

The Ceasefire Intake

Your baseline, before you change anything

Each of you fills this in separately, without discussing it first. It takes about ten minutes. Score every item 0 to 4, where 0 is “not true of us” and 4 is “true of us most weeks.”

Keep this. You will take it again at day 90, and couples consistently underestimate how far they have come — the memory of a hard year compresses.

THE TWENTY ITEMS

#	STATEMENT	0	1	2	3	4
1	We argue more than once a week.					
2	Our arguments escalate faster than they used to.					
3	The same disagreement comes back in different forms.					
4	One of us raises our voice during conflict.					
5	One of us goes silent or leaves the room during conflict.					
6	I lose track of what I said during an argument.					
7	I can feel my body change before I can name what I feel.					
8	Skills we have learned stop working once we are upset.					
9	It takes us more than a day to reconnect after a fight.					
10	One of us follows the other to keep the conversation going.					
11	Something said in a fight is still being carried months later.					
12	I bring up old material during current arguments.					
13	I assume I know why my partner did something.					
14	Repair attempts get made in this relationship.					
15	Repair attempts get accepted in this relationship.					
16	I have thought seriously about leaving in the last year.					
17	I believe my partner still wants this relationship.					
18	I still want this relationship.					
19	There is at least one topic we cannot discuss at all.					
20	I feel hopeful that this can change.					

YOUR BASELINE

TOTAL SCORE

DATE

FILLED IN BY

Items 14, 15, 17, 18 and 20 are reverse-scored: for those, a high number is a good sign. Do not average anything. This is a snapshot, not a diagnosis.

How long it takes you to come back

Do not try to improve the number yet. For the first two weeks, just find out what it is.

TARGET FOR NEXT TWO WEEKS

The Relationship Safety Scale

Read and answer this on your own

Answer these privately, for yourself, about the last twelve months. Nobody is grading this and there is no score to argue with.

If you would rather not be seen filling this in, do it somewhere else, and do not keep it if keeping it is not safe.

#	QUESTION	YES	NO
1	Do I change what I say, wear, spend, or do mainly to avoid a reaction?		
2	Do I keep information from my partner because of what they might do — not because I am ashamed, but because I am afraid?		
3	Does my partner check my phone, location, messages, mileage, or spending in a way I cannot refuse?		
4	Have I lost contact with friends or family because it caused too much trouble to keep it?		
5	Do I have real access to money — my own, or money I do not have to explain?		
6	Has my partner threatened to hurt me, themselves, the children, a pet, to take the children, or to report me to someone?		
7	Has anything physical happened — and did I find myself explaining afterward why it was not that bad?		
8	Have I ever agreed to sex because of what would happen if I did not?		
9	Do people who know us describe my partner very differently than I experience them at home?		
10	Am I afraid of my partner?		

WHAT YOUR ANSWERS MEAN

Question 10 outranks the other nine. If the answer is yes, that answer is the whole assessment. Fear of your partner is not a normal feature of a difficult marriage.

If you answered yes to any of questions 3 through 8, stop working through the book jointly for now and talk to someone who specialises in this. The plan you need is a different plan, and it needs to be built with a person, not a book.

If you answered no to all ten, and what you are living in is two people who escalate and are both ashamed of it afterward — you are in the right place. Keep going.

In the United States, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788. They are not there to tell you to leave. They talk through options, including staying.

Safety Plan

Build this with a person, not a book

For anyone who answered yes to anything on the Relationship Safety Scale. Fill this in with an advocate or an individual therapist of your own rather than alone, and keep it somewhere it will not be found.

A PERSON I CAN CALL

THEIR NUMBER

A SECOND PERSON

THEIR NUMBER

LOCAL ADVOCATE / SERVICE

THEIR NUMBER

SOMEWHERE I COULD GO, AND HOW I WOULD GET THERE

WHAT I WOULD NEED TO TAKE WITH ME

WHAT I WANT THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW US TO UNDERSTAND

A book cannot make this plan safely or specifically. An advocate can.

Emotional Flooding Checklist

Your flooding signature, and your tripwire

Mark everything that is yours. Then go back and put a star next to the **earliest** one — the sign that shows up before the others, while you can still do something. That one is your tripwire.

