting down what comes in through the senses: lower the lights, turn the sound down, or step out of the room.

Fill in your own: The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-11)

05

Letting rip doesn't empty it.

Many people believe anger is like steam: let it out, by shouting, slamming or hitting a pillow, and it will be gone. Research doesn't support this. In a well-known study by Bushman (2002), angry people who hit a punching bag while thinking about the person who annoyed them ended up angrier, not calmer.

So does going over and over what happened in your head: in studies by Bushman and colleagues (2005), people who dwelt on a provocation were later more aggressive, even towards someone who only mildly annoyed them. Anger tends to fade faster when the body is calmed and the mind has something else to do for a while.

For example: After a row with a coworker, a man spends his lunch telling three people how awful she is. By the afternoon he's angrier than ever. Next time, he takes a walk instead, and by two o'clock he can think clearly.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Going over this again is feeding it." "I can come back to this later, when I'm calmer."

TRY THIS:

If you notice yourself replaying an argument, set a timer for twenty minutes and do something absorbing. Come back to the problem after.

06

Step back and look from the outside.

Once the body has settled a little, it helps to look at the moment as if you were watching from across the room. What happened? What might the other person have been dealing with? In experiments by Mischkowski, Kross and Bushman (2012), people who looked back on an annoying moment "like a fly on the wall," rather than reliving it, felt less angry and acted less aggressively. Rethinking what happened, which psychologists call reappraisal (Gross, 1998), helps too.

For example: Furious that a friend cancelled again, a woman imagines telling the story to a kind stranger. Told that way, she remembers her friend is caring for a sick parent. The anger softens into worry.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"If I were watching this from the side, what would I see?" "What else might be going on for them?"

TRY THIS:

Write two lines about the moment, starting with your own name instead of "I": "Wes got angry because…"

07

Say it, don't throw it.

Anger is often a fair message sent in a hurtful way. When you are calmer, you can still say you were angry, and why, without attacking. A simple shape helps: what happened (the facts), how you felt, and what you're asking for.

For example: Instead of "You always let me down," a woman says to her sister: "When you cancelled Mum's appointment again, I felt really angry and alone with it. Can we make a plan for who takes her, for the next three months?"

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I was angry about what happened on Monday. Can I tell you why?"
"When ___ happened, I felt ___. What I'm asking for is ___."

TRY THIS:

Write your angry message, then rewrite it in the three-part shape before you send anything. See Chapter 4 (page 61) for more on saying hard things.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: say it slowly, in one plain sentence. A soft start makes it easier for the other person to hear you.

TOOL **Cool-down corner: soften a tense moment** ·
spreadloveandacceptance.com/tools/soften-a-tense-moment

08

After anger, repair.

Everyone gets angry, and most of us say something sharp sometimes. What matters a great deal is what happens next. A short, real repair (naming what you did, without "but," and saying what you'll do differently) helps rebuild trust.

For example: A grandmother shouts at her grandson for breaking a vase, and he cries. An hour later she sits with him: "I shouted, and that was scary. The vase isn't as important as you. I'm sorry." He hugs her.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I was sharp with you earlier. That wasn't fair, and I'm sorry." "I'm still upset about what happened, and I also shouldn't have spoken to you that way."

TRY THIS:

Think of one recent moment when your anger landed on someone. Is there a short repair you could still make? Chapter 11 (page 174) has more on apologies that land.

09

When anger becomes harm.

Feeling angry is human. But some things done in anger are harm, whatever the feeling behind them: hitting, pushing, throwing things at or near someone, breaking their things, threatening, shouting so someone is scared, or using anger to control what another person does, wears, spends or who they see. People walking on eggshells around you is a sign too. Anger is never a reason someone deserves to be hurt.

For example: A man realises his partner and children go quiet when he comes home in a bad mood. He doesn't hit anyone, but they are afraid of him. He talks to his doctor and joins an anger course.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think my anger is scaring people I love. I want help with it." (If it's happening to you) "I'm frightened of how they get when they're angry."

TRY THIS:

If this sounds like you, see help with your own anger (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents). If you're afraid of someone else's anger, Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help.

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can learn your early signs, settle your body, say what made you angry in words, and repair when you get it wrong. You can't make someone else calm down, and you don't have to accept being shouted at, threatened or controlled. If someone else's anger frightens you, getting safe matters more than working it out. Not safe at home?

TUESDAY, 6:40PM

You put the phone face down and walk round the block. Breathing out long, you notice what's under the anger: you're tired, and you're scared about Mum. Back home you send a different message: "I'm really frustrated. This is the third time and I feel alone with Mum's care. Can we talk tonight and make a plan?"

Your brother rings within ten minutes. His shifts have changed and he's been too embarrassed to say. You make a plan together. The anger was right that something needed to change. It just needed words instead of capitals.

If you're a teenager

A *made-up example.* Maisie, 16, has her phone taken at ten, mid-chat with her friends. She shouts and slams the door. The next morning, calmer, she says: "It felt like you didn't trust me. Sorry for the door. Could I have ten minutes' warning?" Her dad says yes.

Being angry with a parent is normal, and arguments often feel most intense in the middle teens. A rule given out of care isn't control, even when it feels unfair. A calm ask the next day works more often than a slammed door.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm too angry to talk properly. Can we talk tomorrow?" "It's not the rule I mind, it's how it happened." "Could we try it for two weeks and then check?"

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Anger at yourself counts too. "I'm so stupid" is anger turned inward. Speak to yourself as you would to a friend who made the same mistake. See Chapter 7 (page 108).
- **With a partner:** Agree on a pause word on a calm day, and a time you'll always come back. See When we keep having the same fight (spreadloveandacceptance.com/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-partner).
- **Parents and children:** Children copy what we do with anger more than what we say about it. See For parents.
- **With family and friends:** Old anger can flare at gatherings. Plan a short break. See Family rifts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).
- **At work:** Anger at work is common and rarely said. "I'm frustrated about the deadline change. Can we talk about what's realistic?" keeps it useful. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **If you have ADHD:** Anger can arrive fast and big, then pass quickly. Plan for the speed: a three-word pause line ("Back in ten"), and a rule to wait before you send anything. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-13-anger-in-depth).
- **Managing a clash between two people:** Hear each person alone first, then together, about what happened, not about each other. Often the fight is about the setup, like two people who both think they own the same job. A worked example.

Common mix-ups

- **"Anger is a bad feeling."** Anger is a normal feeling. Some things done in anger are harmful. The feeling itself is information.
- **"Letting it out is healthy."** Shouting or hitting things tends to keep anger going. Calming the body and then talking helps more.
- **"They made me angry, so it's their fault I shouted."** Someone can do something unfair. What you do next is still yours.
- **"Holding it in is the safe option."** Swallowing anger for years tends to come out sideways: as coldness, sarcasm or a sudden explosion. Saying it calmly and early is safer.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Keep yourself safe first.** If someone's anger scares you, step away. You don't have to stay and calm them down.
- **Lower, slower, fewer words.** Speak quietly and simply. Don't argue the point while they are flooded.
- **Take the message, not the blow.** Often there's something fair under the anger. You can hear that part and still say the way it was said wasn't okay.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I want to hear this, and I can't while we're both shouting. Can we try again at seven?" "I can tell this really matters to you."

When to get more help

Everyone gets angry. It may be time to talk to a doctor, a counsellor or an anger management course if:

- your anger feels out of control, or you often regret what you do or say when angry;
- people close to you seem nervous or walk on eggshells around you;
- you have hit, pushed, thrown things, broken things or threatened anyone;

- anger is hurting your work, your friendships or your health;
- you are using alcohol or drugs to cope with angry feelings.

Help for anger works for many people: a review of anger treatments by Del Vecchio and O'Leary (2004) found medium to large benefits. It is good for your health too: a review by Chida and Steptoe (2009) linked anger and hostility with a higher risk of heart disease. Asking for help is a responsible thing to do. Help with your own anger has first steps.

If you are afraid of someone else's anger, that fear is an important signal. Not safe at home? lists free, private help. If you or anyone is in danger right now, call your local emergency number.

This chapter is general education, not therapy.

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

Workpapers pages you fill in, on your own or together

- The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11): a plan, made on a calm day, for heated moments.

Tools helpers you use on the website

- Upset right now?: steps for when a feeling is very big, very fast.

Reading pages to read on the website

- When we keep having the same fight and When one talks and one goes quiet (spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw).
- How to apologise so it counts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/apology-languages).
- The library: anger (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions), going over and over things, rethinking versus holding it in, time-outs (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/conflict) and managing flooding.

More for your situation

- For parents: help with your own anger · Repair after you've scared a child
- For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens)

- Family rifts · Caring for someone you love (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers)
- At work
- Not safe at home?
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Anger is a signal** that something seems unfair, blocked or threatening. The feeling is allowed. What you do with it is the part you choose.
- ✓ **The first minutes are about the body.** Slow down, breathe out long, and step away with a time to come back.
- ✓ **Letting rip doesn't empty anger.** Shouting tends to feed it. Calming the body, then putting it into words and repairing any sharp moments, helps more.
- ✓ **Anger that frightens, controls or hurts someone has become harm.** That needs more help, and safety comes first.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Two · Chapter III · Full tanks and different angles — read online
Leftover stress behind a reaction

Part Three · Chapter 1 · How feelings work — page 16
Feelings as signals

Part Three · Chapter 11 · Healing after hurt — page 174
Repair after the hot minutes

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming — read online
A Calm-Down Kit made on a calm day

PUT IT TO USE

The Calm-Down Kit
A plan, made on a calm day, for heated moments
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11

Upset right now?
Steps for when a feeling is very big, very fast
spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now

14

PART THREE · CHAPTER 14

Personality, temperament and change across life

What personality is, where temperament comes in, how people change across their lives, and how to live and work with people who are made differently from you, without putting anyone in a box.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Traits are dials, not boxes
2. Temperament is the starting point
3. Situations matter too
4. Introvert and extravert is about energy, not liking people
5. People change across life
6. You can change on purpose, a little at a time
7. Every trait has gifts and costs
8. Differences are about fit, not fault
9. In everyday life
10. Common mix-ups
11. If you want to help someone else with this
12. When to get more help
13. Tools and reading on this site
14. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Traits are dials, not boxes.** Everyone sits somewhere along each one, and most people are near the middle.
- **Temperament is a starting point.** Babies already differ in how active, cautious or easily upset they are. What happens next matters too.
- **People keep changing.** On average, people grow steadier and more organised as they get older, and you can change on purpose, slowly.
- **Different isn't wrong.** Most clashes between personalities are about fit, not fault.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The "How to talk to me" card and the style quiz** (Part One, Now (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-2-now)) describe how you lean on a few dials, not which box you are in. Most clashes are about fit, not fault.
- **One owner per job** (Part Two, Chapter IV (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-4)) lets people with different temperaments share a home or team without changing who they are: you arrange the jobs around the differences. Big idea: *fix the setup, not the person.*

SATURDAY, 3:00PM

It's your aunt's seventieth birthday. You're standing quietly by the cake when she says, loud enough for everyone: "Oh, you were always the shy one!" Everyone laughs. You smile, but something stings. You're forty-two. You teach thirty children every day. Are you still "the shy one"? Were you ever?

We all describe people by their personality: "She's so laid-back," "He's a worrier," "They're the organised one." Descriptions like these can turn into boxes. This chapter looks at how personality actually works, what stays the same, and what changes.

01

Traits are dials, not boxes.

Personality is your usual pattern of thinking, feeling and acting. Many psychologists describe it with five broad traits, often called the "Big Five": **openness** (curious about new ideas and experiences), **conscientiousness** (organised and careful), **extraversion** (drawn to people and busy places), **agreeableness** (warm and cooperative) and **emotional stability** (how steady your moods are).

The same five turned up in work such as McCrae and Costa (1987), whether people rated themselves or were rated by people who knew them. Each one is a dial, not a switch. Most people sit somewhere in the middle of most dials.

For example: Two friends take a quiz. One gets "introvert," the other "extravert." When they look at their actual scores, they are only a few points apart, both near the middle.

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "I'm more of this than that, some of the time." "A label is a summary, not a whole person."

> TRY THIS:
> For each of the five dials, mark where you think you sit, from one to ten. Then ask: where would a close friend put you?

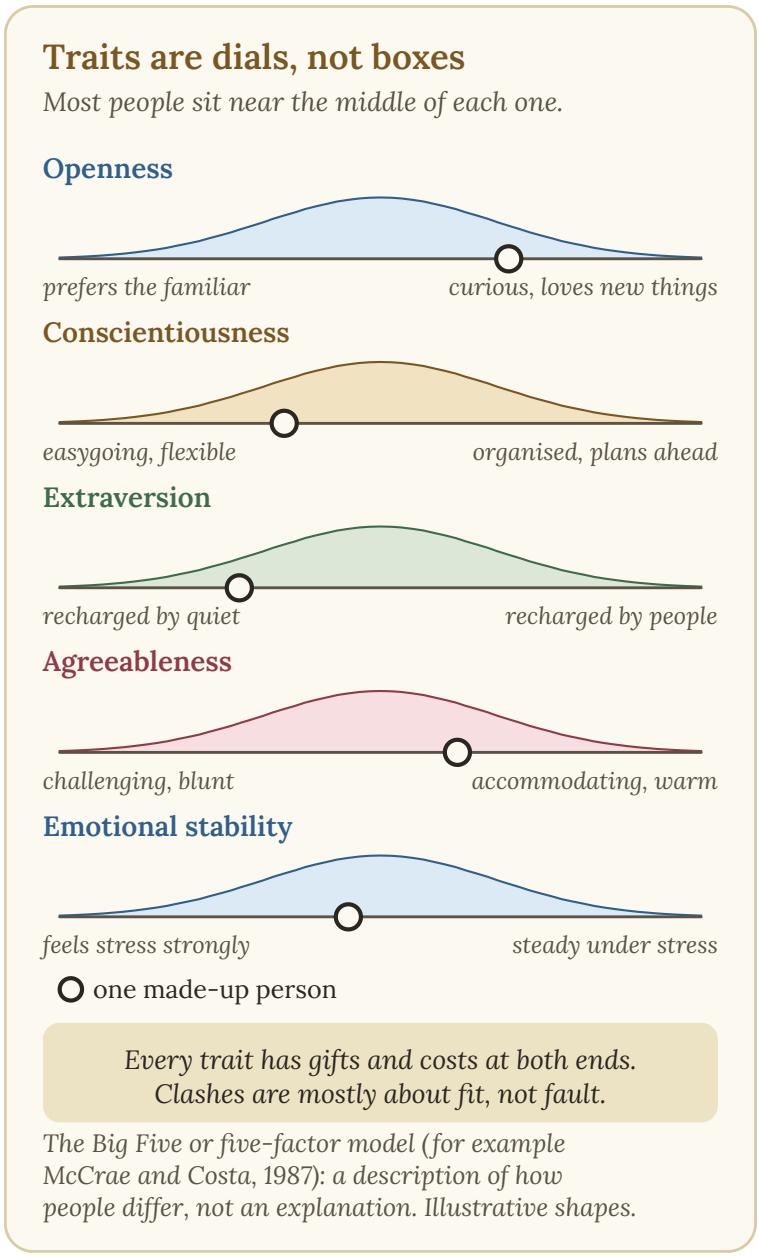


FIGURE 19 Traits are dials, not boxes: most people sit near the middle of each. Illustrative shapes.

02

Temperament is the starting point.

Temperament is the part of personality we can see from very early on. Some babies are very active, some calm; some settle easily into new routines, others take time; some react strongly to noise or change. In their long-running study, Thomas and Chess (1977) described these early differences, and the idea of "goodness of fit": how well a child's temperament fits what the people and places around them expect.

For example: A slow-to-warm-up toddler cries at every new playgroup. Her mum stops pushing her to join in straight away and lets her watch from her lap for ten minutes first. By the third week, she joins in on her own.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"You like to watch first. That's fine. Join in when you're ready." (to yourself) "I need time to warm up. That's how I'm made, not a flaw."

TRY THIS:

Think about what you were like as a small child, from what family say or what you remember. What seems the same now? What seems different?

03

Situations matter too.

Personality is a pattern, not a rule. The same person can be loud with family and quiet at work, organised in their job and messy at home, patient with children and short with call centres. A trait tells you what someone tends to do across many situations, not what they will do in this one.

For example: A manager thinks a new colleague is "cold." At the team's charity football match, the same colleague is chatty, funny and warm. The office was the thing that was quiet, not him.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I've only seen them in one setting." "Where am I most myself, and where am I least?"

TRY THIS:

Before deciding what someone is "like," try to see them in one different setting, or ask them about one.

04

Introvert and extravert is about energy, not liking people.

People who are more introverted often enjoy people very much, but find busy, noisy social time uses up energy, and need quiet to recover. People who are more extraverted often feel energised by company and busy places. Most of us are a mix (sometimes called ambivert). Neither is better. They just need different things to feel at their best.

For example: After a wedding, one partner wants to go on to the after-party; the other wants bed and silence. They agree: one goes for an hour, the other goes home, and they have breakfast together.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I loved tonight, and I'm out of social energy. It's not about you." "Shall we go together, and I'll head home at ten?"

TRY THIS:

Notice what refills you after a busy week: company, quiet, or a bit of both. Plan one of those this weekend.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: some of us recharge at the park with everyone, and some under a quiet blanket. Both are great! A quiz can show you your own style.

TOOL **How you connect: the 2-minute style quiz** ·
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength

05

People change across life.

Personality is fairly stable, but it isn't fixed. A large review by Roberts, Walton and Viechtbauer (2006) found that, on average, people become more organised, more emotionally steady and more confident with others as they

move through adult life, with much of the change between 20 and 40. A later review by Bleidorn and colleagues (2022) found that emotional steadiness kept growing right across the lifespan. Big life events, roles and relationships all play a part.

For example: A man who was a nervous, disorganised student becomes a calm, steady nurse in his forties. His friends from school barely recognise him. He says, "Life kept asking me to cope, and slowly I learned how."

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Who I was at fifteen isn't who I have to be now." "People I knew years ago may have changed too."

TRY THIS:

Write down one way you have changed in the last ten years. What helped it happen?

06

You can change on purpose, a little at a time.

People who want to change a trait can, slowly, mostly by acting differently in small ways, again and again. In a study by Hudson and Fraley (2015), people who set goals to change one of their traits tended, over sixteen weeks, to change in the direction they wanted. A review by Roberts and colleagues (2017) found that therapy was often linked to lasting change too, especially towards more emotional steadiness.

For example: A woman who wants to be less shy at work makes one small plan: say one thing in each team meeting. After two months, speaking up feels ordinary.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I don't have to become a different person. I can practise one different thing."

TRY THIS:

Pick one small action that fits who you'd like to be more of, like "reply to messages the same day" or "say hello first." Do it three times this week. See Chapter 6 (page 93) on habits.

07

Every trait has gifts and costs.

There isn't a "good" personality. Each trait helps in some places and gets in the way in others. Very agreeable people are kind and easy to be with, and may find it hard to say no. Very conscientious people are reliable, and may struggle to rest. People high in openness love new things, and may get bored with routine. Knowing your mix helps you use the gifts and plan for the costs.

For example: A highly organised woman feels irritated by her relaxed housemate. Then the boiler breaks, and the housemate is the one who stays calm and finds a plumber at 10pm. She starts to see his calm as a strength.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What is the gift in this trait, and what is the cost?" "What they do that annoys me might be the flip side of something I value."

TRY THIS:

Pick one trait of yours that people sometimes complain about. Write down one time it helped.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Every trait has gifts and costs. Writing down what helps you on a one-page card turns a "flaw" into useful information.

TOOL **How you connect: how to talk to me** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card

08

Differences are about fit, not fault.

When two people with different personalities share a home, a family or a job, friction is normal. A tidy person and a relaxed one, a planner and someone spontaneous, a talker and someone who needs quiet: neither is wrong. What helps is naming the difference and agreeing how to live with it. Personality is also different from neurodivergence and from mental health conditions. If something feels bigger than personality, Chapter 9 (page 136) may help.

For example: A couple fight about holidays: one wants every hour planned, the other wants to wander. They agree on one plan for the morning and a free afternoon. They both enjoy it more.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I think we're just made differently here. What would work for both of us?" "I'm a planner and you're not. Can we plan half and leave half?"

TRY THIS:

Think of one person you clash with. Name the difference without blame: "I like ___; they like ___." Then think of one small arrangement that would suit you both.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 14

How you connect: the style quiz

Mo, before moving in with his friend Callum

The style quiz: just my Wave Code

Twelve quick either/or taps, about two minutes.

Your first name (optional)

Mo

Someone asks you a big question. You…

Answer right away and figure it out as I talk — *Need a moment, or a day, to think first*

A sudden change of plans feels…

Fine, maybe even fun — Jarring. I need a heads-up or a transition

Starting something new, you want…

The why and the big vision / The first concrete step

When something bothers you, you usually…

Say it plainly so we can fix it / *Hint at it, or wait for the right moment*

Someone says "I'm fine." You…

Believe them. Fine means fine / *Check their tone to see if they really are*

…and seven more like these.

MO'S FOUR LEANINGS (HIS WAVE CODE: S F N A)

What each letter means

Pace: leans Slow Simmer (S, not Quick Spark) · Lens: leans Forest (F, not Trees) · Sending: leans Nuanced (N, not Direct) · Receiving: strongly Attuned (A, not Explicit)

The nickname the tool gives it: the Willow

Reflective and soft-spoken. Feels the undercurrents of every room.

Watch for

agreeing in the moment just to fill the silence; your real needs getting lost in the cushioning.

Mo's style-quiz statement: "About how I'm wired: I think first and talk second, I tend to hint rather than say it straight, I see the big picture first, and I like to take my time."

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. A Wave Code is shorthand for four preferences, each a lean along a dial, not a type or a box. "Leans" means near the middle. Answers can change with the day, the setting and the person you're with.

Fill in your own: How you connect (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength)

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can get to know your own mix, look after what you need, and practise one small change if you want to. You can't change someone else's personality, and you don't have to change yours to be loved. If you're always the one bending to fit, it's fair to say so. Know your own wiring (spreadloveandacceptance.com/know-yourself)

SATURDAY, 5:30PM

Later, as people are leaving, you sit down next to your aunt. "I was the shy one, wasn't I," you say. "I still like quiet. These days I stand in front of thirty children every morning." She laughs. "Well, I was a terror at your age, and look at me now: I do flower arranging." You both laugh. You were never just "the shy one." Neither of you is who you were at ten, and that's fine.

In everyday life

On your own

Knowing your own mix helps you plan a life that suits you: how much company, how much quiet, how much routine, how much new. "I'm just not a people person" might be true, or an old label worth testing.

- **With a partner:** Different traits are normal. A shared plan ("I'll handle bills; you handle holidays") often works better than trying to change each other. See When we keep having the same fight (spreadloveandacceptance.com/how-to-stop-fighting-with-your-partner).
- **With friends:** A quiet friend who doesn't text much may still care a great deal. Ask what kind of contact suits them. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Parents and children:** A child's temperament isn't a sign of good or bad parenting. Adjusting to fit them is a skill, not giving in. See For parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents).
- **Family:** Family roles ("the clever one," "the difficult one") can stick long after they stop fitting. You're allowed to grow out of them.
- **At work:** Teams need a mix. Ask "How do you like to work?" rather than guessing from a quiz. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).

Common mix-ups

- **"You're either an introvert or an extravert."** Most people are somewhere in the middle, and it can shift with setting and mood.
- **"Personality is set by adulthood."** It keeps changing, slowly, across the whole of life.
- **"Some personalities are better."** Every trait has gifts and costs. What matters is fit and how you use it.
- **"Online type quizzes tell you who you are."** Many popular quizzes sort people into a handful of types. Real people are spread along each dial, not sorted into groups. Use quizzes for fun and conversation, not as a label. That includes this book's own Wave Code: four leanings on four dials, not a box.
- **"They're just difficult."** "Difficult" often means "different from me." It can also hide stress, illness or a need nobody has asked about.
- **"Changing would mean being fake."** Practising something new feels unnatural at first. Over time, it becomes part of you.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Drop the old labels.** Notice if you still describe someone the way they were years ago, and look for who they are now.
- **Ask, don't type.** "What helps you recharge?" or "How do you like to plan things?" beats guessing from their personality.
- **Notice growth out loud.** "You handled that so calmly" can help someone see a change they hadn't noticed.
- **Don't use personality as a weapon.** "You're so uptight" or "You're just lazy" closes doors. Describe the action, not the person.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I used to think of you as the shy one. I don't think that fits any more."
> "What do you need to be at your best this week?"

When to get more help

Personality differences are normal and don't need fixing. It may be worth talking to a doctor, counsellor or psychologist if:

- a pattern in how you feel, think or relate to people keeps causing you or others real distress, across many parts of life;
- you feel very unsure who you are, or your moods swing so much it's hard to cope;
- worry, low mood or fear of people is stopping you from living the life you want.

Please don't diagnose yourself or anyone else with a "personality disorder" from what you read online. Those are clinical terms that only a qualified professional can use, after a proper assessment.

A personality trait never excuses controlling, frightening or hurtful behaviour. If you're afraid of someone close to you, Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help.

This chapter is general education, not a diagnosis or therapy.

Tools and reading on the website

Tools helpers you use on the website

- How you connect (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength): four quick dials for how you think, talk and listen. Its four-letter Wave Code is shorthand for four preferences, not a type.
- Communication style quiz (spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz).

Reading pages to read on the website

- Know your own wiring: how you tend to feel, react and recharge.
- The library: the Big Five (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/wiring), introversion, morning and evening people and highly sensitive people.

More for your situation

- Part One, Now: your wiring, your weather and your words
- Part Three, Chapter 6: Habits and change (page 93)
- Part Three, Chapter 9: Minds that work differently (page 136)
- For parents · For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens) · For grandparents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grandparents)
- Sharing a room (spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room) · At work
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Traits are dials, not boxes.** Everyone sits somewhere along each one, and most people are near the middle.
- ✓ **Temperament is a starting point.** Babies already differ in how active, cautious or easily upset they are. What happens next matters too.
- ✓ **People keep changing.** On average, people grow steadier and more organised as they get older, and you can change on purpose, slowly.
- ✓ **Different isn't wrong.** Most clashes between personalities are about fit, not fault.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words
Your wiring today
read online

Part One · Then · Where your lens came from
Temperament and how you grew up
read online

Part Three · Chapter 9 · Minds that work differently
Minds that work differently
page 136

Part Three · Chapter 6 · Habits and change
How change really happens
page 93

PUT IT TO USE

How you connect
Four quick dials for how you think, talk and listen. Its four-letter Wave Code is shorthand for four preferences, not a type
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength

Communication style quiz
spreadloveandacceptance.com/communication-style-quiz

15

PART THREE · CHAPTER 15

Closeness and love: being known, at every age

How closeness grows, what it means to feel truly known, how love changes over the years, and how it looks in every kind of relationship, at every age, including for people on their own.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Love comes in many forms
2. Closeness grows from being known
3. Closeness is built a step at a time
4. Feeling understood matters most
5. Old maps show up in love
6. Love changes over time
7. Love at every age
8. Love is something you do
9. If you're a teenager
10. In everyday life
11. Common mix-ups
12. If you want to help someone else with this
13. When to get more help
14. Reading on this site
15. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Love comes in many forms.** Friends, family, partners, chosen family and the love you give yourself are all real love.
- **Closeness grows from being known.** You share something real, and the other person responds with understanding and care.
- **Love changes over time.** Early excitement often settles, and long love can stay warm, close and even exciting.
- **Love is something you do,** in small ways, every day. It never includes fear or control.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The 90-second daily check-in** (Part Two, Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1)) has an appreciation line, because closeness grows from small, frequent moments of being seen and known.
- **Who did what** (the Preface to Part Two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/preface)) matters for love too: work one person never sees slowly wears closeness down. Big idea: *see the whole load.*

FRIDAY, 10:30PM

You and Charlie have shared a home for eleven years. Tonight you're both on the sofa, both on your phones. You realise you can't remember the last time you talked about anything except bills, the boiler and whose turn it is to cook. You love Charlie. You just feel, oddly, a little alone in the same room.

This chapter isn't only about romance. It's about closeness in all its forms: what helps people feel near to each other, why it can fade, and how it can grow again. It builds on Chapter 5 (page 78), on attachment and trust.

01

Love comes in many forms.

The ancient Greeks had several words for love: for friends, for family, for romantic partners and for strangers. Today people love in many ways too: lifelong friendships, partners of any gender, people with more than one partner, chosen family, people who are asexual or aromantic and build deep closeness without romance or sex, and people on their own who pour love into friends, family, pets, work and community. No form is the "real" one. A life can be full of love without a partner in it.

For example: A woman in her fifties who has never wanted a partner says her closest relationship is with her best friend of thirty years. They've been

through two house moves, one cancer scare and countless Sunday phone calls. “That’s my great love story,” she says.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
“Who are the people I love, in all the forms it takes?” “The love I have counts, even if it doesn’t look like a film.”

TRY THIS:
Write down three people (or more) you love, of any kind. Next to each, write one way you show it.

02

Closeness grows from being known.

Intimacy isn’t only about touch or romance. At its heart is being known. Psychologists Reis and Shaver described it as a back-and-forth: one person shares something real about themselves, and the other responds in a way that leaves them feeling understood, accepted and cared for. In a diary study by Laurenceau, Barrett and Pietromonaco (1998), feeling that the other person really responded was a big part of what made everyday conversations feel intimate.

For example: Two brothers who talk mainly about football are driving to their dad’s care home. One says, “I find these visits really hard.” The other says, “Me too. I always feel guilty on the way home.” They’ve never felt closer.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
“Can I tell you something I haven’t said out loud before?” “Thank you for telling me. That makes sense.”

TRY THIS:
Share one small, true thing with someone you care about: a worry, a hope, or something that made you happy this week. Then notice how they respond.

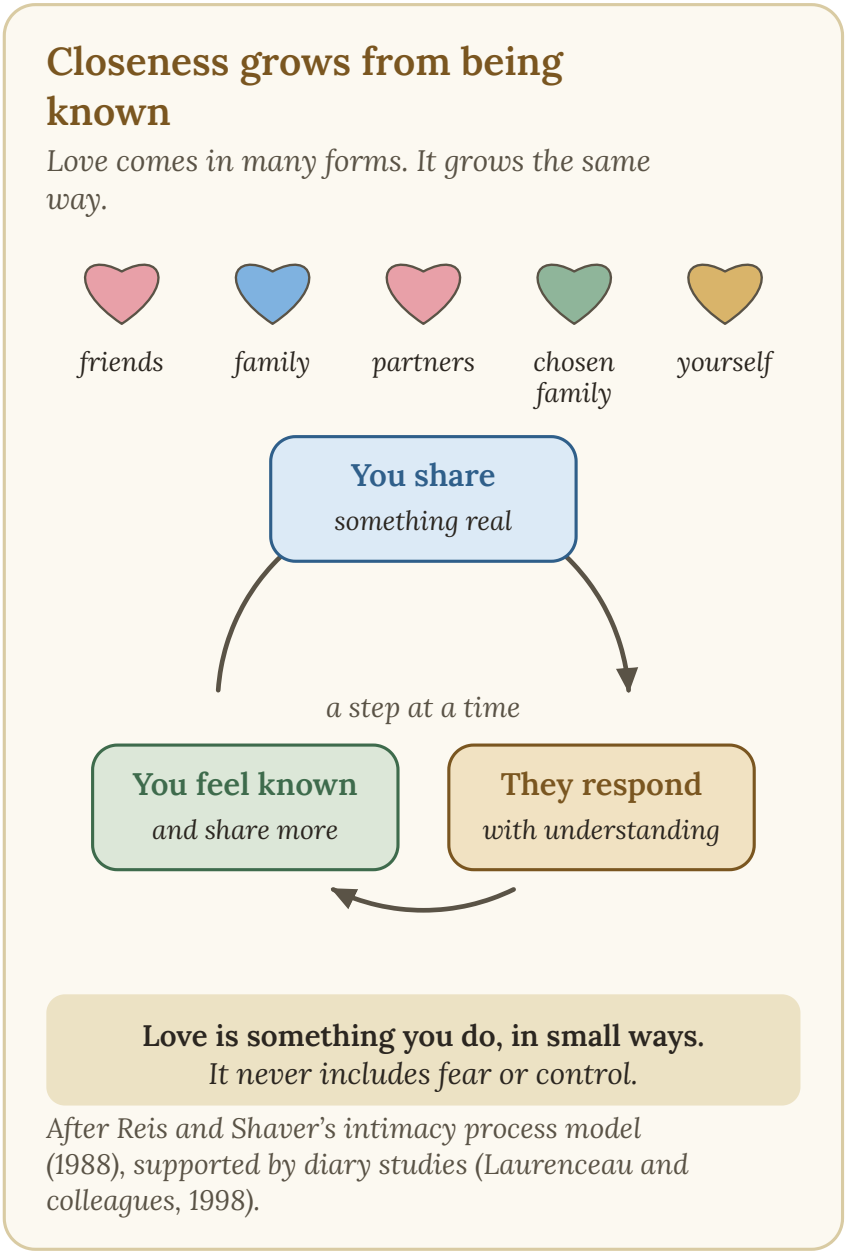


FIGURE 20 Closeness grows from being known: you share something real, the other person responds with understanding, and you share a little more.

03

Closeness is built a step at a time.

People usually get close by sharing a little more, and a little more, when it feels safe. In a well-known study by Aron and colleagues (1997), pairs of strangers who took turns asking gradually more personal questions (now known as the "36 questions") felt closer after 45 minutes than pairs who made small talk. The same idea works in friendships and long relationships: closeness grows when both people take small, matched steps.

For example: Two new neighbours start with weather and parking. Over a few months, it becomes "How's your mum doing?" and later, "Can I tell you what's really been going on?" Neither rushed it.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"What's something you're looking forward to?" "What's been on your mind lately?" "What was the best part of your week?"

TRY THIS:

Ask someone one question a little deeper than usual. If they answer, share something of your own back.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Closeness grows when you know what feels like care to the other person, not just to you. A "What feels like care" card is a gentle way to find out.

TOOL **How you connect: what feels like care** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/love-languages

04

Feeling understood matters most.

What makes someone feel loved is often less about grand gestures and more about feeling understood. Researchers call this *responsiveness*: noticing, understanding and caring about what matters to the other person. It shows in small moments, like how you react to good news. Gable and colleagues (2004) found that people whose partners usually met their good news with real interest and warmth felt closer and more satisfied together.

For example: A teenager says, "I got picked for the band!" Her grandad stops what he's doing, smiles, and asks, "What instrument? When's the first concert?" She talks for twenty minutes.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"Tell me everything!" "That sounds like it really mattered to you." "What was that like?"

TRY THIS:
The next time someone shares good news, put your phone down and ask two follow-up questions.

05

Old maps show up in love.

The patterns from Chapter 5 (page 78) often come out most strongly with the people we love most. Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that adult love uses the same attachment system as childhood bonds. When closeness feels shaky, some people reach harder for reassurance; others pull back to feel safe. Neither is bad. Both are ways of protecting something precious.

For example: When his partner goes quiet, Leo texts five times in an hour. His partner, who goes quiet to calm down, feels crowded. They agree: "I need an hour, and I'll message you at eight." Leo can wait for a known time.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I'm feeling unsure of us right now. Can you tell me we're okay?" "I need some space, and I'm coming back. Let's talk at eight."

TRY THIS:
Notice what you do when closeness feels shaky: reach out, pull back, or both. Tell someone you trust what helps you feel safe again.

06

Love changes over time.

Early love is often intense, with racing thoughts and a lot of longing. Over years, it usually settles into something calmer and deeper. That isn't failure. A review by Acevedo and Aron (2009) found that some people in long relationships still report strong romantic love, without the anxious, obsessive edge of early love, and that this was linked to being happier together.

In experiments by Aron and colleagues (2000), couples who tried a new, mildly challenging activity together felt better about their relationship afterwards than couples given a dull task.

For example: After twenty-five years, a couple take a pottery class. They're both terrible at it and laugh all evening. On the way home, one says, "I feel like we're on a date."

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Calm isn't the same as cold." "What could we try that's new for both of us?"

TRY THIS:

Plan one small new thing with someone you love: a new walk, a new recipe, a new place. New for both of you matters more than big.



SUGARFOOT

Sugarfoot's tip: little rituals, like a Sunday walk or a goodnight text, keep love warm through the years. Look after the ones you have.

WORKPAPER WP-15 **Keep your little rituals alive** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-15

07

Love at every age.

Love looks different across a life. Teenagers' first loves can be huge and real. Adults juggle love with work, children and caring for parents. Many older people choose to spend their time with fewer, closer people. Carstensen and colleagues (1999) linked this to feeling that time is more limited, which makes the most meaningful relationships matter more. People find new love at

seventy and eighty. People lose great loves and carry them always. All of it counts.

For example: A widower of seventy-eight meets a woman at his walking group. His children are surprised. He says, "I loved your mother for fifty years. I still do. And I'm allowed to be happy now."

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"It's never too late to be close to someone." "Missing someone is a form of love too."

TRY THIS:
Reach out to someone from another generation this week: an older relative, a younger neighbour or a colleague. Ask them about love in their life, if it feels right.

08

Love is something you do.

Feelings of love come and go. The actions of love can be steady: turning towards someone when they speak, keeping small promises, saying thank you, saying sorry, making room for who they are. Physical closeness, like a hug or holding hands, matters a lot to some people and less to others, and sex is part of closeness for some relationships and not others. What matters is that both people feel comfortable and free to say yes or no. Love never includes fear, threats or control.

For example: A friend notices her friend has been quiet since his divorce. She doesn't say "I love you," but every Thursday she texts, "Walk?" and turns up. That is love too.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"What makes you feel most loved by me?" "Is this okay for you?" "I noticed you've been quiet. I'm here."

TRY THIS:

Ask someone you love, “What’s one small thing that makes you feel cared for?” Then do it this week.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 15

Our time-together deal

Jamal and Tess, a couple; Jamal games most evenings

Our time-together deal

Your name
Jamal

Their name
Tess

Game nights (or long phone time)
Tuesday and Friday evenings, plus Sunday afternoon

Heads-up rule
Say before a session over an hour, and roughly when it ends.

When one of us asks for time
Finish this match, then I’m yours. No new one.

Our protected evening
Wednesday, from 7: we cook together

Phone-free times
Dinner, and the first 20 minutes in bed

Chores before the session
Dishes and our own jobs for the day are done first.

YOUR DEAL, READY TO SEND

Our time-together deal (Jamal and Tess), with each line above. A link holds the deal as it is right now: if either of you changes something, send a new link.

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

Fill in your own: Our time-together deal (spreadloveandacceptance.com/gaming-and-time-together)

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can share a little of yourself, listen well, turn towards the people you love and keep small promises. You can't make someone love you, or love you in the way you want. If closeness keeps hurting you, or you feel afraid, that is not a failure of love on your part. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety)

THE NEXT FRIDAY, 10:30PM

This time you leave both phones in the kitchen. You make two cups of tea and ask, "What's something you've been thinking about lately that you haven't told me?" Charlie is quiet for a moment, then talks about their dad getting older, and how scared they are of the phone ringing. You listen, and share your own worry about work. It's midnight before you notice the time. Nothing big was fixed. But you both feel known again.

If you're a teenager

First love can be huge and real. So can a first breakup. A *made-up example*: Ines, 16, is dumped by message on a Tuesday night and cries until 2am. "You'll get over it" from an adult doesn't help. What does: telling her cousin, who just listens; muting the chat instead of rereading it; and a rule of no checking their profile after ten. Weeks later she notices a whole day without thinking about it.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I don't need advice, I just need to tell someone." "Can we reply when we can, not all day?" If you're ending it: "I don't want to go out any more. I'm sorry. It isn't about something you did wrong."

In everyday life

On your own

Being single, widowed, divorced or happily alone doesn't mean a life without love. Friendships, family, community and the way you treat yourself are all

places where love lives. If you want a partner and don't have one, that longing is real and worth being gentle with. See On my own (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own) and Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief).

- **Partners:** Most partners drift into talking only about jobs and bills. One real question a week can bring you back. See Turning towards (spreadloveandacceptance.com/turning-toward) and Check-ins (spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins).
- **More than two partners:** Closeness with each person needs its own time and attention. See More than two (spreadloveandacceptance.com/more-than-two).
- **Friends:** Friendship is love too, and it needs tending like any other. See Friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **Family:** Parents, children, siblings and grandparents often love each other deeply and say it rarely. A short "I'm glad you're my sister" can mean a lot.
- **Long distance:** Being known can still happen across miles, through small, regular check-ins. See Long distance (spreadloveandacceptance.com/long-distance).
- **Different levels of desire:** Very common in long relationships, and nobody's fault. Talk at a calm time, keep some affection that doesn't have to lead anywhere, and remember a kind "no" isn't a rejection of the person. A qualified sex therapist or couples therapist can help. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-15-love-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"Real love means a romantic partner."** Friendship, family and chosen family are real love.
- **"If the spark fades, love is over."** Early intensity usually settles. Many long relationships stay warm, close and lively.
- **"If they loved me, they'd just know what I need."** Nobody reads minds. Saying what helps is a gift, not a failure.
- **"Jealousy proves love."** Feeling jealous is human, and asking for something out of care for the relationship is not control. Checking up without agreement, cutting someone off or punishing them is not love. See signs to look out for.
- **"Intimacy means sex."** Intimacy means being known. It can include physical closeness, or not.
- **"Love should be effortless."** Love usually takes small, steady effort, and that effort is part of what love is.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Respect their kind of love.** Don't assume everyone wants a partner, children or one kind of relationship.
- **Be a safe person to tell things to.** Listen without judging, and keep what they share private.
- **After a loss or breakup, keep showing up.** Many people get lots of support for two weeks and then very little.
- **If you're worried about someone's relationship,** stay close and kind rather than criticising their partner. If they seem afraid, gently share Not safe at home?

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I'm always glad to hear from you." "You don't have to explain your relationship to me. I just want you to be happy and safe."

When to get more help

- If you feel very lonely or low most days for two weeks or more, talk to a doctor or counsellor.
- If closeness feels frightening, or you keep ending up in relationships that hurt you, a counsellor or therapist can help you understand why.
- Couples, family or relationship counselling can help when you feel stuck, distant or keep having the same fight.
- If someone you love controls you, frightens you, checks your phone, cuts you off from friends or pressures you into anything you don't want, that isn't love. Not safe at home? lists free, private help.
- If you're in danger now, call your local emergency number. Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now) can help you take the first step.

This chapter is general education, not therapy.

Reading on the website

Reading pages to read on the website

- Bonding: how closeness grows (spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding): what research says about closeness, with small ideas for partners, kids, friends, family and you.
- Turning towards: small daily moments of connection.
- The languages of connection (spreadloveandacceptance.com/languages-of-connection): the different ways people show care.
- Complacency (spreadloveandacceptance.com/complacency): why good things fade, and how to keep them alive.
- The library: responsiveness (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/relationships), love maps, self-expansion, adult attachment and sharing good news (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection).

More for your situation

- Part Three, Chapter 5: Attachment, trust and belonging (page 78)
- Friends · More than two · Long distance
- Coming out as an adult (spreadloveandacceptance.com/coming-out)
- On my own · Grief and later life
- Retired together (spreadloveandacceptance.com/retired-together) · Empty nest (spreadloveandacceptance.com/empty-nest)
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Love comes in many forms.** Friends, family, partners, chosen family and the love you give yourself are all real love.
- ✓ **Closeness grows from being known.** You share something real, and the other person responds with understanding and care.
- ✓ **Love changes over time.** Early excitement often settles, and long love can stay warm, close and even exciting.
- ✓ **Love is something you do,** in small ways, every day. It never includes fear or control.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 5 · Attachment, trust and belonging
Attachment and trust
page 78

Part Two · Chapter I · Why we get out of tune
Staying in tune day to day
read online

Preface to Part Two · The work nobody sees
Noticing the work love does
read online

Part One · Next · Who you are becoming
Growing as a person inside a relationship
read online

PUT IT TO USE



Bonding: how closeness grows
What research says about closeness, with small ideas for partners, kids, friends, family and you
spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding



Turning towards
Small daily moments of connection
spreadloveandacceptance.com/turning-toward

16

PART THREE · CHAPTER 16

Worry, low mood and trauma

How worry and anxiety work, the difference between a low patch and depression, what trauma is and isn't, what helps day to day, how to support someone, and when and where to get more help. For anyone, in any kind of relationship, or on your own.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. Worry and anxiety are the body's alarm
2. Avoiding keeps fear going
3. Give worry a time and a place
4. Low mood is common. Depression is more than a bad week
5. Doing often comes before feeling better
6. Sleep, moving and people do a lot of the work
7. Trauma is about what happened, and what it left behind
8. After something frightening: safety, choice and no pressure
9. Talking therapies help many people, and medicines can too
10. If you're a teenager
11. In everyday life
12. Common mix-ups
13. If you want to help someone else with this
14. When to get more help
15. Workpapers, tools and reading on this site
16. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **Worry, low mood and the after-effects of trauma are common, human and treatable.** They are not weakness, and they are not your fault.
- **They all run through the stress system** from Chapter 2 (page 31). Small, steady things that settle the body and reconnect you with life help more than big pushes.
- **Avoiding and withdrawing feel safer but keep things going.** Small steps back in, a little at a time, help most.

- **Talking therapies work for many people, and so can medicines.** If it has lasted weeks, is getting in the way of life, or you feel unsafe, get help. If you might act on thoughts of ending your life, call or text 988 (US) or call Samaritans on 116 123 (UK and Ireland) now.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The daily check-in's "low, medium or high"** (Part Two, Chapter I (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-1)) works because worry and low mood shrink the room you have. Saying so lets the people around you adjust. Big idea: *read your state first.*
- **"A full tank means later, not never"** (Part Two, Chapter III (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-3)) names a time to come back, because avoiding a thing keeps fear going, and a named time doesn't.
- **Pick one small goal** (Part One, Next (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-3-next)) fits low mood: doing often comes before feeling better.

SUNDAY, 10:50PM

The house is quiet. You've checked the front door twice. Tomorrow is the hospital appointment, and the same three thoughts go round: what if it's bad, what if I can't cope, what if there's nobody to tell. Your chest is tight and your mind won't stop. You haven't really wanted to see anyone for a few weeks either. Everything feels like too much effort.

Almost everyone worries, feels low or goes through something frightening at some point. For some people these feelings settle by themselves. For others they stick, grow and start to shape every day. This chapter explains how they work, what tends to help, and when it's time to ask for more help. It can't diagnose anyone. If any of this is about you right now, you are not alone, and things can get better.

01

Worry and anxiety are the body's alarm.

Fear is the body's alarm for danger that is here now. Anxiety is the same alarm ringing about something that might happen. Worry is the thinking part: "What if…?" on repeat. They use the same stress system as Chapter 2 (page 31): a racing heart, tight chest, shallow breathing, a churning stomach, poor sleep. The alarm is trying to protect you. The trouble is that it can be set too sensitive, and it can't tell a real tiger from a worrying email.

For example: A teenager's heart pounds before every class presentation. Nothing bad has ever happened. Her alarm still treats a room of classmates like danger.

> THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
> "This is my alarm, not a fact." "My body is getting ready to protect me. I can thank it and carry on."

TRY THIS:

When worry rises, breathe out slowly, longer out than in, five times. Then name three things you can see. It tells the body the danger isn't here right now.

02

Avoiding keeps fear going.

When something makes us anxious, stepping away brings quick relief. But the relief teaches the brain, "Good thing we escaped." Next time, the fear is a little bigger and the world a little smaller. What helps is the opposite: going back towards the feared thing in small, chosen steps, and staying long enough to learn that you can cope. Therapists call this exposure. Craske and colleagues (2014) describe how it works best when each step tests what you expect to happen.

For example: After a panic attack on a bus, a man starts walking everywhere. With his sister's help he takes one stop, then two, then a whole journey. The fear fades as his brain learns buses are survivable.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"What do I think will happen? Let's see what actually happens."
"Uncomfortable isn't the same as dangerous."

TRY THIS:

Pick one small thing you've been avoiding. Break it into three steps, from easiest to hardest. Do the easiest one this week.

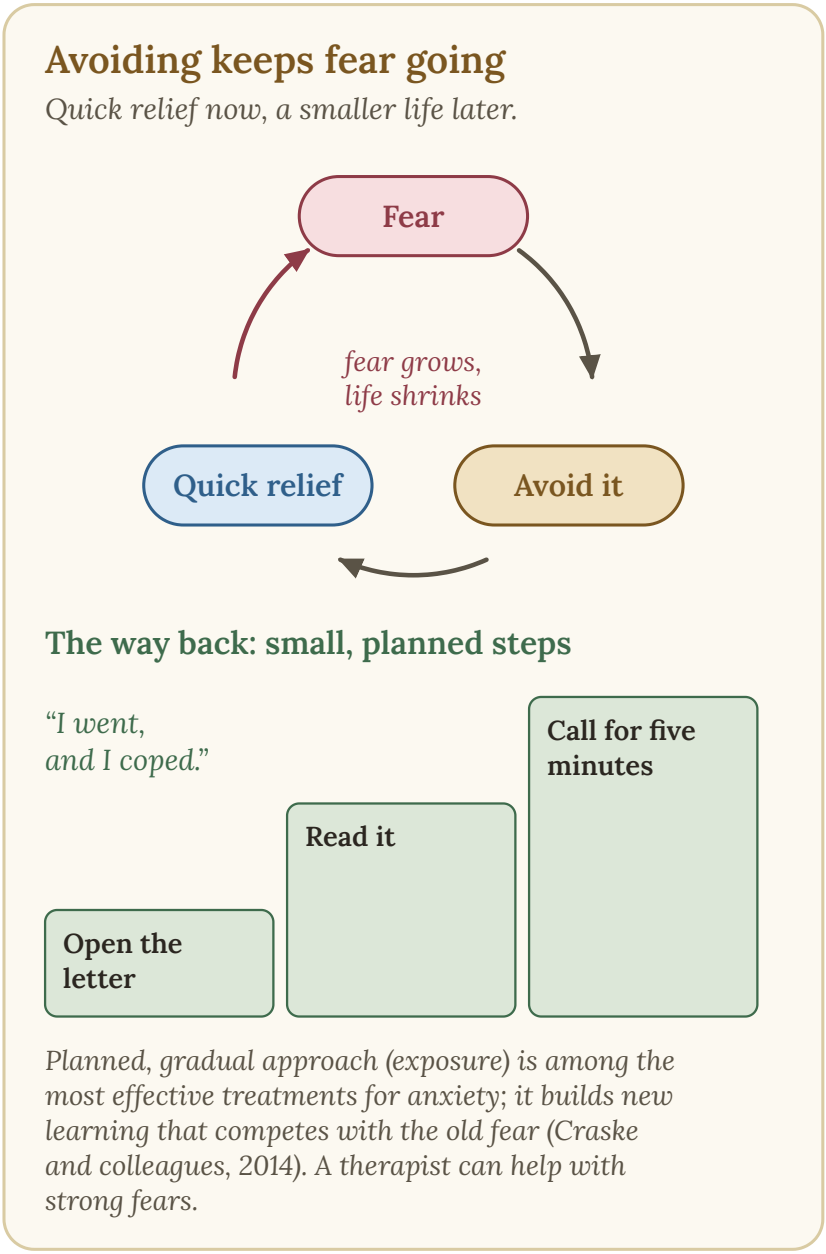


FIGURE 21 Avoiding keeps fear going. Small, planned steps back in help most, and a therapist can help with strong fears.

03

Give worry a time and a place.

Trying hard not to worry rarely works. What helps many people is postponing it: noticing a worry, writing it down, and saving it for a set "worry time" later in the day. In an early study by Borkovec and colleagues (1983), people who practised this for four weeks reported worrying less each day. In worry time, sort each worry: is there something I can do? If yes, plan one step. If not, practise letting it go.

For example: A father caring for his own dad keeps a worry notebook by the kettle. At 6pm he gives it fifteen minutes. Many of the morning's worries already look smaller.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Noted. I'll think about that at six." "Can I do anything about this today? If not, it can wait."

TRY THIS:

Choose a fifteen-minute worry time, not just before bed. Keep a note on your phone for worries that pop up in between.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 16

Flip it

Tolu, 17, at 1am, three days before an exam

Flip it

What's on your mind?

What if I fail my chemistry exam on Friday and don't get into the course I want?

What kind is it?

A complaint about someone | A *worry* | Being hard on myself | Anger

THE FLIP

The best outcome would be
[what you hope for]

The main thing in the way
I fail my chemistry exam on Friday and don't get into the course I want

If that happens, I'll
[one small thing you could do]

One step today
[something that takes ten minutes or less]

This is WOOP, from Gabriele Oettingen's research: Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan. The worry becomes the obstacle you plan for. This is a starting point. Change any words you like.

Tolu's version
Best outcome: I pass, and I feel I did my best. In the way: I freeze on the long questions. If that happens, I'll do the short questions first and come back. One step today: one long question from a past paper, then bed.

When the worry comes back at 1am
It goes on the list for tomorrow's worry time, 5pm, ten minutes.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. If worry is stopping you sleeping or eating most days, tell someone you trust, or your doctor.

Fill in your own: Flip it (spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins)

04

Low mood is common. Depression is more than a bad week.

Everyone has low days, and sadness after a loss or a disappointment is normal. Depression is different: low mood, or losing interest in things you used to enjoy, most of the day, nearly every day, for two weeks or more, often with poor sleep, tiredness, changes in appetite, feeling worthless or guilty, and finding it hard to think. It can look like sadness, or like irritability, numbness or just running on empty. It is a health problem, not a character flaw.

For example: A retired teacher notices he has stopped going to his walking group, isn't reading, and wakes at four every morning. He tells himself he's just old. His daughter gently suggests it might be depression, and that it's treatable.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I've not been myself for a few weeks, and I don't think it's just tiredness."
"I don't enjoy things I used to. Can I talk to you about it?"

TRY THIS:

If you've felt low or lost interest most days for two weeks or more, book a talk with a doctor this week. Write down what you've noticed to take with you.

05

Doing often comes before feeling better.

Low mood says, "Wait until you feel like it." But withdrawing makes life emptier, which deepens the low. A well-tested approach called behavioural activation turns this round: plan small, doable things that bring a bit of pleasure, meaning or achievement, and do them whether you feel like it or not. A review of 26 trials by Ekers and colleagues (2014) found it helped with depression, though many of the studies were small.

For example: A woman living alone after her divorce plans three small things a day: a ten-minute walk, one call or message, one task she can finish. Some days they feel pointless. Over a few weeks, the days start to feel less flat.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"I don't have to feel like it to do it." "Small counts."

TRY THIS:

Write down three tiny things for tomorrow: one for pleasure, one for connection, one you can finish. Tick them off, however small.

06

Sleep, moving and people do a lot of the work.

These sound too simple to matter, but the evidence for them is solid. Improving sleep can lift mood: in a large trial with university students, Freeman and colleagues (2017) found that an online sleep course reduced insomnia, and with it some other mental health difficulties.

Exercise helps depression too: a review of 218 trials by Noetel and colleagues (2024) found walking or jogging, yoga and strength training all helped. And belonging to groups protects: Cruwys and colleagues (2013) found that people with depression who joined groups were less likely to relapse.

For example: A new dad, exhausted and flat, agrees with his partner on one protected long sleep each weekend each, a pram walk every morning, and a weekly game of five-a-side.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I need help protecting my sleep for a while." "Would you come for a short walk with me? I find it hard to go on my own."

TRY THIS:

Pick the one basic that is most off for you right now, sleep, moving or people, and make one small change to it this week.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Small, steady things help: a walk, a regular bedtime, time with someone kind. Calm sounds can be a soft way to wind down at night.

TOOL **Cool-down corner: calm sounds and music** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes

07

Trauma is about what happened, and what it left behind.

Trauma usually means going through, or seeing, something that threatened life or safety, such as violence, abuse, a serious accident, war, or the sudden death of someone close. It is very common: in surveys across 24 countries, Kessler and colleagues (2017) found about 7 in 10 adults had been through at least one.

Most people recover over time. A smaller number develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with memories that come back vividly, avoiding reminders, feeling on high alert, and sleep problems. Ordinary hard times and stress hurt too, even when they aren't trauma in this sense.

For example: Months after a car crash, a woman still jumps at screeching brakes and avoids driving at night. She isn't "overreacting." Her alarm learned that cars can mean danger, and hasn't unlearned it yet.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"My reactions make sense after what happened." "It's in the past, even if my body doesn't feel that yet."

TRY THIS:

If something frightening happened more than a month ago and it still shapes your days, talk to a doctor. Trauma-focused talking therapies help many people.

08

After something frightening: safety, choice and no pressure.

After a frightening event, people need safety, practical help, warmth and choice. They don't need to be made to talk. In fact, a review of single-session "debriefing" after trauma by Rose and colleagues (2002) found it did not prevent PTSD, and might make things worse for some. Services that are "trauma-informed" (SAMHSA, 2014) put safety, trust, choice and working together first. The same ideas help in families, friendships and workplaces.

For example: After a break-in, a grandmother doesn't want to talk about it. Her grandson doesn't push. He fixes the lock, stays the night, and says, "If you ever want to talk about it, I'm here." A week later, she does.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"You don't have to tell me anything. What would help right now?" "You're safe now. I'm staying."

TRY THIS:

If someone you love has been through something frightening, ask one practical question ("What do you need today?") and one open one ("How are you doing, really?"), and let them choose.

09

Talking therapies help many people, and medicines can too.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) teaches practical ways to notice and change patterns of thinking and doing. It is one of the most studied talking therapies: a review of over a hundred meta-analyses by Hofmann and colleagues (2012) found the strongest support for anxiety problems and stress, and support for many other problems too.

Guidelines such as NICE (2022) also recommend guided self-help, behavioural activation, exercise groups and, for some people, antidepressants. Questions about medicine, including starting, changing or stopping it, are for a doctor or prescriber. Please don't stop a medicine suddenly without advice.

For example: A young man is embarrassed to ask for help with panic attacks. His GP refers him to a short course of CBT. Eight sessions later, he's back on the train to work.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'd like to talk about my mood. It's been going on for a while." "What are my options, and what do you recommend for someone like me?"

TRY THIS:

Write three lines before an appointment: what you've noticed, how long, and what it's stopping you doing. It makes the first conversation easier.

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can learn how your alarm works, keep the basics going, take small steps back towards life, and ask for help when it's more than you can carry. You can't think your way out of depression by trying harder, and you can't fix someone else's. Being kind to yourself, and getting the right help, are part of the work, not a failure at it. If you feel unsafe, reaching out today matters more than anything in this book.

MONDAY, 7:30AM

Last night you wrote the three worries on the back of an envelope and told them: tomorrow. You slept, a bit. This morning you breathe out long at the kitchen window, then text your neighbour: "Hospital at ten. A bit scared. Fancy a cuppa after?"

She replies with three hearts and "Of course." The appointment is still the appointment. But you're not facing it alone, and you've noticed something: it's been weeks of feeling flat. You add a line to the envelope: "Ask the doctor about my mood too."

If you're a teenager

Exams, friends, group chats and the future can all pile up, often at 1am. A *made-up example*: Tolu, 17, can't sleep before a chemistry exam. She writes the worry down for tomorrow's ten-minute worry time, plans one small step, and puts her phone in another room. The next day she tells her mum, and it helps more than she expected.

If worry or low mood is stopping you sleeping, eating or going to school most days for a few weeks, tell someone you trust or your doctor. Under 19 in the UK, you can call Childline free on 0800 1111.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I keep worrying at night. Can I talk it through?" "I don't need you to fix it. I just need to say it."

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Living alone can make worry louder at night and low mood quieter and easier to miss. A daily small contact, a call, a message, a walk with someone, protects you. See On your own: when it's lonely (spreadloveandacceptance.com/on-my-own).
- **With a partner:** Low mood can look like not caring; anxiety can look like nagging. Name it: "I'm low, not cross with you." See Chapter 2 (page 31) on stress in two people.
- **Parents and children:** Children and teens get anxious and low too. Calm, routine and listening help more than reassurance on repeat. See For parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/parents) and For teens (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).
- **With friends and family:** A friend who keeps cancelling may be struggling, not drifting. Keep inviting, with no pressure. See When a friend goes quiet (spreadloveandacceptance.com/friends).
- **After a loss:** Grief and depression overlap but aren't the same. See Chapter 8 (page 122) and Grief and later life (spreadloveandacceptance.com/grief).
- **At work:** Stress, worry and low mood are common at work and rarely spoken about. A short, honest line to a manager often opens up support. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work).
- **If you have ADHD:** Avoidance often looks like putting things off. Make the first step almost silly ("open the envelope"), set a ten-minute timer, or do it with someone else in the room. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-16-worry-in-depth).

Common mix-ups

- **"Anxiety means something is wrong with me."** Anxiety is a normal alarm. It becomes a problem when it's too loud, too often, or starts shrinking your life.
- **"Depression is just sadness. Snap out of it."** Depression affects sleep, energy, thinking and body as well as mood. Nobody snaps out of it, but many people recover with the right help.
- **"Everything bad that happens is trauma."** Trauma usually means threat to life or safety. Other hard things still hurt and still deserve care, and the word doesn't need to fit for help to be fair.
- **"Talking about trauma straight away helps everyone."** Some people want to talk, some don't. Forcing it can make things worse. Safety and choice come first.
- **"Asking someone about suicide puts the idea in their head."** It doesn't. A review by Dazzi and colleagues (2014) found no evidence that asking increases suicidal thoughts, and it may help.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Notice and ask.** "You've seemed low lately. How are you doing, really?" Then listen more than you talk.
- **Don't argue with the feeling.** "Cheer up" and "It could be worse" push people away. "That sounds really hard" keeps them close.
- **Offer something specific.** A walk, a meal, a lift to the doctor, sitting together. Small and practical beats big and vague.
- **Ask directly about safety if you're worried.** "Are you having thoughts of ending your life?" If yes, stay with them, and get help together today.
- **Look after yourself too.** Supporting someone who is struggling is tiring. See Chapter 12 (page 189).

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"I'm not trying to fix it. I just want you to know I'm here." "Would it help if I came with you to the doctor?"

When to get more help

Talk to a doctor, a counsellor or a mental health service if:

- you've felt low, empty or hopeless, or lost interest in things, most days for two weeks or more;
- worry or panic is stopping you doing things, or you're avoiding more and more;
- something frightening happened over a month ago and still shapes your days and nights;
- you're using alcohol, drugs, food or anything else to cope;
- you're not sleeping, eating or looking after yourself;
- you have thoughts of harming yourself.

If you might act on thoughts of ending your life, or you are in danger, get help now. Call your local emergency number (911 in the US and Canada, 999 in the UK, 112 in most of Europe). In the US, call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or text HOME to 741741. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123, or text SHOUT to 85258.

In Canada, call or text 988. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Under 19 in the UK? Childline is free on 0800 1111. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines in your country. More are on Someone to talk to, free (spreadloveandacceptance.com/outside-help).

In England you can usually refer yourself to NHS Talking Therapies without seeing a GP first. Find a counsellor or therapist has more places to start. If someone at home is hurting or frightening you, Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) lists free, private help.

This chapter is general education. It isn't a diagnosis or a substitute for care from a professional.

Workpapers, tools and reading on the website

Workpapers **pages you fill in, on your own or together**

- The Calm-Down Kit (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11): a plan, made on a calm day, for hard moments.

Tools **helpers you use on the website**

- Upset right now? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now): steps for when a feeling is very big, very fast.
- My weather today (spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks): a quick daily check-in on stress, sleep and people.

Reading **pages to read on the website**

- The calm visualizer (spreadloveandacceptance.com/calm-visualizer) for slow breathing.
- Help beyond this book: counsellors, helplines and support groups.
- The library: the stress response (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/stress), the window of tolerance, sleep and mood, going over and over things (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/emotions), catastrophising (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/thinking) and loneliness (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection).

More for your situation

- On your own · Grief and later life
- For teens · For parents · New parents (spreadloveandacceptance.com/new-parent)
- Caring for someone you love (spreadloveandacceptance.com/caregivers)
- At work
- Not safe at home?
- **More in Part Three:** Stress (page 31) · Self-worth and self-compassion (page 108) · Healing (page 174)
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **Worry, low mood and the after-effects of trauma are common, human and treatable.** They are not weakness, and they are not your fault.
- ✓ **They all run through the stress system** from Chapter 2. Small, steady things that settle the body and reconnect you with life help more than big pushes.
- ✓ **Avoiding and withdrawing feel safer but keep things going.** Small steps back in, a little at a time, help most.
- ✓ **Talking therapies work for many people, and so can medicines.** If it has lasted weeks, is getting in the way of life, or you feel unsafe, get help. If you might act on thoughts of ending your life, call or text 988 (US) or call Samaritans on 116 123 (UK and Ireland) now.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 2 · Stress and the nervous system page 31
The stress ladder and rest

Part Three · Chapter 7 · Self-worth, shame and self-compassion page 108
A kinder inner voice

Part Three · Chapter 12 · Helping others well page 189
Supporting someone who is struggling

Part One · Now · Your wiring, weather and words read online
Checking your weather each day

PUT IT TO USE

The Calm-Down Kit
A plan, made on a calm day, for hard moments
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11

Upset right now?
Steps for when a feeling is very big, very fast
spreadloveandacceptance.com/upset-right-now

17

PART THREE · CHAPTER 17

Fitting in: groups, influence and culture

Why fitting in pulls so hard, how groups shape what we say and do, how culture and family set the unwritten rules, and how to stay yourself, and disagree kindly, without losing your place. For anyone in any group: a family, a friendship, a team, a faith, a neighbourhood or a group chat.

IN THIS CHAPTER

1. The pull to fit in is old and strong
2. We go along more than we think
3. Authority can lead people a long way
4. "Us and them" forms fast
5. Norms are the rules nobody wrote down
6. Cultures differ, and so do people inside them
7. Every family is a small culture
8. Online groups pull harder and faster
9. You can belong and still be yourself
10. Disagree kindly, and early
11. If you're a teenager
12. In everyday life
13. Common mix-ups
14. If you want to help someone else with this
15. When to get more help
16. Reading on this site
17. More for your situation

IN SHORT:

- **The pull to fit in is old and strong.** Being left out hurts, so we bend to stay in. That's human, not weak.
- **Groups shape us more than we notice:** what we say, what we think is normal, and sometimes what we're willing to do.
- **Cultures and families each have unwritten rules.** They differ a lot, and so do the people inside them.

- **You can belong and still be yourself.** One calm, kind voice saying "I see it differently" often frees others to say so too.

WHY THE TOOLS WORK: this chapter explains the thinking behind these tools from earlier in the book.

- **The rulebook from home** (Part One, Then (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/self-1-then)) and **House rules for us** (One owner per job) write down the rules nobody wrote down, so a group can choose them instead of just following them. Big idea: *notice the quiet incentives.*
- **The monthly look-back** (Part Two, Chapter V (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/chapter-5)) is "not a review of either person". That is what lets people speak up early, before the group drifts.

THURSDAY, 9:20PM

The family group chat is buzzing. Someone has posted a joke about your cousin's new partner, and the laughing faces are piling up. Your thumb hovers. You don't find it funny. You also don't want to be the one who "can't take a joke." Everyone else seems fine with it. You start typing a laughing face.

We all belong to groups, and we need them. Chapter 5 (page 78) looked at belonging: why we need each other and how trust grows. This chapter looks at the other side: how groups pull on us, why we go along, and how to stay true to yourself while staying connected.

01

The pull to fit in is old and strong.

For most of human history, being part of a group meant survival. Being left out still feels alarming. In studies by Williams and colleagues (2000), people who were simply left out of an online ball-throwing game, by strangers they

would never meet, felt worse and less like they belonged. So we bend to stay in: laughing at jokes, keeping quiet, going along.

For example: A new starter at a warehouse laughs at a teasing nickname he dislikes, because he wants to be one of the team.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"Wanting to fit in is normal. I still get to choose what I go along with."

TRY THIS:
Notice one moment this week when you went along with something to fit in. No judging. Just notice.

02

We go along more than we think.

In Solomon Asch's famous experiments (Asch, 1956), people judged which of three lines matched another line. When the actors around them all gave the same wrong answer, people went along with the group on about a third of the answers, even though the right answer was obvious.

Many never went along at all. Later research, such as a review by Bond and Smith (1996), found the effect is real but varies: it has been smaller in more recent studies, and larger in cultures that put the group first.

For example: In a meeting, everyone praises a plan. One woman sees a big problem, but stays quiet. Afterwards, two colleagues tell her they had doubts too.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"Would I say this if I were on my own?" "If I'm thinking it, someone else might be too."

TRY THIS:
Before a group decision, write down your own view first. Then listen to the group.

We go along more than we think

And one other voice changes a lot.



Alone against the group



went along on about 1 in 3 answers

With one ally



going along fell sharply

One calm, kind voice saying "I see it differently" often frees others to say so too.

Asch (1956). About a quarter of people never went along. Across 133 later studies the effect held but varied by time and culture (Bond and Smith, 1996).

FIGURE 22 We go along more than we think, and one other voice changes a lot. In Asch's studies, going along fell sharply when one other person gave the right answer.

03

Authority can lead people a long way.

In Stanley Milgram's experiments (Milgram, 1963), many ordinary people kept giving what they believed were painful electric shocks to a stranger, because a man in a lab coat told them to. (No shocks were real.) Burger (2009) repeated part of it safely and found similar results. But the studies are also debated: later researchers, such as Haslam and Reicher (2012), argue people went along when they believed in the cause, not blindly, and many people refused.

For example: A nurse is told by a senior doctor to give a dose that looks wrong. She checks, speaks up, and is right. Checking is not disloyalty.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Before I do this, can I check one thing?" "I'm not comfortable with this. Can we look at it again?"

TRY THIS:

Think of one person whose word you tend to follow without question. Is there anything you'd want to check next time?

04

"Us and them" forms fast.

Part of how we see ourselves comes from our groups: our family, town, team, faith or job. Tajfel and Turner (1979) called this social identity. It brings pride and loyalty. It also makes us quick to favour "us" and to see "them" as all the same, even when the groups are formed on almost nothing. Knowing that this happens is the first step to catching it.

For example: Two branches of a family always sit apart at weddings. Nobody quite remembers why. One year, a cousin swaps the seating plan, and the two sides discover they like the same terrible music.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Am I seeing a person, or a group?" "What do we have in common?"

TRY THIS:

Think of a "them" in your life. Name one person from that group as an individual: something they like, something they worry about.

05

Norms are the rules nobody wrote down.

Every group has norms: what you wear, how you speak, what you laugh at, what you never mention. We often guess the norms wrong. In studies at a university, Prentice and Miller (1993) found that most students were privately less comfortable with heavy drinking than they thought everyone else was. Each person thought they were the odd one out, so everyone kept going along.

For example: In an office, everyone answers emails at midnight because they think it's expected. When one manager says, "I don't expect replies after six," relief spreads.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Is this really what everyone thinks, or just what everyone does?"

TRY THIS:

Pick one unwritten rule in a group you're in. Ask one person, privately, what they really think of it.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 17

House rules for us

Shona and her son Dexter, 15

House rules for us

Person A
Shona

Person B
Dexter

Date of this list
3 October 2026

Our rules, and who keeps each one

Rule	Who keeps it	Why it matters to Shona	Why it matters to Dexter
Phones charge in the kitchen from 10 on school nights	*Both (decide together)*	*I sleep better knowing you're not up at 2*	*Fine if it's both our phones, not just mine*
Homework before games, Monday to Thursday	*Dexter*	*Less nagging from me*	*Weekends are mine, then*
Say where you're going and when you'll be back	*Both (decide together)*	*So I don't worry*	*Mum does it too, so it's fair*
Friday tea together, no phones at the table	*Both (decide together)*	*It's my favourite hour of the week*	*Only if I can pick the food sometimes*

DOES EVERY JOB HAVE AN OWNER?

Rules with someone who keeps them
4 of 4. Every rule has someone who keeps it.

Changes to the list

Date	What changed	Who
3 Oct 2026	*Dexter asked for weekends without phone rules. Agreed for a month, then we look again.*	*Shona and Dexter*

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. The norms nobody wrote down, written down, with room for both of them to change them.

Fill in your own: House rules for us (spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/wp-03)

06

Cultures differ, and so do people inside them.

Cultures differ in how much they put the individual or the group first. Researchers call this individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980). In some, "standing out" is admired. In others, fitting in and keeping harmony are signs of maturity. Neither is better. But be careful with labels: a large review by Oyserman and colleagues (2002) found the differences were smaller and less tidy than often claimed, and individuals vary hugely within every culture.

For example: A woman raised in a close-knit family moves in with a partner who grew up encouraged to "do your own thing." He sees her daily calls home as clingy; she sees his rare calls as cold. Both are following the rules they learned.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"Where I grew up, this was normal. What was normal for you?"

TRY THIS:

Name one thing you think of as simply "how people should behave." Where did you learn it? Might someone else have learned the opposite?

07

Every family is a small culture.

Families have their own norms: how loud people are, how feelings are shown, who does what, what's talked about and what isn't, how you say sorry, or if you do. We often only notice our family's rules when we live with someone

from a different family. Part One looks at the rules you grew up with.

For example: Two housemates clash over the kitchen. In one's family, you wash up straight away. In the other's, you wash up in the morning. Neither is lazy or fussy; they grew up in different small cultures.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:

"In my family we always… What did yours do?" "Shall we make our own rule?"

TRY THIS:

Write three rules from the family you grew up in. Keep one you value, and question one you don't.

FILLED-IN EXAMPLE 18

Kitchen-table check-in: family plan

Amaka and Chris, new parents, with Chris's parents

Our family plan

A plan for the family, not a list of chores.

Who's in this plan (optional)

Amaka, Chris, Nana Joy and Grandad Pete

Visits

Sunday lunch every other week, 12 to 3. Text the day before.

Advice

Ask first: "Do you want ideas, or just to talk?"

The baby's or children's routines

Nap at 1. Back to sleep on her back, always. Ask us before any new food.

A regular job for a grandparent or relative

Grandad Pete does the Tuesday morning walk with the pram.

We'll look at this again on

The first Sunday of December

ON THE CARD

One topic at a time. We're on the same side.

A made-up example. Names and details are invented. Two family cultures, one plan written on purpose.

Fill in your own: Kitchen-table check-in: family plan
(spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins)

08

Online groups pull harder and faster.

Group chats, forums and social media make group pressure quicker and more public. Likes and replies show the norm instantly. In a study of over half a million posts, Brady and colleagues (2017) found that messages with more moral and emotional words spread further, mostly among people who already agreed. Outrage travels fast; quiet doubts don't.

For example: A parents' group chat turns against a teacher after one angry post. A dad who knows the teacher well sends a calm message: "I'd want to hear her side before we decide." Two others agree.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:

"Would I say this to their face?" "The loudest posts aren't the whole group."

TRY THIS:

Before you react to a heated post, wait ten minutes. Then decide whether to reply, reply privately, or not reply at all.



TIDBIT

Tidbit wants you to know: group chats move fast! Before you send a reply, a helper can read the room with you.

TOOL **Chat analyzer** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator

09

You can belong and still be yourself.

Belonging is being accepted as you are; fitting in is changing to be accepted (see Chapter 5 (page 78)). Good groups have room for difference. It helps to know your own values, to have more than one group, and to have at least one ally. In Asch's experiments, when just one other person gave the right answer, going along with the group dropped sharply.

For example: A teenager loves chess but his friends tease it as "nerdy." He joins a chess club as well as keeping his friends. With two groups, neither one can decide who he is.

THOUGHTS YOU COULD TRY:
"Which groups let me be fully myself?" "Who would back me up if I spoke?"

TRY THIS:
Write down three things you value. Next time a group pulls you, check: is this in line with them?

10

Disagree kindly, and early.

You don't have to choose between going along and starting a war. A kind dissent is short, calm, about the issue rather than the people, and leaves room for others. Speaking early is easier than speaking late. And you don't have to do it in front of everyone: a private word often works better.

For example: Back to the group chat. Instead of a laughing face, you message your aunt privately: "I know it was meant as a joke, but it might hurt. Could we leave it?" She deletes it.

WORDS YOU COULD USE:
"I see it a bit differently. Can I say why?" "I'm not comfortable with that joke." "I might be the only one, but I'd like us to think again." "Can we hear from people who haven't spoken yet?"

TRY THIS:

Choose one sentence from above that feels like you. Say it out loud a few times, so it's ready when you need it.



PROFESSOR PUDDLES

Disagreeing early and kindly is easier with the words ready. This workpaper helps you say it so it lands.

WORKPAPER WP-09 **Say it so it lands** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-09

YOUR PART, AND ONLY YOUR PART. You can notice the pull to fit in, check what you actually think, choose your groups, and say "I see it differently" kindly.

You can't control what a group does, and you don't have to stay in a group that keeps asking you to hide who you are or go against what's right. If a group, a family or a partner uses pressure, fear or threats to control you, that's not belonging. Not safe at home? (spreadloveandacceptance.com/safety) has free, private help.

THURSDAY, 9:40PM

You delete the laughing face. Instead, you message your aunt, who posted the joke: "I know it was meant to be funny, but it might hurt if they see it. Could we leave it?" A few minutes later the joke disappears. Then your cousin messages you privately: "Thank you. I saw it before it went. Means a lot." Nobody fell out. The group is still the group. It just has a bit more room in it now.

If you're a teenager

Group chats are where a lot of friendship happens, and a lot of hurt. A *made-up example*: Rhys, 15, finds a photo of himself from PE being joked about in his class chat. He doesn't answer back.

He screenshots it, mutes the chat and tells his sister, and they tell his form tutor. Then a girl in his class messages him privately: "That wasn't funny. Sorry I didn't say anything." Most people in a group chat don't like what's happening. They just think everyone else does.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I'm not okay with this. Please delete it." To a friend: "That wasn't okay. Are you alright?" To an adult: "Something's happening online and I need help with it."

In everyday life

- **On your own:** Having no group can be as hard as having a pushy one. Look for groups built around something you enjoy, so the belonging comes with the activity. See Chapter 5 (page 78) and casual ties (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/connection).
- **With a partner:** Two families, two sets of rules. Talk about them openly, and make your own. See family scripts (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/life).
- **Parents and children:** Children and teens feel peer pressure strongly. Help them practise a "no" that saves face. See For teens: friends (spreadloveandacceptance.com/teens).
- **With family:** Old family roles (the joker, the peacekeeper, the black sheep) can be hard to step out of. See Old roles (spreadloveandacceptance.com/family-rifts).
- **At work:** Teams where people feel safe to speak up make better decisions. See At work (spreadloveandacceptance.com/work) and the library on teams (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/teams).
- **Online:** Mute, leave or take a break from groups that leave you feeling worse. You're allowed.
- **When everyone agrees too fast:** That's called groupthink. If you lead, share your view last and ask for one risk from each person before deciding. More in the full chapter (spreadloveandacceptance.com/book/understanding-17-groups-in-depth).

- **Teams rarely in one room:** Write decisions down, go round everyone before deciding, and keep a short check-in so people at home aren't forgotten. More in the full chapter.

Common mix-ups

- **"Only weak people conform."** Everyone is influenced by groups. Knowing that makes you more free, not less.
- **"Milgram proved people will do anything they're told."** Many people refused, results varied a lot with the setup, and the studies have real critics. People seem most likely to go along when they believe in the cause.
- **"Culture explains everything about a person."** Culture shapes us, but people vary hugely within every culture. Ask the person, don't assume.
- **"Disagreeing will ruin the relationship."** Calm, kind disagreement often builds trust. Swallowing it for years tends to do more harm.
- **"Fitting in is the same as belonging."** Fitting in means changing to be accepted. Belonging means being accepted as you are.

If you want to help someone else with this

- **Be the ally.** If someone speaks up, back them up, even quietly: "I think that's a fair point." One ally makes a big difference.
- **Make room.** In any group you lead, invite quieter people and different views: "What haven't we thought of?"
- **Check in privately.** If someone seems to be going along against their wishes, ask gently, away from the group.
- **Watch for exclusion.** Notice who is left out of chats, plans and jokes, and bring them in.

> WORDS YOU COULD USE:
> "I noticed you went quiet when they said that. Are you okay?" "I'd like to hear what you think, even if it's different."

When to get more help

Group pressure is part of life. It may be time for more help if:

- a group, family or partner controls who you see, what you wear, what you spend or what you believe, or punishes you for disagreeing;
- you feel you can't leave a group without being threatened, shamed or cut off from everyone you know;
- you're being bullied, at school, at work or online;
- being left out or pressured is leaving you very low, anxious or hopeless.

Talk to someone you trust, a counsellor or a doctor. Not safe at home? lists free, private help if someone at home controls or frightens you. For low mood or worry, see Chapter 16 (page 264). If you are thinking about ending your life, please tell someone today.

In the US and Canada, call or text 988. In the UK and Ireland, call Samaritans free on 116 123. In Australia, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. In New Zealand, call or text 1737. Anywhere else, findahelpline.com lists free helplines.

This chapter is general education, not therapy.

Reading on the website

Reading pages to read on the website

- The wiring card (spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card): share how you work best, so a group can make room for you.
- Leading a group (spreadloveandacceptance.com/groups): a six-session guide with ground rules that make room for difference.
- The library on teams, including psychological safety.
- The library: family scripts, social comparison, the false consensus effect (spreadloveandacceptance.com/library/thinking) and confirmation bias.
- Chapter 4 (page 61) on saying hard things so they land.

More for your situation

- For teens: friends and pressure
- Family rifts · In-laws
- At work
- For teachers (spreadloveandacceptance.com/for-teachers)
- **More in Part Three:** Belonging and trust (page 78) · How we see each other (page 47) · Values (page 158)
- Help by relationship (spreadloveandacceptance.com/by-relationship): find the pages for your situation.

WHAT TO REMEMBER

- ✓ **The pull to fit in is old and strong.** Being left out hurts, so we bend to stay in. That's human, not weak.
- ✓ **Groups shape us more than we notice:** what we say, what we think is normal, and sometimes what we're willing to do.
- ✓ **Cultures and families each have unwritten rules.** They differ a lot, and so do the people inside them.
- ✓ **You can belong and still be yourself.** One calm, kind voice saying "I see it differently" often frees others to say so too.

THIS CONNECTS TO

Part Three · Chapter 3 · How we see each other
Bias and the stories we tell page 47

Part Three · Chapter 5 · Attachment, trust and belonging
Why belonging matters so much page 78

Part Three · Chapter 10 · Values, meaning and a good life
Holding on to your own values page 158

Part Two · Chapter IV · Two kinds of fair
Agreeing what fair means in your group read online

PUT IT TO USE

The wiring card
Share how you work best, so a group can make room for you
spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card

Leading a group
A six-session guide with ground rules that make room for difference
spreadloveandacceptance.com/groups

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-02 **How much are you carrying?** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-02
In: Stress and the nervous system (page **31**), Helping others well (page **189**)

WORKPAPER WP-03 **One owner per job** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-03
In: Habits and change (page **93**), Helping others well (page **189**), Groups, influence and culture (page **267**)

WORKPAPER WP-09 **Say it so it lands** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-09
In: How communication works (page **61**), Groups, influence and culture (page **267**)

WORKPAPER WP-11 **The Calm-Down Kit** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-11
In: How feelings work (page **16**), Stress and the nervous system (page **31**), Anger (page **205**), Worry, low mood and trauma (page **250**)

WORKPAPER WP-13 **The 90-second daily check-in** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-13
In: Habits and change (page **93**)

WORKPAPER WP-15 **Keep your little rituals alive** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/wp-15
In: Attachment, trust and belonging (page **78**), Values, meaning and a good life (page **158**), Closeness and love (page **235**)

Tools mentioned in this book

Interactive helpers to use on the site.

TOOL **Chat analyzer** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/signal-translator
In: How we see each other (page **47**), How communication works (page **61**), Groups, influence and culture (page **267**)

TOOL **Rewind the talk** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/carrier-wave-decoder
In: How we see each other (page **47**), How communication works (page **61**), Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page **108**), Healing after hurt (page **174**)

TOOL **Chat analyzer: Help me write it (say no kindly)** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/refusals`

In: Helping others well (page **189**)

TOOL **Cool-down corner: make a pause plan** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/pursue-withdraw`

In: Stress and the nervous system (page **31**), Attachment, trust and belonging (page **78**), Anger (page **205**)

TOOL **Kitchen-table check-in** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/check-ins`

In: How communication works (page **61**), Helping others well (page **189**), Closeness and love (page **235**), Groups, influence and culture (page **267**)

TOOL **Chat analyzer: Help me write it (ask for a change)** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/small-wins`

In: Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page **108**), Worry, low mood and trauma (page **250**)

TOOL **Stay close: one small idea** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/bonding`

In: How feelings work (page **16**), Attachment, trust and belonging (page **78**), Closeness and love (page **235**)

TOOL **How you connect: what feels like care** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/love-languages`

In: Values, meaning and a good life (page **158**), Closeness and love (page **235**)

TOOL **How you connect: the 2-minute style quiz** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/wavelength`

In: Personality, temperament and change (page **220**)

TOOL **How you connect: how to talk to me** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/wiring-card`

In: How communication works (page **61**), Minds that work differently (page **136**), Personality, temperament and change (page **220**), Groups, influence and culture (page **267**)

TOOL **Old rules, new choices** · `spreadloveandacceptance.com/growing-up`

In: Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page **108**), Values, meaning and a good life (page **158**)

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

In: How feelings work (page **16**), Stress and the nervous system (page **31**), How communication works (page **61**), Attachment, trust and belonging (page **78**), Habits and change (page **93**), Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page **108**), Loss, grief and big life changes (page **122**), Healing after hurt (page **174**), Anger (page **205**), Closeness and love (page **235**), Worry, low mood and trauma (page **250**)

TOOL **Cool-down corner: soften a tense moment** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/tools/soften-a-tense-moment

In: Anger (page 205)

TOOL **Cool-down corner: calm sounds and music** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/soundscapes

In: Stress and the nervous system (page 31), Loss, grief and big life changes (page 122), Worry, low mood and trauma (page 250)

TOOL **My weather today** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/quick-checks

In: How feelings work (page 16), Habits and change (page 93), Worry, low mood and trauma (page 250)

TOOL **Write it through** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/write-it-through

In: Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page 108), Loss, grief and big life changes (page 122), Healing after hurt (page 174)

TOOL **Ask Professor Puddles** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/ask

In: Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page 108), Values, meaning and a good life (page 158), Helping others well (page 189)

TOOL **Read your way** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/how-you-take-things-in

In: Minds that work differently (page 136)

TOOL **Gentle games: the Re-check Drive (calm football)** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/recheck-drive

In: Habits and change (page 93)

TOOL **Plan it once: handoff bag for two homes** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/co-parenting

In: How we see each other (page 47), How communication works (page 61), Healing after hurt (page 174)

TOOL **Plan it once: room agreement for roommates** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/sharing-a-room

In: How communication works (page 61), Minds that work differently (page 136), Personality, temperament and change (page 220)

TOOL **Team job list: the 10-minute weekly round** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/work

In: How feelings work (page 16), Stress and the nervous system (page 31), How we see each other (page 47), Attachment, trust and belonging (page 78), Habits and change (page 93), Self-worth, shame and self-compassion (page 108), Values, meaning and a good life (page 158), Helping others well (page 189), Anger (page 205), Personality, temperament and change (page 220), Worry, low mood and trauma (page 250), Groups, influence and culture (page 267)

TOOL **Learn by doing: connect two fields of study** · spreadloveandacceptance.com/polymath

In: Values, meaning and a good life (page 158)

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.

```
load = (sleep + workload + conflict + body + time) ÷ 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 (online), scores sleep 3, workload 4, conflict 1, body 2 and time 3.
>
> `3 + 4 + 1 + 2 + 3 = 13; 13 ÷ 20 = 0.65`, 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.

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.

How much are you carrying?

Fillable version: spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/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."

Say it so it lands

Fillable version:
spreadloveandacceptance.com/workpapers/fill/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/fill/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.

Words used in this book

The book's own words, each in one plain sentence. More at spreadloveandacceptance.com/glossary.

Alexithymia

Finding it hard to notice, name or describe your own feelings. It is a trait on a scale, not an illness, and it is more common in some autistic people. Naming body signals first can help.

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.

Groupthink

When a close group wants agreement so much that doubts go unsaid and a poor decision goes ahead. Irving Janis named it in 1972.

If-then plan

A small plan written as "If this happens, then I will do that", which makes a new habit easier to start (Peter Gollwitzer).

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.

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.

Masking

Masking is hiding the way you're wired to fit in, which can be very tiring over time.

For example: Forcing eye contact and rehearsing small talk all day, then needing the evening to recover.

Monotropism

A theory of autistic attention: attention gathers deeply on a few things at a time, rather than spreading thinly across many. Switching away can take real effort.

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.

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.

Prolonged grief

Grief that stays intense and gets in the way of daily life for a long time after a death (usually a year or more for adults). It is treatable; a GP or doctor is a good first step.

Psychological safety

A shared sense in a group or team that you can speak up, ask a question or admit a mistake without being punished or embarrassed (Amy Edmondson).

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…"

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."

Rumination

Going over the same worry or regret again and again without getting closer to an answer.

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.

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.

Window of tolerance

The range in which you can feel strong feelings and still think and talk. Above it you are flooded or revved up; below it you shut down. A phrase from the psychiatrist Dan Siegel.

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.

Your lens

Your lens is the set of understandings about yourself, other people and what they owe you that you picked up growing up and still use without noticing.

For example: "Rest is earned" can feel like plain fact, until you notice it was your family's rule.

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Research notes

The 330 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.

PART THREE · CHAPTER 1

How feelings work

Barrett, L. F. (2017). *The theory of constructed emotion: an active inference account of interoception and categorization.* Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 12(1), 1–23. Sets out the theory that the brain constantly predicts the body's needs and constructs emotions by making sense of body sensations using learned concepts.
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Barrett, L. F., Adolphs, R., Marsella, S., Martinez, A. M., & Pollak, S. D. (2019). *Emotional expressions reconsidered: Challenges to inferring emotion from human facial movements.* Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 20(1), 1–68. Concluded that facial movements are not reliable enough to infer a person's specific emotion across situations and cultures.
doi.org/10.1177/1529100619832930

Bird, G., & Cook, R. (2013). *Mixed emotions: The contribution of alexithymia to the emotional symptoms of autism.* Translational Psychiatry, 3(7), e285. Argued that emotional difficulties seen in some autistic people are better explained by co-occurring alexithymia than by autism itself.
doi.org/10.1038/tp.2013.61

Bushman, B. J. (2002). *Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger, and aggressive responding.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(6), 724–731. Angered people who hit a punching bag while thinking about the person who provoked them felt angrier afterwards than people who were distracted or did nothing.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167202289002

Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection.* W. W. Norton (New York). A book arguing that loneliness is a biological signal, like hunger, that we need connection, and that chronic loneliness can trap people in isolation and harm health.
wellcomecollection.org/works/wp45vzsp

Craig, A. D. (2002). *How do you feel? Interoception: the sense of the physiological condition of the body.* Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 3(8), 655–666. Described a pathway that carries signals about the body's internal state to the brain (including the insula), and proposed it underlies subjective feelings, emotion and self-awareness.
doi.org/10.1038/nrn894

Dutton, D. G., & Aron, A. P. (1974). *Some evidence for heightened sexual attraction under conditions of high anxiety.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30(4), 510–517. In a field study, men approached by an attractive female interviewer on a high, swaying suspension bridge were more likely to call her afterwards than men approached on a low, sturdy bridge; the authors read this as arousal from fear being mislabelled as attraction.
doi.org/10.1037/h0037031

Ekman, P., & Friesen, W. V. (1971). *Constants across cultures in the face and emotion.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 17(2), 124–129. In the Fore people of Papua New Guinea, who had seen little Western media, adults and children mostly matched short emotion stories to the same facial expressions that Western people chose. This was taken as evidence that a few facial expressions of emotion are shared across cultures.
doi.org/10.1037/h0030377

Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). *Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(2), 348–362. Across five studies, people who habitually reappraised had better emotional experience, relationships and well-being; habitual suppression was linked to worse outcomes.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348

Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1994). *Emotional contagion.* Cambridge University Press (Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction). Describes emotional contagion: people tend to mimic each other's faces, voices and postures, and that mimicry can shift their own feelings.
catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb37435416b

James, W. (1884). *What is an emotion?* Mind, os-IX(34), 188–205. James argued that bodily changes follow directly from perceiving something exciting, and that our feeling of those bodily changes is the emotion.
doi.org/10.1093/mind/os-IX.34.188

Kashdan, T. B., Barrett, L. F., & McKnight, P. E. (2015). *Unpacking emotion differentiation: Transforming unpleasant experience by perceiving distinctions in negativity.* Current Directions in Psychological Science, 24(1), 10–16. Reviewed research on emotion differentiation (emotional granularity): people who describe negative feelings in fine-grained ways tend to rely less on unhelpful coping such as binge drinking or aggression.
doi.org/10.1177/0963721414550708

Kircanski, K., Lieberman, M. D., & Craske, M. G. (2012). *Feelings into words: Contributions of language to exposure therapy.* Psychological Science, 23(10), 1086–1091. Spider-fearful people who described their feelings in words while near a live spider showed lower skin-conductance arousal a week later than people who reappraised, distracted themselves or had exposure alone; self-reported fear did not differ between groups.
doi.org/10.1177/0956797612443830

Levant, R. F., Hall, R. J., Williams, C. M., & Hasan, N. T. (2009). *Gender differences in alexithymia.* Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 10(3), 190–203. A meta-analysis of 41 samples found that men scored slightly higher than women on alexithymia (difficulty identifying and describing feelings), but the difference was small.
doi.org/10.1037/a0015652

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

Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (Eds.) (1985). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors.* Guilford Press. An edited volume setting out the cognitive-behavioural relapse prevention model, including the "abstinence violation effect": after one slip, guilt and a sense of total failure can make a full relapse more likely.
krimdok.uni-tuebingen.de/Record/27251005X

Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & Nakagawa, S. (2008). *Culture, emotion regulation, and adjustment.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 94(6), 925–937. Across 23 countries, cultures that placed more value on social order and hierarchy tended to report more suppression of emotions; cultures valuing individual autonomy and egalitarianism reported less.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.6.925

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

Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. (1986). *Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease.* Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95(3), 274–281. An early expressive-writing experiment in which students wrote about traumatic experiences over several days; it launched decades of research on whether writing about difficult experiences helps health and well-being.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.95.3.274

Schachter, S., & Singer, J. (1962). *Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state.* Psychological Review, 69(5), 379–399. Proposed the two-factor theory: an emotion is physical arousal plus a label we give it from the situation.
doi.org/10.1037/h0046234

Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (1983). *Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: Informative and directive functions of affective states.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45(3), 513–523. People in a good mood (including people phoned on sunny days) rated their happiness and life satisfaction higher. A bad mood stopped lowering their ratings once their attention was drawn to an outside cause, such as the weather.
worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl

Singer, T., & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). *Empathy and compassion.* Current Biology, 24(18), R875–R878. Distinguished empathic distress (sharing someone's pain, which can overwhelm) from compassion (warm concern), which engage different brain networks; brief compassion training increased positive feelings.
doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2014.06.054

Torre, J. B., & Lieberman, M. D. (2018). *Putting feelings into words: Affect labeling as implicit emotion regulation.* Emotion Review, 10(2), 116–124. Reviewed evidence that naming a feeling can reduce its intensity even though it does not feel like regulating it at the time.
doi.org/10.1177/1754073917742706

Verduyn, P., & Lavrijsen, S. (2015). *Which emotions last longest and why: The role of event importance and rumination.* Motivation and Emotion, 39(1), 119–127. Of 27 emotions studied, sadness lasted longest, while shame, surprise, fear and disgust were among the shortest; long-lasting emotions tended to follow important events and involve rumination.
ppw.kuleuven.be/okp/_pdf/Verduyn2015WELLA.pdf

Wegner, D. M., Schneider, D. J., Carter, S. R., & White, T. L. (1987). *Paradoxical effects of thought suppression.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53(1), 5–13. People asked not to think of a white bear kept thinking of it, suggesting that trying to suppress a thought can backfire.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.53.1.5

PART THREE · CHAPTER 2

Stress and the nervous system

Arnsten, A. F. T. (2009). *Stress signalling pathways that impair prefrontal cortex structure and function.* Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 10(6), 410–422. Reviewed evidence that stress chemicals rapidly weaken the prefrontal cortex, which supports planning and flexible thinking, while strengthening more habitual responses.
doi.org/10.1038/nrn2648

Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). *The job demands-resources model: State of the art.* Journal of Managerial Psychology, 22(3), 309–328. A review of the job demands-resources model: high job demands drive strain and burnout, while job resources such as support, control and feedback drive motivation and help buffer demands.
doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115

Balban, M. Y., Neri, E., Kogon, M. M., Weed, L., Nouriani, B., Jo, B., Holl, G., Zeitzer, J. M., Spiegel, D., & Huberman, A. D. (2023). *Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal.* Cell Reports Medicine, 4(1), 100895. In a month-long randomised trial of five minutes a day, breathing exercises improved mood more than mindfulness meditation, with cyclic sighing (long out-breaths) showing the largest benefits.
doi.org/10.1016/j.xcrm.2022.100895

Ben Simon, E., & Walker, M. P. (2018). *Sleep loss causes social withdrawal and loneliness.* Nature Communications. After a night without sleep, young adults kept an approaching person at a greater distance and felt lonelier, with brain changes linked to social avoidance; rested people who briefly watched them felt lonelier too.
doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-05377-0

Bolger, N., Zuckerman, A., & Kessler, R. C. (2000). *Invisible support and adjustment to stress.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79(6), 953–961. In couples where one partner faced a stressful exam, support the recipient did not notice (reported by the giver but not the receiver) was linked with better adjustment, while noticed (visible) support was not.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.953

Coan, J. A., Schaefer, H. S., & Davidson, R. J. (2006). *Lending a hand: Social regulation of the neural response to threat.* Psychological Science, 17(12), 1032–1039. In an fMRI study, married women facing the threat of a mild shock showed less threat-related brain activity while holding their husband's hand than when alone.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01832.x

Gordon, A. M., & Chen, S. (2014). *The role of sleep in interpersonal conflict: Do sleepless nights mean worse fights?* Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5(2), 168–175. In a 14-day daily study, people reported more conflict with their partner after poor nights of sleep, and conflicts were resolved best when both partners were well rested.
doi.org/10.1177/1948550613488952

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). *"Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions.* Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47(8), 2519–2534. Interviews with 92 autistic adults described camouflaging as motivated by wanting to fit in and connect, done through masking and compensating techniques, and often followed by exhaustion and threats to self-perception.
doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5

Jamieson, J. P., Nock, M. K., & Mendes, W. B. (2012). *Mind over matter: Reappraising arousal improves cardiovascular and cognitive responses to stress.* Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 141(3), 417–422. People told to see their stress arousal as helpful showed healthier cardiovascular responses and less attention to negative information than control groups.
doi.org/10.1037/a0025719

Kanner, A. D., Coyne, J. C., Schaefer, C., & Lazarus, R. S. (1981). *Comparison of two modes of stress measurement: Daily hassles and uplifts versus major life events.* Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 4(1), 1–39. Everyday hassles predicted psychological symptoms better than major life events did, and still did after life events were taken into account.
doi.org/10.1007/BF00844845

Kaplan, S. (1995). *The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework.* Journal of Environmental Psychology, 15(3), 169–182. Set out attention restoration theory: effortful, directed attention gets fatigued, and environments such as nature, which hold attention effortlessly, help it recover; the paper links this with stress recovery.
doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944(95)90001-2

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* Springer Publishing, New York. Set out the appraisal model: stress depends on judging whether something threatens you and whether you can cope; it also distinguished problem-focused from emotion-focused coping.
wellcomecollection.org/works/b5zr7tvm

Leikas, S., & Ilmarinen, V.-J. (2017). *Happy now, tired later? Extraverted and conscientious behavior are related to immediate mood gains, but to later fatigue.* Journal of Personality, 85(5), 603–615. In a 12-day experience-sampling study, acting extraverted went with better mood at the time but more fatigue about three hours later, for introverts and extraverts alike.
doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12264

McEwen, B. S., & Stellar, E. (1993). *Stress and the individual: Mechanisms leading to disease.* Archives of Internal Medicine, 153(18), 2093–2101. Introduced "allostatic load": the cumulative wear and tear on the body from repeated or chronic stress responses.
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8379800

Miserandino, C. (2003). *The spoon theory.* ButYouDontLookSick.com (essay). A personal essay in which Christine Miserandino, who has lupus, used a handful of spoons to show a friend that each daily task costs some of a limited supply of energy.
butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). *Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism.* Autism, 9(2), 139–156. Proposed "monotropism": autistic attention tends to be pulled strongly into a few interests at a time, and the authors argued this can explain the other diagnostic features of autism.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398

Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., et al. (2020). *"Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure and being left with no clean-up crew": Defining autistic burnout.* Autism in Adulthood, 2(2), 132–143. From 19 interviews and 19 public online accounts, analysed with autistic co-researchers, autistic burnout was defined as long-term exhaustion, loss of function and reduced tolerance to stimulus, arising from chronic life stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities without enough support.
doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079

Repetti, R. L. (1989). *Effects of daily workload on subsequent behavior during marital interaction: The roles of social withdrawal and spouse support.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57(4), 651–659. In a daily study of air traffic controllers, after high-workload days they were more socially withdrawn and less emotionally expressive with their spouses that evening.
psych.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Repetti-JPSP-1989.pdf

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). *Emotion dysregulation in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.* American Journal of Psychiatry, 171(3), 276-293. A literature review found that trouble regulating emotions (quick, strong feelings that are hard to bring back down) is common in ADHD across the lifespan, with clinic studies of young people putting it at roughly a quarter to a half, and that it adds a lot to the day-to-day difficulty ADHD brings.
doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.13070966

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: Toward a neurobiology of interpersonal experience.* Guilford Press. A book linking attachment, memory and brain development; it introduced the "window of tolerance", the range of arousal in which a person can feel strong emotion and still think and respond flexibly.
catalog.library.nashville.org/Record/CARL0000114962

Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2007). *The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: Development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work.* Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12(3), 204–221. Identified four separate recovery experiences outside work: psychological detachment, relaxation, mastery and control.
doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.3.204

Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A. R., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). *Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight.* Psychological Review, 107(3), 411–429. Proposed that under stress people, perhaps especially women, often respond by protecting others and seeking social connection ("tend and befriend"), not only fight or flight.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.107.3.411

Tronick, E., Als, H., Adamson, L., Wise, S., & Brazelton, T. B. (1978). *The infant's response to entrapment between contradictory messages in face-to-face interaction.* Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 17(1), 1–13. The first "still face" study: when a mother kept a blank, unresponsive face, infants tried hard to re-engage her, then grew upset and withdrew; they recovered when she responded again.
doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138(09)62273-1

Yerkes, R. M., & Dodson, J. D. (1908). *The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation.* Journal of Comparative Neurology and Psychology, 18(5), 459–482. Studied how the strength of an electric shock affected how quickly dancing mice learned to avoid a black passage; later writers turned it into a general "inverted U" for arousal and performance.
doi.org/10.1002/cne.920180503

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

Zaccaro, A., Piarulli, A., Laurino, M., Garbella, E., Menicucci, D., Neri, B., & Gemignani, A. (2018). *How breath-control can change your life: A systematic review on psycho-physiological correlates of slow breathing.* Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 12, 353. Slow breathing was linked with changes in heart-rate variability and with more comfort, relaxation and alertness and less arousal and anxiety.
doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2018.00353

PART THREE · CHAPTER 3

How we see each other

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). *Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective.* Autism, 24(7), 1704–1712. In "diffusion chains" where a story was passed along eight people (72 adults), all-autistic chains passed on as much detail as all-non-autistic chains, while mixed chains lost detail faster and reported lower rapport.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286

Epley, N. (2014). *Mindwise: How We Understand What Others Think, Believe, Feel, and Want.* Alfred A. Knopf (New York). A book reviewing research on how people infer others' thoughts and feelings, and why this 'sixth sense' is more error-prone than we believe.
wellcomecollection.org/works/zh83qear

Eyal, T., Steffel, M., & Epley, N. (2018). *Perspective mistaking: Accurately understanding the mind of another requires getting perspective, not taking perspective.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114(4), 547–571. As the title states, a series of experiments found that imagining another person's perspective did not make people more accurate about what that person thought or felt, whereas getting their perspective directly (by asking) did.
doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000115

Hastorf, A. H., & Cantril, H. (1954). *They saw a game: A case study.* Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 49(1), 129–134. Students from Princeton and Dartmouth watched the same rough football game and saw it very differently, for example in how many infractions each team committed.
doi.org/10.1037/h0057880

Jones, E. E., & Harris, V. A. (1967). *The attribution of attitudes.* Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 3(1), 1–24. In three experiments, people judged a speaker's true attitude from a speech; they tended to attribute the stated position to the speaker even when told the speaker had been assigned it.
doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(67)90034-0

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

Malle, B. F. (2006). *The actor-observer asymmetry in attribution: A (surprising) meta-analysis.* Psychological Bulletin, 132(6), 895–919. A meta-analysis of 173 studies found average actor-observer effects near zero; the asymmetry appeared only in some conditions (for example when actor and observer were intimates, or for negative events), with a reverse pattern for positive events.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.6.895

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

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). *Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism.* Autism, 9(2), 139–156. Proposed "monotropism": autistic attention tends to be pulled strongly into a few interests at a time, and the authors argued this can explain the other diagnostic features of autism.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398

Pronin, E., Lin, D. Y., & Ross, L. (2002). *The bias blind spot: Perceptions of bias in self versus others.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(3), 369–381. People, from students to airport travelers, readily saw common biases in others but rated themselves as less biased than their peers (the bias blind spot).
doi.org/10.1177/0146167202286008

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

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

Sasson, N. J., Faso, D. J., Nugent, J., Lovell, S., Kennedy, D. P., & Grossman, R. B. (2017). *Neurotypical peers are less willing to interact with those with autism based on thin slice judgments.* Scientific Reports, 7, 40700. Across three studies, non-autistic observers formed less favourable first impressions of autistic children and adults from a few seconds of video, and were less willing to interact with them; the bias disappeared when they judged only transcripts of what was said.
doi.org/10.1038/srep40700

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

PART THREE · CHAPTER 4

How communication works

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

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). *Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective.* Autism, 24(7), 1704–1712. In "diffusion chains" where a story was passed along eight people (72 adults), all-autistic chains passed on as much detail as all-non-autistic chains, while mixed chains lost detail faster and reported lower rapport.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). *Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design.* Management Science, 32(5), 554–571. Proposed media richness theory: richer channels (face to face, then phone, then written) are better suited to ambiguous, equivocal messages.
doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.32.5.554

Epley, N., & Schroeder, J. (2014). *Mistakenly seeking solitude.* Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143(5), 1980–1999. Commuters asked to talk with a stranger on their train or bus reported a more positive journey than those told to sit in solitude, even though people predicted the opposite; misjudging how pleasant such talk would be keeps people apart.
doi.org/10.1037/a0037323

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

Gottman, J. M., Coan, J., Carrère, S., & Swanson, C. (1998). *Predicting marital happiness and stability from newlywed interactions.* Journal of Marriage and the Family, 60(1), 5–22. In a six-year study of newlyweds, husbands who accepted influence from their wives were more likely to have stable, happy marriages, while active-listening style paraphrasing during conflict was rare and did not predict outcomes.
jstor.org/stable/353438

Gunraj, D. N., Drumm-Hewitt, A. M., Dashow, E. M., Upadhyay, S. S. N., & Klin, C. M. (2016). *Texting insincerely: The role of the period in text messaging.* Computers in Human Behavior, 55, 1067–1075. Short text-message replies ending in a period were rated as less sincere than the same replies without one; the effect did not appear for handwritten notes.
doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.003

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

Malinowski, B. (1923). *The problem of meaning in primitive languages.* Supplement I (pp. 451–510 in later printings) in C. K. Ogden & I. A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning. London: Kegan Paul; New York: Harcourt, Brace. Named "phatic communion": small talk whose job is not to pass on information but to create and keep up a bond ("ties of union are created by mere exchange of words").
archive.org/details/meaningofmeaning00ogde

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

Sandstrom, G. M., & Dunn, E. W. (2014). *Is efficiency overrated? Minimal social interactions lead to belonging and positive affect.* Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5(4), 437–442. People who had a brief, friendly social exchange with a coffee-shop barista reported more belonging and positive mood than those who kept the exchange purely efficient.
doi.org/10.1177/1948550613502990

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

Schegloff, E. A., Jefferson, G., & Sacks, H. (1977). *The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation.* Language, 53(2), 361–382. Analyses of everyday conversation showed that 'repair' of trouble in speaking, hearing and understanding is a built-in, organised part of talk, and that people strongly prefer to correct themselves rather than be corrected.
doi.org/10.1353/lan.1977.0041

Tronick, E., Als, H., Adamson, L., Wise, S., & Brazelton, T. B. (1978). *The infant's response to entrapment between contradictory messages in face-to-face interaction.* Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 17(1), 1–13. The first "still face" study: when a mother kept a blank, unresponsive face, infants tried hard to re-engage her, then grew upset and withdrew; they recovered when she responded again.
doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138(09)62273-1

Watzlawick, P., Beavin [Bavelas], J. H., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes.* New York: W. W. Norton (book). Set out a few "axioms" of communication, including that every message has a content level (what is said) and a relationship level (what it says about us), and that the relationship level often decides how the content is heard.
ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA01493188

Weger, H., Jr., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). *The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions.* International Journal of Listening, 28(1), 13–31. People who talked with a listener using active-listening responses felt more understood than those who received advice or simple acknowledgements; differences in satisfaction and liking were small.
doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2013.813234

PART THREE · CHAPTER 5

Attachment, trust and belonging

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation.* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates (Hillsdale, NJ). Reported the Strange Situation studies of infants and mothers and described secure and insecure attachment patterns.
search.worldcat.org/title/4194069

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). *The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation.* Psychological Bulletin, 117(3), 497–529. A major review arguing that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation: people need frequent, pleasant contact within a few stable, caring relationships, and unmet belonging has wide emotional and cognitive costs.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment.* Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis (London) / Basic Books (New York). The first volume of Bowlby's trilogy, setting out attachment theory: children's bond with caregivers is an evolved system for seeking safety and comfort.
vufind.lboro.ac.uk/Record/194760

Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). *Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview.* In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), Attachment Theory and Close Relationships (pp. 46–76). Guilford. A large factor-analytic study of all known self-report adult attachment measures found that they reduce to two broad dimensions: attachment anxiety and avoidance.
labs.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/measures/brennan.html

Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection.* W. W. Norton (New York). A book arguing that loneliness is a biological signal, like hunger, that we need connection, and that chronic loneliness can trap people in isolation and harm health.
wellcomecollection.org/works/wp45vzsp

Coan, J. A., & Sbarra, D. A. (2015). *Social baseline theory: The social regulation of risk and effort.* Current Opinion in Psychology, 1, 87–91. Proposes that the brain expects to have supportive people around, which lowers perceived risk and effort; without them, coping takes more effort.
doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2014.12.021

Coan, J. A., Schaefer, H. S., & Davidson, R. J. (2006). *Lending a hand: Social regulation of the neural response to threat.* Psychological Science, 17(12), 1032–1039. In an fMRI study, married women facing the threat of a mild shock showed less threat-related brain activity while holding their husband's hand than when alone.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01832.x

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). *Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective.* Autism, 24(7), 1704–1712. In "diffusion chains" where a story was passed along eight people (72 adults), all-autistic chains passed on as much detail as all-non-autistic chains, while mixed chains lost detail faster and reported lower rapport.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286

Edmondson, A. (1999). *Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams.* Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350–383. In 51 teams at a manufacturing company, a shared belief that it was safe to take interpersonal risks (psychological safety) was linked with more team learning behaviour, which in turn was linked with performance.
doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., & Williams, K. D. (2003). *Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion.* Science, 302(5643), 290–292. Being left out of a virtual ball-tossing game increased activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, a region also involved in physical pain distress, in proportion to how upset people felt.
doi.org/10.1126/science.1089134

Epley, N., & Schroeder, J. (2014). *Mistakenly seeking solitude.* Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143(5), 1980–1999. Commuters asked to talk with a stranger on their train or bus reported a more positive journey than those told to sit in solitude, even though people predicted the opposite; misjudging how pleasant such talk would be keeps people apart.
doi.org/10.1037/a0037323

Fraley, R. C., Hudson, N. W., Heffernan, M. E., & Segal, N. (2015). *Are adult attachment styles categorical or dimensional? A taxometric analysis of general and relationship-specific attachment orientations.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109(2), 354–368. Taxometric analyses suggested that adult attachment differences are dimensional (degrees of anxiety and avoidance) rather than distinct types.
doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000027

Hall, J. A. (2019). *How many hours does it take to make a friend?* Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 36(4), 1278–1296 (online first 2018). Studies of adults who had recently moved and of students found that more hours spent together, especially in leisure, went with moving from acquaintance to closer friendship.
doi.org/10.1177/0265407518761225

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). *Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52(3), 511–524. Two questionnaire studies proposed that adult romantic love is an attachment process: the share of adults in each of three attachment styles roughly matched infant figures, and the styles differed in how people experienced love, their views of self and others, and recalled relationships with parents.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). *Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review.* PLoS Medicine, 7(7), e1000316. A meta-analysis of 148 studies (308,849 participants) found people with stronger social relationships had about 50% greater odds of survival over the study periods, consistently across age, sex and health status.
doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). *"Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions.* Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47(8), 2519–2534. Interviews with 92 autistic adults described camouflaging as motivated by wanting to fit in and connect, done through masking and compensating techniques, and often followed by exhaustion and threats to self-perception.
doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5

Lewicki, R. J., Polin, B., & Lount, R. B., Jr. (2016). *An exploration of the structure of effective apologies.* Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 9(2), 177–196. Testing six apology components with 755 participants, acknowledging responsibility was rated most important, then an offer of repair; a request for forgiveness mattered least. Apologies with more components were rated better.
doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12073

Main, M., & Solomon, J. (1990). *Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange Situation.* In M. T. Greenberg, D. Cicchetti & E. M. Cummings (Eds.), Attachment in the Preschool Years (pp. 121–160). University of Chicago Press. Added a fourth attachment pattern, disorganized/disoriented, for infants who seemed frightened or confused by the caregiver in the Strange Situation, with indices for coding it.
chicagoreference.com/ucp/books/book/chicago/A/bo3774473.html

Rempel, J. K., Holmes, J. G., & Zanna, M. P. (1985). *Trust in close relationships.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49(1), 95–112. Described trust in close relationships as having three components, predictability, dependability and faith, and developed a self-report Trust Scale to measure them.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.49.1.95

Rutgers, A. H., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., van IJzendoorn, M. H., & van Berckelaer-Onnes, I. A. (2004). *Autism and attachment: A meta-analytic review.* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45(6), 1123–1134. Across 16 studies, about half of autistic children in Strange Situation studies were securely attached; autistic children were less often secure on average, but the difference disappeared in samples of children with higher mental development.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2004.t01-1-00305.x

Sandstrom, G. M., & Dunn, E. W. (2014). *Is efficiency overrated? Minimal social interactions lead to belonging and positive affect.* Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5(4), 437–442. People who had a brief, friendly social exchange with a coffee-shop barista reported more belonging and positive mood than those who kept the exchange purely efficient.
doi.org/10.1177/1948550613502990

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). *An integrative theory of intergroup conflict.* In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole. Sets out social identity theory: part of our self-image comes from the groups we belong to, and we are motivated to see our groups positively, often by favouring them over others, even when groups are formed on trivial grounds.
alnap.org

Williams, K. D., Cheung, C. K. T., & Choi, W. (2000). *Cyberostracism: Effects of being ignored over the Internet.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79(5), 748–762. In an online ball-tossing game (1,486 people from 62 countries in the first study), being left out by computer-controlled "players" made people feel worse and lowered their sense of belonging.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.748

PART THREE · CHAPTER 6

Habits and change

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Muraven, M., & Tice, D. M. (1998). *Ego depletion: Is the active self a limited resource?* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74(5), 1252–1265. In four experiments, an earlier act of self-control (such as resisting chocolate and eating radishes) was followed by giving up sooner on a later task, which the authors took as evidence that self-control draws on a limited resource.
researchconnect.suny.edu

Bem, D. J. (1972). *Self-perception theory.* Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 6, 1–62. Proposed that people come to know their own attitudes and feelings partly by observing their own behaviour, much as an outside observer would.
doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60024-6

Bolger, N., Zuckerman, A., & Kessler, R. C. (2000). *Invisible support and adjustment to stress.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79(6), 953–961. In couples where one partner faced a stressful exam, support the recipient did not notice (reported by the giver but not the receiver) was linked with better adjustment, while noticed (visible) support was not.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.953

Breines, J. G., & Chen, S. (2012). *Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38(9), 1133–1143. In four experiments, people encouraged to be self-compassionate about a failure or moral mistake were more motivated to improve (for example, studying longer for a retest) than people encouraged to boost their self-esteem.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167212445599

Bryan, C. J., Walton, G. M., Rogers, T., & Dweck, C. S. (2011). *Motivating voter turnout by invoking the self.* PNAS, 108(31), 12653–12656. Asking people about "being a voter" rather than "voting" increased interest in registering and, in two US statewide elections, increased turnout measured in official records.
doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1103343108

Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). *Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59(1), 73–81. Wife-demand/husband-withdraw was more common overall, but who demanded depended partly on whose issue was being discussed; the authors linked the pattern to social structure (who wants change) as well as gender.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.1.73

Christensen, A., Atkins, D. C., Berns, S., Wheeler, J., Baucom, D. H., & Simpson, L. E. (2004). *Traditional versus integrative behavioral couple therapy for significantly and chronically distressed married couples.* Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 72(2), 176–191. In a randomised trial with 134 seriously distressed couples, both integrative (acceptance-based) and traditional behavioural couple therapy produced similar rates of clinically significant improvement, with different patterns of change during treatment.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.72.2.176

Drigotas, S. M., Rusbult, C. E., Wieselquist, J., & Whitton, S. W. (1999). *Close partner as sculptor of the ideal self: Behavioral affirmation and the Michelangelo phenomenon.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 77(2), 293–323. Across four studies, people whose partners saw and treated them in line with their ideal self moved closer to that ideal over time, and this affirmation was linked with better couple functioning and more stable relationships.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.2.293

Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). *Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans.* American Psychologist, 54(7), 493–503. Reviewed research showing that if-then plans ("when situation X arises, I will do Y") hand control of action to the planned cue and help people act on their goals.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.7.493

Gollwitzer, P. M., & Sheeran, P. (2006). *Implementation intentions and goal achievement: A meta-analysis of effects and processes.* Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 38, 69–119. A meta-analysis of 94 independent tests found that forming if-then plans had a medium-to-large effect on reaching goals (d = .65).
doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(06)38002-1

Hagger, M. S., Chatzisarantis, N. L. D., Alberts, H., et al. (2016). *A multilab preregistered replication of the ego-depletion effect.* Perspectives on Psychological Science, 11(4), 546–573. A preregistered replication across 23 labs (2,141 participants) found an ego-depletion effect close to zero (d = 0.04, confidence interval including zero).
doi.org/10.1177/1745691616652873

Hofmann, W., Baumeister, R. F., Förster, G., & Vohs, K. D. (2012). *Everyday temptations: An experience sampling study of desire, conflict, and self-control.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102(6), 1318–1335. Tracking people's desires through the day by smartphone, the researchers found that people high in trait self-control reported fewer temptations and conflicts, rather than resisting more often.
doi.org/10.1037/a0026545

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). *Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk.* Econometrica, 47(2), 263–291. People weigh choices as gains and losses from where they stand now, and a loss feels bigger than a gain of the same size ("loss aversion"), which helps explain why change can feel risky even when it would help.
jstor.org/stable/1914185

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

Marlatt, G. A., & Gordon, J. R. (Eds.) (1985). *Relapse prevention: Maintenance strategies in the treatment of addictive behaviors.* Guilford Press. An edited volume setting out the cognitive-behavioural relapse prevention model, including the "abstinence violation effect": after one slip, guilt and a sense of total failure can make a full relapse more likely.
krimdok.uni-tuebingen.de/Record/27251005X

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (1991). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people to change addictive behavior.* Guilford Press. The first full presentation of motivational interviewing: a way of talking about change that treats mixed feelings as normal and draws out the person's own reasons for change.
motivationalinterviewing.org

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). *Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism.* Autism, 9(2), 139–156. Proposed "monotropism": autistic attention tends to be pulled strongly into a few interests at a time, and the authors argued this can explain the other diagnostic features of autism.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398

Neal, D. T., Wood, W., Wu, M., & Kurlander, D. (2011). *The pull of the past: When do habits persist despite conflict with motives?* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37(11), 1428–1437. In field experiments on habitual eating, people with a strong cinema-popcorn habit ate stale popcorn about as much as fresh popcorn in a cinema, but not in a different setting: context cues drove the habit more than taste or intentions.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167211419863

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). *Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change.* Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 51(3), 390–395. Applied an integrative "stages of change" model to 872 people quitting smoking on their own, describing movement through stages such as contemplation, action and maintenance.
digitalcommons.uri.edu/psy_facpubs/572

Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., et al. (2020). *"Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure and being left with no clean-up crew": Defining autistic burnout.* Autism in Adulthood, 2(2), 132–143. From 19 interviews and 19 public online accounts, analysed with autistic co-researchers, autistic burnout was defined as long-term exhaustion, loss of function and reduced tolerance to stimulus, arising from chronic life stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities without enough support.
doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.* American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78. Summarised self-determination theory: people are most motivated and well when three basic needs are met: autonomy, competence and relatedness.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Samuelson, W., & Zeckhauser, R. (1988). *Status quo bias in decision making.* Journal of Risk and Uncertainty, 1, 7–59. In decision experiments and in real choices of health plans and retirement programmes, people disproportionately stuck with the current option (status quo bias).
jstor.org/stable/41760530

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness.* Yale University Press. Argues that small changes in how choices are presented (defaults, order, ease) can steer people towards better decisions without removing their freedom to choose.
identity.wellcomecollection.org/works/usu4u2um

Wood, W., Quinn, J. M., & Kashy, D. A. (2002). *Habits in everyday life: Thought, emotion, and action.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83(6), 1281–1297. In two diary studies with hourly reports, a large share of everyday behaviour was habitual (repeated in the same place, often while thinking about something else), and habits came with less stress than non-habitual actions.
dornsife.usc.edu

PART THREE · CHAPTER 7

Self-worth, shame and self-compassion

Baumeister, R. F., Campbell, J. D., Krueger, J. I., & Vohs, K. D. (2003). *Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles?* Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 4(1), 1–44. A major review concluded that high self-esteem does not reliably cause better performance or relationships; for example, good school performance partly produces high self-esteem rather than the reverse.
doi.org/10.1111/1529-1006.01431

Breines, J. G., & Chen, S. (2012). *Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38(9), 1133–1143. In four experiments, people encouraged to be self-compassionate about a failure or moral mistake were more motivated to improve (for example, studying longer for a retest) than people encouraged to boost their self-esteem.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167212445599

Curran, T., & Hill, A. P. (2019). *Perfectionism is increasing over time: A meta-analysis of birth cohort differences from 1989 to 2016.* Psychological Bulletin, 145(4), 410–429. A meta-analysis of college students' perfectionism scores found perfectionism rose between 1989 and 2016, with the largest rise in the sense that others expect perfection.
doi.org/10.1037/bul0000138

Festinger, L. (1954). *A theory of social comparison processes.* Human Relations, 7(2), 117–140. Proposed that people judge their own opinions and abilities by comparing themselves with others, especially when there is no objective standard.
doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Hewitt, P. L., & Flett, G. L. (1991). *Perfectionism in the self and social contexts: Conceptualization, assessment, and association with psychopathology.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60(3), 456–470. Introduced a multidimensional model of perfectionism, distinguishing self-oriented, other-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism, and linked these to psychological difficulties.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.3.456

Lewis, H. B. (1971). *Shame and guilt in neurosis.* International Universities Press, New York. Drawing on therapy sessions, Lewis distinguished shame, which centres on the whole self, from guilt, which centres on a specific act.
find.library.upenn.edu/catalog/99549673503681

Mueller, C. M., & Dweck, C. S. (1998). *Praise for intelligence can undermine children's motivation and performance.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75(1), 33–52. In six studies, children praised for intelligence cared more about looking good than learning, and after failure persisted less and performed worse than children praised for effort.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.1.33

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

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). *Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes.* Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 100(4), 569–582. Proposed the response styles theory: people who ruminate on their low mood tend to have longer depressions than people who distract themselves.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.100.4.569

Tangney, J. P., & Dearing, R. L. (2002). *Shame and guilt.* Guilford Press. Summarizes years of research distinguishing shame (about the self) from guilt (about the act): guilt-proneness goes with empathy and repair, shame-proneness with hiding, blame and anger.
guilford.com/books/Shame-and-Guilt/Tangney-Dearing/9781572309876

PART THREE · CHAPTER 8

Loss, grief and big life changes

Bonanno, G. A. (2004). *Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?* American Psychologist, 59(1), 20–28. Argued that resilience after loss or trauma is distinct from recovery, is more common than many theorists assumed, and can come about in several ways.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20

Bonanno, G. A. (2009). *The other side of sadness: What the new science of bereavement tells us about life after loss.* Basic Books. A book summarising bereavement research: most people are resilient after a loss, grief tends to come and go rather than follow fixed stages, and only a minority develop long-lasting, severe grief.
hachettebookgroup.com

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

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment.* Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis (London) / Basic Books (New York). The first volume of Bowlby's trilogy, setting out attachment theory: children's bond with caregivers is an evolved system for seeking safety and comfort.
vufind.lboro.ac.uk/Record/194760

Bridges, W. (1980). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes.* Addison-Wesley. Distinguished outer change from inner transition and described three phases: endings, a "neutral zone", and new beginnings.
narrativestudies.lib.unb.ca/bibcite/reference/16554

Doka, K. J. (Ed.) (1989). *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow.* Lexington Books. Coined "disenfranchised grief": grief that is not openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported.
openlibrary.org/books/OL354418M

Holmes, T. H., & Rahe, R. H. (1967). *The Social Readjustment Rating Scale.* Journal of Psychosomatic Research, 11(2), 213–218. Created the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, a list of 43 life events (such as divorce, job loss, moving and bereavement) rated by how much readjustment they demand.
doi.org/10.1016/0022-3999(67)90010-4

Klass, D., Silverman, P. R., & Nickman, S. L. (Eds.) (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief.* Taylor & Francis. Challenged the idea that healthy mourning means cutting ties with the dead, showing across many groups that ongoing inner bonds with the deceased are common and often healthy.
routledge.com

Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying.* Macmillan. Described five stages (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) from work with dying patients.
search.worldcat.org/title/4238

Martin, T. L., & Doka, K. J. (2000). *Men don't cry... women do: Transcending gender stereotypes of grief.* Brunner/Mazel. Described intuitive (feeling-focused) and instrumental (thinking- and doing-focused) grieving patterns, plus blended ones, arguing that they are related to gender but not determined by it.
opac.tangaza.ac.ke/bib/168348

O'Connor, M.-F. (2022). *The grieving brain: The surprising science of how we learn from love and loss.* HarperOne. A neuroscientist's account of grief as partly a learning problem: the brain must slowly update a map of the world in which the lost person is always there.
newbooksnetwork.com/the-grieving-brain

Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. (1986). *Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease.* Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95(3), 274–281. An early expressive-writing experiment in which students wrote about traumatic experiences over several days; it launched decades of research on whether writing about difficult experiences helps health and well-being.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.95.3.274

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (1999). *The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description.* Death Studies, 23(3), 197–224. Proposed the dual process model: healthy grieving moves back and forth (oscillates) between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping, including taking breaks from grief.
research-portal.uu.nl

Minds that work differently

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) (2018). *Facilitated communication [Position statement].* ASHA policy PS2018-00352. States that facilitated communication, where a helper supports the person's hand or arm while they type or point, is discredited: research has found the messages come from the facilitator, and it should not be used.
asha.org/policy/ps2018-00352

Aron, E. N., & Aron, A. (1997). *Sensory-processing sensitivity and its relation to introversion and emotionality.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73(2), 345–368. Across seven studies, the authors identified a single core trait of sensory-processing sensitivity, partly independent of introversion and emotionality, and developed the 27-item Highly Sensitive Person Scale.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.2.345

Au-Yeung, S. K., Freeth, M., & Thompson, A. R. (2025). *'Am I gonna regret this?': The experiences of diagnostic disclosure in autistic adults.* Autism, 29(8), 2181–2192. In interviews with 12 adults diagnosed as autistic in adulthood, telling others helped some reach support, be more themselves and help others, but many had not been believed, which made them more cautious about telling.
doi.org/10.1177/13623613251337504

Barkley, R. A. (1997). *Behavioral inhibition, sustained attention, and executive functions: Constructing a unifying theory of ADHD.* Psychological Bulletin, 121(1), 65–94. A theoretical review proposing that ADHD centres on a difficulty with behavioural inhibition, which in turn affects executive functions such as working memory, self-regulation of emotion and motivation, and the sense of time.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.121.1.65

Bird, G., & Cook, R. (2013). *Mixed emotions: The contribution of alexithymia to the emotional symptoms of autism.* Translational Psychiatry, 3(7), e285. Argued that emotional difficulties seen in some autistic people are better explained by co-occurring alexithymia than by autism itself.
doi.org/10.1038/tp.2013.61

Blackwell, A. G. (2017). *The curb-cut effect.* Stanford Social Innovation Review, 15(1), Winter 2017. An essay arguing that laws and programmes designed for disadvantaged groups, like kerb cuts made for wheelchair users, often end up benefiting everyone.
ssir.org/issue/winter-2017

Botha, M., & Frost, D. M. (2020). *Extending the minority stress model to understand mental health problems experienced by the autistic population.* Society and Mental Health, 10(1), 20–34. In 111 autistic adults, everyday discrimination, internalised stigma and concealing being autistic predicted poorer mental health even after accounting for general stress, suggesting minority stress plays a part.
doi.org/10.1177/2156869318804297

Cooper, K., Smith, L. G. E., & Russell, A. (2017). *Social identity, self-esteem, and mental health in autism.* European Journal of Social Psychology, 47(7), 844–854. In 272 autistic and 267 non-autistic participants, autistic people who identified more strongly with other autistic people had higher self-esteem, which was in turn linked to lower anxiety and depression.
doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2297

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). *Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective.* Autism, 24(7), 1704–1712. In "diffusion chains" where a story was passed along eight people (72 adults), all-autistic chains passed on as much detail as all-non-autistic chains, while mixed chains lost detail faster and reported lower rapport.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286

Demetriou, E. A., Lampit, A., Quintana, D. S., et al. (2018). *Autism spectrum disorders: A meta-analysis of executive function.* Molecular Psychiatry, 23, 1198–1204. Pooling 235 studies with over 14,000 participants, found that autistic people on average scored lower than non-autistic people across executive function tasks, with wide variation and mixed findings across ages.
doi.org/10.1038/mp.2017.75

Donnellan, A. M. (1984). *The criterion of the least dangerous assumption.* Behavioral Disorders, 9(2), 141–150. Proposed that when we lack evidence about what someone can understand or do, we should act on the assumption that would do the least harm if wrong, which usually means presuming competence.
scholar.google.com

Dunn, W. (1997). *The impact of sensory processing abilities on the daily lives of young children and their families: A conceptual model.* Infants & Young Children, 9(4), 23–35. Proposed a model of sensory processing in which people differ in their neurological thresholds (high or low) and in how they respond (going along with them or acting against them), giving four patterns that affect daily life.
doi.org/10.1097/00001163-199704000-00005

Grove, R., Hoekstra, R. A., Wierda, M., & Begeer, S. (2018). *Special interests and subjective wellbeing in autistic adults.* Autism Research, 11(5), 766–775. In a survey of autistic adults in the Netherlands Autism Register, about two-thirds reported a special interest; greater motivation for the interest was linked to higher wellbeing, while very high intensity of engagement was linked to lower wellbeing.
research.vu.nl

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). *"Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions.* Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47(8), 2519–2534. Interviews with 92 autistic adults described camouflaging as motivated by wanting to fit in and connect, done through masking and compensating techniques, and often followed by exhaustion and threats to self-perception.
doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5

Kapp, S. K., Steward, R., Crane, L., Elliott, D., Elphick, C., Pellicano, E., & Russell, G. (2019). *"People should be allowed to do what they like": Autistic adults' views and experiences of stimming.* Autism, 23(7), 1782–1792. Interviews and focus groups with 32 autistic adults described stimming as a way to regulate overwhelming emotions and sensations, and as something that becomes accepted through understanding; participants objected to efforts to stop harmless stimming.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361319829628

Kenny, L., Hattersley, C., Molins, B., Buckley, C., Povey, C., & Pellicano, E. (2016). *Which terms should be used to describe autism? Perspectives from the UK autism community.* Autism, 20(4), 442–462. A survey of 3,470 people in the UK autism community found no single preferred term: "autism" and "on the autism spectrum" were widely endorsed, and "autistic" was favoured by many autistic adults and families but much less by professionals.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361315588200

Kildahl, A. N., Helverschou, S. B., Rysstad, A. L., Wigaard, E., Hellerud, J. M., Ludvigsen, L. B., & Howlin, P. (2021). *Pathological demand avoidance in children and adolescents: A systematic review.* Autism, 25(8), 2162–2176. Reviewing 13 studies, found they nearly all relied on Newson's original descriptions and mostly on parent reports, seldom considered other explanations such as anxiety, and none asked people with the profile about their own experience.
doi.org/10.1177/13623613211034382

Leedham, A., Thompson, A. R., Smith, R., & Freeth, M. (2020). *'I was exhausted trying to figure it out': The experiences of females receiving an autism diagnosis in middle to late adulthood.* Autism, 24(1), 135–146. Interviews with eleven autistic women diagnosed at 40 or older explored how they made sense of a lifetime of feeling different and how the diagnosis changed their understanding of themselves.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361319853442

Millar, D. C., Light, J. C., & Schlosser, R. W. (2006). *The impact of augmentative and alternative communication intervention on the speech production of individuals with developmental disabilities: A research review.* Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 49(2), 248–264. Across 23 studies (67 people aged 2 to 60), AAC did not hold back speech, and in many cases speech increased, though most studies lacked strong experimental control.
doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2006/021)

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

Miserandino, C. (2003). *The spoon theory.* ButYouDontLookSick.com (essay). A personal essay in which Christine Miserandino, who has lupus, used a handful of spoons to show a friend that each daily task costs some of a limited supply of energy.
butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). *Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism.* Autism, 9(2), 139–156. Proposed "monotropism": autistic attention tends to be pulled strongly into a few interests at a time, and the authors argued this can explain the other diagnostic features of autism.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398

Newson, E., Le Maréchal, K., & David, C. (2003). *Pathological demand avoidance syndrome: A necessary distinction within the pervasive developmental disorders.* Archives of Disease in Childhood, 88(7), 595–600. Proposed recognising "pathological demand avoidance" as a separate profile within the autism spectrum, based on 150 cases with an equal sex ratio, describing strong avoidance of everyday demands.
doi.org/10.1136/adc.88.7.595

NHS (n.d.). *Prosopagnosia (face blindness).* NHS website (nhs.uk), health A to Z. Describes face blindness as difficulty recognising faces, often present from childhood and sometimes running in families; there is no treatment, but strategies such as recognising voices, hair or clothes, and telling people, can help.
nhs.uk/conditions/face-blindness

Phung, J., Penner, M., Pirlot, C., & Welch, C. (2021). *What I wish you knew: Insights on burnout, inertia, meltdown, and shutdown from autistic youth.* Frontiers in Psychology, 12, 741421. Interviews with eight autistic children and young people explored burnout, inertia, meltdown and shutdown as separate experiences, what they feel like, and what others do that helps or makes them worse.
doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.741421

Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., et al. (2020). *"Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure and being left with no clean-up crew": Defining autistic burnout.* Autism in Adulthood, 2(2), 132–143. From 19 interviews and 19 public online accounts, analysed with autistic co-researchers, autistic burnout was defined as long-term exhaustion, loss of function and reduced tolerance to stimulus, arising from chronic life stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities without enough support.
doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079

Sasson, N. J., & Morrison, K. E. (2019). *First impressions of adults with autism improve with diagnostic disclosure and increased autism knowledge of peers.* Autism, 23(1), 50–59. 215 observers formed more favourable first impressions of autistic adults when told they were autistic, and observers who knew more about autism rated them more favourably.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361317729526

Sasson, N. J., Faso, D. J., Nugent, J., Lovell, S., Kennedy, D. P., & Grossman, R. B. (2017). *Neurotypical peers are less willing to interact with those with autism based on thin slice judgments.* Scientific Reports, 7, 40700. Across three studies, non-autistic observers formed less favourable first impressions of autistic children and adults from a few seconds of video, and were less willing to interact with them; the bias disappeared when they judged only transcripts of what was said.
doi.org/10.1038/srep40700

Weigelt, S., Koldewyn, K., & Kanwisher, N. (2012). *Face identity recognition in autism spectrum disorders: A review of behavioral studies.* Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 36(3), 1060–1084. Found that autistic people were, on average, less accurate at recognising and remembering face identity, especially when memory was involved, while processing faces in broadly the same way; whether the difficulty is specific to faces was unclear.
doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2011.12.008

PART THREE · CHAPTER 10

Values, meaning and a good life

Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). *Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life.* Journal of Positive Psychology, 8(6), 505–516. In surveys of about 400 adults, happiness and meaningfulness overlapped but differed: good health and an easy life went with happiness but not meaning, while thinking more about the past and future went with more meaning but less happiness.
doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2013.830764

Curry, O. S., Rowland, L. A., Van Lissa, C. J., Zlotowitz, S., McAlaney, J., & Whitehouse, H. (2018). *Happy to help? A systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of performing acts of kindness on the well-being of the actor.* Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 76, 320–329. A meta-analysis of 27 experiments found that performing acts of kindness had a small-to-medium positive effect on the giver's well-being (δ = 0.28).
doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2018.02.014

Gollwitzer, P. M. (1999). *Implementation intentions: Strong effects of simple plans.* American Psychologist, 54(7), 493–503. Reviewed research showing that if-then plans ("when situation X arises, I will do Y") hand control of action to the planned cue and help people act on their goals.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.7.493

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change.* Guilford Press. The first main book on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), which puts chosen values at the centre and teaches making room for difficult feelings while acting on what matters.
contextualscience.org/publications/hayes_strosahl_wilson_1999

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

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* Springer Publishing, New York. Set out the appraisal model: stress depends on judging whether something threatens you and whether you can cope; it also distinguished problem-focused from emotion-focused coping.
wellcomecollection.org/works/b5zr7tvm

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). *Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation.* Psychological Review, 98(2), 224–253. Argued that cultures differ in how they construe the self, as independent or interdependent with others, and that this shapes cognition, emotion and motivation.
sites.duke.edu

Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). *The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance.* Journal of Positive Psychology, 11(5), 531–545. Proposed that meaning in life has three parts: coherence (life makes sense), purpose (having core goals and direction) and significance (feeling that one's life has value).
research.aalto.fi

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

Murray, D., Lesser, M., & Lawson, W. (2005). *Attention, monotropism and the diagnostic criteria for autism.* Autism, 9(2), 139–156. Proposed "monotropism": autistic attention tends to be pulled strongly into a few interests at a time, and the authors argued this can explain the other diagnostic features of autism.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361305051398

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

Rotter, J. B. (1966). *Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement.* Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 80(1), 1–28. Described individual differences in "locus of control", how far people believe outcomes depend on their own actions rather than outside forces, and introduced a scale to measure it.
doi.org/10.1037/h0092976

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.* American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78. Summarised self-determination theory: people are most motivated and well when three basic needs are met: autonomy, competence and relatedness.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). *On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.* Annual Review of Psychology, 52, 141–166. Reviewed two traditions of well-being research: hedonic (pleasure and the absence of pain) and eudaimonic (meaning, self-realisation and full functioning), and how they diverge and complement each other.
doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.141

Ryff, C. D. (1989). *Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57(6), 1069–1081. Proposed six dimensions of psychological well-being (self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth) and tested them with 321 adults, finding that several were not captured by earlier happiness measures.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). *Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries.* Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 25, 1–65. Using data from 20 countries, found that the meaning of a set of basic value types was broadly similar across most groups, and that values are organised by two dimensions into a circle of compatible and conflicting motivations.
cris.huji.ac.il

Steger, M. F., Frazier, P., Oishi, S., & Kaler, M. (2006). *The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the presence of and search for meaning in life.* Journal of Counseling Psychology, 53(1), 80–93. Developed the 10-item Meaning in Life Questionnaire, which separately measures the presence of meaning and the search for meaning, and tested its reliability and validity across three studies.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.53.1.80

Healing after hurt

Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A., & Wotman, S. R. (1990). *Victim and perpetrator accounts of interpersonal conflict: Autobiographical narratives about anger.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59(5), 994–1005. People wrote stories about a time they angered someone and a time someone angered them; perpetrators and victims described the same kinds of event very differently, for example in how serious, understandable and finished the harm was.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.994

Bonanno, G. A. (2004). *Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?* American Psychologist, 59(1), 20–28. Argued that resilience after loss or trauma is distinct from recovery, is more common than many theorists assumed, and can come about in several ways.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20

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

Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). *Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis.* Psychological Bulletin, 98(2), 310–357. A review arguing that social support protects (buffers) people from the harmful effects of stress, especially perceived availability of support, alongside general main effects of being socially integrated.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310

Eisenberger, N. I., Lieberman, M. D., & Williams, K. D. (2003). *Does rejection hurt? An fMRI study of social exclusion.* Science, 302(5643), 290–292. Being left out of a virtual ball-tossing game increased activity in the anterior cingulate cortex, a region also involved in physical pain distress, in proportion to how upset people felt.
doi.org/10.1126/science.1089134

Eubanks, C. F., Muran, J. C., & Safran, J. D. (2018). *Alliance rupture repair: A meta-analysis.* Psychotherapy, 55(4), 508–519. Across 11 studies (1,314 patients), repairing ruptures in the therapist-client relationship was moderately associated with better outcomes; training therapists in rupture repair did not show a significant effect on outcomes in 6 studies.
doi.org/10.1037/pst0000185

Frattaroli, J. (2006). *Experimental disclosure and its moderators: A meta-analysis.* Psychological Bulletin, 132(6), 823–865. Pooling 146 randomised studies, experimental disclosure (such as expressive writing) had a small but significant positive average effect.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.6.823

Frazier, P., Tennen, H., Gavian, M., Park, C., Tomich, P., & Tashiro, T. (2009). *Does self-reported posttraumatic growth reflect genuine positive change?* Psychological Science, 20(7), 912–919. Measuring 122 students before and after a trauma, the researchers found that self-reported growth was largely unrelated to actual measured change, and perceived growth went with more distress while actual growth went with less.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02381.x

Gordon, K. C., Baucom, D. H., & Snyder, D. K. (2004). *An integrative intervention for promoting recovery from extramarital affairs.* Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 30(2), 213–231. In a small study of six couples who had a structured couples therapy after an affair, most were less distressed by the end, and the hurt partners reported more forgiveness. The therapy moved in stages: dealing with the shock, understanding how the affair came about, and then deciding how to move on.
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15114949

Gottman, J. M. (2011). *The Science of Trust: Emotional Attunement for Couples.* W. W. Norton (New York). A book drawing on Gottman's lab research and game theory to argue that trust is built through emotional attunement in everyday moments, and describing how couples can repair it.
wwnorton.co.uk/books/9780393705959-the-science-of-trust

Kim, P. H., Ferrin, D. L., Cooper, C. D., & Dirks, K. T. (2004). *Removing the shadow of suspicion: The effects of apology versus denial for repairing competence- versus integrity-based trust violations.* Journal of Applied Psychology, 89(1), 104–118. Trust was repaired more successfully when people apologised for competence-based violations but denied culpability for integrity-based violations, depending also on later evidence of guilt or innocence.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.1.104

Leary, M. R., Springer, C., Negel, L., Ansell, E., & Evans, K. (1998). *The causes, phenomenology, and consequences of hurt feelings.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74(5), 1225–1237. Hurt feelings were triggered by events that signalled relational devaluation (feeling less valued by someone), usually by people the person knew well.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1225

Leary, M. R., Tate, E. B., Adams, C. E., Allen, A. B., & Hancock, J. (2007). *Self-compassion and reactions to unpleasant self-relevant events: The implications of treating oneself kindly.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(5), 887–904. In five studies, self-compassion softened people's reactions to unpleasant events in ways distinct from, and sometimes more helpful than, self-esteem.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.5.887

Lewicki, R. J., Polin, B., & Lount, R. B., Jr. (2016). *An exploration of the structure of effective apologies.* Negotiation and Conflict Management Research, 9(2), 177–196. Testing six apology components with 755 participants, acknowledging responsibility was rated most important, then an offer of repair; a request for forgiveness mattered least. Apologies with more components were rated better.
doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12073

McNulty, J. K. (2008). *Forgiveness in marriage: Putting the benefits into context.* Journal of Family Psychology, 22(1), 171–175. Looked at newly married couples and argued, as the title says, that the benefits of forgiving depend on the context, such as how often a partner behaves badly.
doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.22.1.171

McNulty, J. K. (2011). *The dark side of forgiveness: The tendency to forgive predicts continued psychological and physical aggression in marriage.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37(6), 770–783. In newlywed couples over four years, partners' aggression stayed stable towards more forgiving spouses but declined towards less forgiving ones, suggesting forgiveness can remove consequences that would discourage repeat offending.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167211407077

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

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

Nolen-Hoeksema, S. (1991). *Responses to depression and their effects on the duration of depressive episodes.* Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 100(4), 569–582. Proposed the response styles theory: people who ruminate on their low mood tend to have longer depressions than people who distract themselves.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.100.4.569

Pennebaker, J. W., & Beall, S. K. (1986). *Confronting a traumatic event: Toward an understanding of inhibition and disease.* Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 95(3), 274–281. An early expressive-writing experiment in which students wrote about traumatic experiences over several days; it launched decades of research on whether writing about difficult experiences helps health and well-being.
doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.95.3.274

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

Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., et al. (2020). *"Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure and being left with no clean-up crew": Defining autistic burnout.* Autism in Adulthood, 2(2), 132–143. From 19 interviews and 19 public online accounts, analysed with autistic co-researchers, autistic burnout was defined as long-term exhaustion, loss of function and reduced tolerance to stimulus, arising from chronic life stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities without enough support.
doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079

Rempel, J. K., Holmes, J. G., & Zanna, M. P. (1985). *Trust in close relationships.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49(1), 95–112. Described trust in close relationships as having three components, predictability, dependability and faith, and developed a self-report Trust Scale to measure them.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.49.1.95

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

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1996). *The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma.* Journal of Traumatic Stress, 9(3), 455–471. Developed the 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory with five areas of reported growth: new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life.
doi.org/10.1007/BF02103658

Tronick, E., Als, H., Adamson, L., Wise, S., & Brazelton, T. B. (1978). *The infant's response to entrapment between contradictory messages in face-to-face interaction.* Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 17(1), 1–13. The first "still face" study: when a mother kept a blank, unresponsive face, infants tried hard to re-engage her, then grew upset and withdrew; they recovered when she responded again.
doi.org/10.1016/S0002-7138(09)62273-1

Wade, N. G., Hoyt, W. T., Kidwell, J. E. M., & Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2014). *Efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions to promote forgiveness: A meta-analysis.* Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 82(1), 154–170. Across 54 reports, people in explicit forgiveness interventions reported more forgiveness than untreated controls and than those in other treatments, along with larger improvements in depression, anxiety and hope than no treatment.
doi.org/10.1037/a0035268

PART THREE · CHAPTER 12

Helping others well

Bloom, P. (2016). *Against empathy: The case for rational compassion.* Ecco. A book arguing that empathy, feeling what others feel, is biased towards people like us and can cloud judgment, and that reasoned compassion is a better guide to helping.
wellcomecollection.org/works/c5q8eupq

Bolger, N., Zuckerman, A., & Kessler, R. C. (2000). *Invisible support and adjustment to stress.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79(6), 953–961. In couples where one partner faced a stressful exam, support the recipient did not notice (reported by the giver but not the receiver) was linked with better adjustment, while noticed (visible) support was not.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.6.953

Brown, S. L., Nesse, R. M., Vinokur, A. D., & Smith, D. M. (2003). *Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality.* Psychological Science, 14(4), 320–327. In a five-year study of older married adults, those who reported giving practical help to others or emotional support to their spouse had lower mortality, while receiving support was not linked to mortality once giving was accounted for.
researchconnect.stonybrook.edu

Cutrona, C. E., & Russell, D. W. (1990). *Type of social support and specific stress: Toward a theory of optimal matching.* In B. R. Sarason, I. G. Sarason & G. R. Pierce (Eds.), Social Support: An Interactional View (pp. 319–366). New York: Wiley. Proposed the "optimal matching" idea: support helps most when its type fits the problem, for example practical help for things you can change and comfort for things you can't.
search.worldcat.org

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

Dazzi, T., Gribble, R., Wessely, S., & Fear, N. T. (2014). *Does asking about suicide and related behaviours induce suicidal ideation? What is the evidence?* Psychological Medicine, 44(16), 3361–3363. A review of published studies in adults and adolescents, in the general population and in groups at higher risk. None found a significant rise in suicidal thoughts after people were asked about suicide; talking about it may even lower them.
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24998511

Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). *Spending money on others promotes happiness.* Science, 319(5870), 1687–1688. Spending more of one's income on others predicted greater happiness in a nationally representative survey and in a field study of windfall spending, and people randomly assigned to spend money on others were happier than those assigned to spend it on themselves.
doi.org/10.1126/science.1150952

Figley, C. R. (Ed.) (1995). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized.* Brunner/Mazel, New York. An edited volume introducing "compassion fatigue" as a cost of helping traumatized people, distinguished from burnout and PTSD, with ideas for prevention.
routledge.com

Fischer, P., Krueger, J. I., Greitemeyer, T., Vogrincic, C., Kastenmüller, A., Frey, D., Heene, M., Wicher, M., & Kainbacher, M. (2011). *The bystander-effect: A meta-analytic review on bystander intervention in dangerous and non-dangerous emergencies.* Psychological Bulletin, 137(4), 517–537. Across 105 effect sizes and over 7,700 participants, the bystander effect was reliable but weaker when situations were clearly dangerous.
doi.org/10.1037/a0023304

Flynn, F. J., & Lake, V. K. B. (Bohns) (2008). *"If you need help, just ask": Underestimating compliance with direct requests for help.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95(1), 128–143. In five studies, people asking for help underestimated how many others would agree to a direct request, by as much as 50%, partly because they overlooked how awkward it feels to say no.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.1.128

Helgeson, V. S., & Fritz, H. L. (1998). *A theory of unmitigated communion.* Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2(3), 173–183. Proposed "unmitigated communion", focusing on others to the exclusion of oneself, and distinguished it from healthy caring; unmitigated communion, not communion, was linked to psychological distress.
doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0203_2

Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). *Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress.* American Psychologist, 44(3), 513–524. Proposed conservation of resources theory: stress arises when people's valued resources are threatened or lost, or when investing resources does not pay off, and people strive to protect what they have.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.3.513

House, J. S. (1981). *Work Stress and Social Support.* Addison-Wesley (Reading, MA). A book on social support at work that distinguished emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal support.
libcat.library.tamu.edu/Record/in00000649568

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1981). *The measurement of experienced burnout.* Journal of Occupational Behaviour (now Journal of Organizational Behavior), 2(2), 99–113. Developed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, with three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.
scienceopen.com/document/vid/19d4ed76-9f31-47eb-93e2-81f08d26f4d4

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (1991). *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people to change addictive behavior.* Guilford Press. The first full presentation of motivational interviewing: a way of talking about change that treats mixed feelings as normal and draws out the person's own reasons for change.
motivationalinterviewing.org

Miserandino, C. (2003). *The spoon theory.* ButYouDontLookSick.com (essay). A personal essay in which Christine Miserandino, who has lupus, used a handful of spoons to show a friend that each daily task costs some of a limited supply of energy.
butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory

Philpot, R., Liebst, L. S., Levine, M., Bernasco, W., & Lindegaard, M. R. (2020). *Would I be helped? Cross-national CCTV footage shows that intervention is the norm in public conflicts.* American Psychologist, 75(1), 66–75. Analysing CCTV footage of real public conflicts in three countries, the researchers found that at least one bystander intervened in most incidents, at similar rates across countries, and that more bystanders made intervention more likely.
doi.org/10.1037/amp0000469

Pinquart, M., & Sörensen, S. (2003). *Differences between caregivers and noncaregivers in psychological health and physical health: A meta-analysis.* Psychology and Aging, 18(2), 250–267. Across 84 studies, caregivers reported more stress and depression and lower wellbeing and self-efficacy than non-caregivers, with smaller differences in physical health; gaps were larger for dementia caregivers.
doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.18.2.250

Raymaker, D. M., Teo, A. R., Steckler, N. A., et al. (2020). *"Having all of your internal resources exhausted beyond measure and being left with no clean-up crew": Defining autistic burnout.* Autism in Adulthood, 2(2), 132–143. From 19 interviews and 19 public online accounts, analysed with autistic co-researchers, autistic burnout was defined as long-term exhaustion, loss of function and reduced tolerance to stimulus, arising from chronic life stress and a mismatch between expectations and abilities without enough support.
doi.org/10.1089/aut.2019.0079

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.* American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78. Summarised self-determination theory: people are most motivated and well when three basic needs are met: autonomy, competence and relatedness.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68

Singer, T., & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). *Empathy and compassion.* Current Biology, 24(18), R875–R878. Distinguished empathic distress (sharing someone's pain, which can overwhelm) from compassion (warm concern), which engage different brain networks; brief compassion training increased positive feelings.
doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2014.06.054

World Health Organization (2019). *Burn-out an "occupational phenomenon": International Classification of Diseases.* WHO news item, 28 May 2019. ICD-11 includes burn-out as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition: a syndrome from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, with exhaustion, mental distance or cynicism about one's job, and reduced professional efficacy. WHO says the term should not be used for other areas of life.
who.int

Anger

Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A., & Wotman, S. R. (1990). *Victim and perpetrator accounts of interpersonal conflict: Autobiographical narratives about anger.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59(5), 994–1005. People wrote stories about a time they angered someone and a time someone angered them; perpetrators and victims described the same kinds of event very differently, for example in how serious, understandable and finished the harm was.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.5.994

Bushman, B. J. (2002). *Does venting anger feed or extinguish the flame? Catharsis, rumination, distraction, anger, and aggressive responding.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28(6), 724–731. Angered people who hit a punching bag while thinking about the person who provoked them felt angrier afterwards than people who were distracted or did nothing.
doi.org/10.1177/0146167202289002

Bushman, B. J., Bonacci, A. M., Pedersen, W. C., Vasquez, E. A., & Miller, N. (2005). *Chewing on it can chew you up: Effects of rumination on triggered displaced aggression.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88(6), 969–983. In three experiments, people who ruminated about a provocation, even for eight hours, were later more aggressive towards someone who only mildly annoyed them than people who were distracted.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.6.969

Carver, C. S., & Harmon-Jones, E. (2009). *Anger is an approach-related affect: Evidence and implications.* Psychological Bulletin, 135, 183–204. A review of evidence that anger is usually an "approach" emotion: like eagerness, it moves people towards a goal or obstacle rather than away from it.
doi.org/10.1037/a0013965

Chida, Y., & Steptoe, A. (2009). *The association of anger and hostility with future coronary heart disease: A meta-analytic review of prospective evidence.* Journal of the American College of Cardiology, 53(11), 936–946. Anger and hostility were linked with a modestly higher risk of later coronary heart disease events, in both initially healthy people and people with heart disease; the link was no longer significant in studies that controlled for behaviours such as smoking.
doi.org/10.1016/j.jacc.2008.11.044

Crompton, C. J., Ropar, D., Evans-Williams, C. V. M., Flynn, E. G., & Fletcher-Watson, S. (2020). *Autistic peer-to-peer information transfer is highly effective.* Autism, 24(7), 1704–1712. In "diffusion chains" where a story was passed along eight people (72 adults), all-autistic chains passed on as much detail as all-non-autistic chains, while mixed chains lost detail faster and reported lower rapport.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361320919286

Del Vecchio, T., & O'Leary, K. D. (2004). *Effectiveness of anger treatments for specific anger problems: A meta-analytic review.* Clinical Psychology Review, 24(1), 15–34. Across 23 controlled studies of adults with anger problems, anger treatments produced medium to large effects; cognitive approaches did well for long-standing (trait) anger, anger suppression and driving anger, and relaxation for in-the-moment anger.
doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2003.09.006

Gordon, A. M., & Chen, S. (2014). *The role of sleep in interpersonal conflict: Do sleepless nights mean worse fights?* Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5(2), 168–175. In a 14-day daily study, people reported more conflict with their partner after poor nights of sleep, and conflicts were resolved best when both partners were well rested.
doi.org/10.1177/1948550613488952

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

Gross, J. J. (1998). *The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review.* Review of General Psychology, 2(3), 271–299. Set out the process model of emotion regulation, with five points where emotion can be shaped: situation selection, situation modification, attention, cognitive change (reappraisal) and response modulation.
doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271

Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). *Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85(2), 348–362. Across five studies, people who habitually reappraised had better emotional experience, relationships and well-being; habitual suppression was linked to worse outcomes.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348

James, W. (1884). *What is an emotion?* Mind, os-IX(34), 188–205. James argued that bodily changes follow directly from perceiving something exciting, and that our feeling of those bodily changes is the emotion.
doi.org/10.1093/mind/os-IX.34.188

Kapp, S. K., Steward, R., Crane, L., Elliott, D., Elphick, C., Pellicano, E., & Russell, G. (2019). *"People should be allowed to do what they like": Autistic adults' views and experiences of stimming.* Autism, 23(7), 1782–1792. Interviews and focus groups with 32 autistic adults described stimming as a way to regulate overwhelming emotions and sensations, and as something that becomes accepted through understanding; participants objected to efforts to stop harmless stimming.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361319829628

Kinnaird, E., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2019). *Investigating alexithymia in autism: A systematic review and meta-analysis.* European Psychiatry, 55, 80–89. Across 15 studies, about half of autistic participants (around 50%) had high alexithymia compared with about 5% of comparison participants; alexithymia is common in autism but not universal.
doi.org/10.1016/j.eurpsy.2018.09.004

Kjærvik, S. L., & Bushman, B. J. (2024). *A meta-analytic review of anger management activities that increase or decrease arousal: What fuels or douses rage?* Clinical Psychology Review (April 2024). Across 154 studies, activities that calm the body (such as slow breathing, relaxation and mindfulness) reduced anger and aggression, while arousal-increasing activities showed little or no benefit.
news.osu.edu

Kross, E., Ayduk, O., & Mischel, W. (2005). *When asking "why" does not hurt: Distinguishing rumination from reflective processing of negative emotions.* Psychological Science, 16(9), 709–715. After recalling an anger-provoking experience, people who asked why they felt as they did from a self-distanced perspective showed less emotional reactivity than those who relived it through their own eyes.
rascl.studentorg.berkeley.edu/assets/files/kross_etal_2005_ps.pdf

Mischkowski, D., Kross, E., & Bushman, B. J. (2012). *Flies on the wall are less aggressive: Self-distancing "in the heat of the moment" reduces aggressive thoughts, angry feelings and aggressive behavior.* Journal of Experimental Social Psychology. After being provoked, people who reflected on the moment from a distanced, "fly on the wall" view felt less angry and behaved less aggressively than people who relived it from their own point of view.
doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.03.012

Mostofsky, E., Penner, E. A., & Mittleman, M. A. (2014). *Outbursts of anger as a trigger of acute cardiovascular events: A systematic review and meta-analysis.* European Heart Journal, 35(21), 1404–1410. Across nine case-crossover studies, the rate of heart attacks, strokes and arrhythmias was higher in the two hours after an outburst of anger than at other times, especially for people already at high risk.
doi.org/10.1093/eurheartj/ehu033

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

Saini, M. (2009). *A meta-analysis of the psychological treatment of anger: Developing guidelines for evidence-based practice.* Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 37(4), 473–488. Across 96 studies and 139 treatment effects, psychological treatments for anger (such as CBT, skills training and relaxation) were generally effective, with considerable variation between treatments and studies.
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20018996

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). *Emotion dysregulation in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.* American Journal of Psychiatry, 171(3), 276–293. A literature review found that trouble regulating emotions (quick, strong feelings that are hard to bring back down) is common in ADHD across the lifespan, with clinic studies of young people putting it at roughly a quarter to a half, and that it adds a lot to the day-to-day difficulty ADHD brings.
doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.13070966

PART THREE · CHAPTER 14

Personality, temperament and change

Bleidorn, W., Schwaba, T., Zheng, A., Hopwood, C. J., Sosa, S. S., Roberts, B. W., & Briley, D. A. (2022). *Personality stability and change: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies.* Psychological Bulletin, 148(7–8), 588–619. Who is more or less of a trait compared with others becomes steadier through childhood and levels off by about 25, while average levels keep shifting gently across life, with emotional stability rising most.
doi.org/10.1037/bul0000365

Grove, R., Hoekstra, R. A., Wierda, M., & Begeer, S. (2018). *Special interests and subjective wellbeing in autistic adults.* Autism Research, 11(5), 766–775. In a survey of autistic adults in the Netherlands Autism Register, about two-thirds reported a special interest; greater motivation for the interest was linked to higher wellbeing, while very high intensity of engagement was linked to lower wellbeing.
research.vu.nl

Hudson, N. W., & Fraley, R. C. (2015). *Volitional personality trait change: Can people choose to change their personality traits?* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109(3), 490–507. In two 16-week studies, people who wanted to change a trait tended to shift a little in that direction, especially when they set concrete plans to act differently.
doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000021

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V., Allison, C., Smith, P., Baron-Cohen, S., Lai, M.-C., & Mandy, W. (2017). *"Putting on my best normal": Social camouflaging in adults with autism spectrum conditions.* Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 47(8), 2519–2534. Interviews with 92 autistic adults described camouflaging as motivated by wanting to fit in and connect, done through masking and compensating techniques, and often followed by exhaustion and threats to self-perception.
doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3166-5

Leedham, A., Thompson, A. R., Smith, R., & Freeth, M. (2020). *'I was exhausted trying to figure it out': The experiences of females receiving an autism diagnosis in middle to late adulthood.* Autism, 24(1), 135–146. Interviews with eleven autistic women diagnosed at 40 or older explored how they made sense of a lifetime of feeling different and how the diagnosis changed their understanding of themselves.
doi.org/10.1177/1362361319853442

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (1987). *Validation of the five-factor model of personality across instruments and observers.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52(1), 81–90. Ratings of 275 adults by their peers showed the same five broad trait factors found in self-reports, and peers and the people themselves agreed moderately well. This helped establish the "Big Five" as a common map of personality.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.1.81

Roberts, B. W., Luo, J., Briley, D. A., Chow, P. I., Su, R., & Hill, P. L. (2017). *A systematic review of personality trait change through intervention.* Psychological Bulletin, 143(2), 117–141. Across 207 studies, personality trait scores changed noticeably during therapy and other interventions over about six months, mostly towards more emotional stability, and the changes lasted in follow-ups.
doi.org/10.1037/bul0000088

Roberts, B. W., Walton, K. E., & Viechtbauer, W. (2006). *Patterns of mean-level change in personality traits across the life course: A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies.* Psychological Bulletin, 132(1), 1–25. Pooling 92 long-term studies, people on average became more confident in social settings, more conscientious and more emotionally stable, especially between about 20 and 40, and traits kept changing in middle and old age.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.1.1

Thomas, A., & Chess, S. (1977). *Temperament and Development.* New York: Brunner/Mazel. From the New York Longitudinal Study, which followed children from infancy, the authors described inborn differences in temperament, such as activity, regularity, adaptability and mood, and argued that how well a child's temperament fits their surroundings matters ("goodness of fit").
wellcomecollection.org/works/epddh966

PART THREE · CHAPTER 15

Closeness and love

Acevedo, B. P., & Aron, A. (2009). *Does a long-term relationship kill romantic love?* Review of General Psychology, 13(1), 59–65. Reviewing studies of short- and long-term relationships, the authors concluded that romantic love without obsession can last in long-term relationships and is linked with greater satisfaction and well-being.
doi.org/10.1037/a0014226

Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2010). *It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships.* Personal Relationships, 17(2), 217–233. In a daily-diary study of cohabiting couples, feeling gratitude after a partner's thoughtful act predicted greater relationship connection and satisfaction the next day, for both partners.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01273.x

Aron, A., & Aron, E. N. (1986). *Love and the Expansion of Self: Understanding Attraction and Satisfaction.* Hemisphere Publishing (Washington, DC). Introduced the self-expansion model: people are motivated to grow by including a partner's perspectives, resources and identity in their sense of self.
libcat.library.tamu.edu/Record/in00000408876

Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vallone, R. D., & Bator, R. J. (1997). *The experimental generation of interpersonal closeness: A procedure and some preliminary findings.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23(4), 363–377. Pairs of strangers who spent about 45 minutes on gradually deepening self-disclosure tasks (the "36 questions") felt closer afterwards than pairs given small-talk tasks; matching on attitudes or expecting to like each other made no significant difference.
ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/36_questions_for_increasing_closeness

Aron, A., Norman, C. C., Aron, E. N., McKenna, C., & Heyman, R. E. (2000). *Couples' shared participation in novel and arousing activities and experienced relationship quality.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78(2), 273–284. Couples who took part together in a novel, mildly challenging activity reported higher relationship quality afterwards than couples who did a mundane task.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.2.273

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). *The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation.* Psychological Bulletin, 117(3), 497–529. A major review arguing that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation: people need frequent, pleasant contact within a few stable, caring relationships, and unmet belonging has wide emotional and cognitive costs.
doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497

Carstensen, L. L., Isaacowitz, D. M., & Charles, S. T. (1999). *Taking time seriously: A theory of socioemotional selectivity.* American Psychologist, 54(3), 165–181. Proposes that perceived time left shapes social goals: when time feels open-ended people seek new information and contacts; when it feels limited they focus on fewer, emotionally meaningful relationships.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.3.165

Driver, J. L., & Gottman, J. M. (2004). *Daily marital interactions and positive affect during marital conflict among newlywed couples.* Family Process, 43(3), 301–314. Observing 49 newlywed couples over dinner and in a conflict discussion, the authors linked turning towards each other's everyday bids with more positive emotion (such as humour and affection) during later conflict.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2004.00024.x

Fraley, R. C., Hudson, N. W., Heffernan, M. E., & Segal, N. (2015). *Are adult attachment styles categorical or dimensional? A taxometric analysis of general and relationship-specific attachment orientations.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109(2), 354–368. Taxometric analyses suggested that adult attachment differences are dimensional (degrees of anxiety and avoidance) rather than distinct types.
doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000027

Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). *What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87(2), 228–245. Across four studies, telling others about good news was linked with higher daily positive mood and well-being beyond the event itself, especially when the listener responded actively and constructively; couples whose partners usually responded enthusiastically reported more intimacy and satisfaction.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.228

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). *Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 52(3), 511–524. Two questionnaire studies proposed that adult romantic love is an attachment process: the share of adults in each of three attachment styles roughly matched infant figures, and the styles differed in how people experienced love, their views of self and others, and recalled relationships with parents.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.52.3.511

Laurenceau, J.-P., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). *Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges.* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74(5), 1238–1251. Diary studies of everyday social interactions supported Reis and Shaver's model: disclosing feelings, and feeling that the other person responded with understanding, both contributed to how intimate an interaction felt.
doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238

Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). *Intimacy as an interpersonal process.* In S. Duck (Ed.), Handbook of Personal Relationships (pp. 367–389). Chichester: Wiley. Described intimacy as a back-and-forth process: one person shares something, the other responds with understanding, validation and care, and the first feels known.
search.worldcat.org

Worry, low mood and trauma

Bonanno, G. A. (2004). *Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?* American Psychologist, 59(1), 20–28. Argued that resilience after loss or trauma is distinct from recovery, is more common than many theorists assumed, and can come about in several ways.
doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.1.20

Borkovec, T. D., Wilkinson, L., Folensbee, R., & Lerman, C. (1983). *Stimulus control applications to the treatment of worry.* Behaviour Research and Therapy, 21(3), 247–251. People who described themselves as worriers and were taught to postpone worry to a set time and place each day reported less daily worry after four weeks than people given no treatment.
doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(83)90206-1

Carleton, R. N. (2016). *Fear of the unknown: One fear to rule them all?* Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 41, 5–21. A review arguing that fear of the unknown, closely related to intolerance of uncertainty, may be a fundamental fear underlying anxiety and neuroticism.
doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2016.03.011

Craske, M. G., Treanor, M., Conway, C. C., Zbozinek, T., & Vervliet, B. (2014). *Maximizing exposure therapy: An inhibitory learning approach.* Behaviour Research and Therapy, 58, 10–23. Describes exposure therapy for anxiety as building new learning that competes with old fear, and sets out ways to strengthen it, such as testing specific expectations, dropping safety behaviours and practising in varied settings.
doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2014.04.006

Cruwys, T., Dingle, G. A., Haslam, C., Haslam, S. A., Jetten, J., & Morton, T. A. (2013). *Social group memberships protect against future depression, alleviate depression symptoms and prevent depression relapse.* Social Science & Medicine, 98, 179–186. In population data on adults aged 50 and over followed for two to four years, belonging to fewer groups predicted more depression later; among people already depressed, joining one group was linked to a 24% lower risk of relapse and joining three to a 63% lower risk.
doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.09.013

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Groups, influence and culture

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csmapnyu.org

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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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