BODY

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Heat in the face or chest | ☐ Jaw or fists tightening |
| ☐ Leg bouncing | ☐ Pacing |
| ☐ Hollow feeling in the stomach | ☐ Needing to stand up |
| ☐ Going very still | ☐ Shallow breathing |

HEAD

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Narrow focus on one word they used | ☐ Rehearsing while they talk |
| ☐ Reaching for old evidence | ☐ The thought: this is who they really are |
| ☐ Going blank | ☐ Certainty that I am right |

MOUTH

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Talking faster | ☐ Getting much quieter |
| ☐ Sarcasm arriving | ☐ Saying always and never |
| ☐ Going completely silent | |

REACHING FOR

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| ☐ The door | ☐ The phone |
| ☐ A drink | ☐ The keys |
| ☐ The last thing I know will hurt them | |

MY TRIPWIRE IS

Tell your partner what your tripwire is — not so they can point it out mid-fight, which has never once helped, but so they know what they are looking at.

Flooding Threshold Inventory

Your number, and what lowers it

Your threshold is not fixed. It drops when you are tired, unwell, hungry, stressed at work, or in the weeks after something hard has happened. Some nights you start already rising.

MY USUAL RESTING PULSE

MY NUMBER DURING CONFLICT

HOW LONG I TAKE TO SETTLE

WHAT LOWERS MY THRESHOLD

SEVEN-DAY PULSE LOG

Two fingers on your neck or wrist. Count fifteen seconds, multiply by four. You will feel ridiculous. Do it anyway.

DAY	TIME	PULSE	WHAT WAS HAPPENING	MODE (STEADY / RISING / FIRING)

The Ceasefire Card

Sign it while you are calm. Cut it out.

Fill in one card each while you are calm, sign both, and cut them out. One in each wallet, one on the refrigerator.

PARTNER ONE

I call it by saying: "I'm calling a ceasefire. ____ minutes. I'm coming back."

You receive it by saying: "Okay. ____ minutes."

I return by saying: "I'm back. I said I would be."

MY TWO SOOTHING ACTIVITIES

DEFAULT MINUTES

During a ceasefire I will not: replay it · plan my comeback · text about it · leave the house

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

PARTNER TWO

I call it by saying: "I'm calling a ceasefire. ____ minutes. I'm coming back."

You receive it by saying: "Okay. ____ minutes."

I return by saying: "I'm back. I said I would be."

MY TWO SOOTHING ACTIVITIES

DEFAULT MINUTES

During a ceasefire I will not: replay it · plan my comeback · text about it · leave the house

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

Self-Soothing Menu

Pick two before you need them

Circle two before you ever need them. A flooded brain cannot choose.

BODY

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Walk around the block | ☐ Push-ups or stairs |
| ☐ Cold water on wrists and face | ☐ Stretch on the floor |

ATTENTION

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Fold laundry | ☐ Wash the dishes |
| ☐ Play three songs all the way through | ☐ Water the plants, feed the dog |

BREATH

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ In for four, out for eight, ten times | ☐ Hand on your chest, count breaths to twenty |
| ☐ Sit outside and name five things you can hear | ☐ Shower |

Not on this list: your phone, your car keys, a drink, and your mother.

MY TWO

The Scripts

Calling, receiving, returning

Print this and keep it where the fights happen. You are not improvising any of these sentences.

CALLING ONE

“I’m calling a ceasefire. Twenty minutes. I’m coming back.” Then stop talking. Not one more clause.

RECEIVING ONE

“Okay. Twenty minutes.” Two words and a number. Not “fine.” Not “we’re not done.”

RETURNING

“I’m back. I said I would be.” Then say nothing for a moment. The return is doing work all by itself.

IF YOU ARE NOT READY

“I’m back, and I’m still at an eight. Can I have another twenty?”

IF IT HAS TO WAIT UNTIL TOMORROW

“I’m back. I don’t think I can do this well tonight. Can we take it up at seven tomorrow?” A specific time. An unscheduled conversation is an abandoned conversation.

A ceasefire has a return. Avoidance does not. That is the whole test.

Conflict Temperature Scale — Calibration

In your words, in behaviours

Fill this in separately first, then compare. Behaviours only — things a stranger could observe from across the room. If you write a feeling word, replace it with what the feeling looks like.

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN OUR HOUSE
0–2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9–10	

OUR EXIT NUMBER

The number at which either of you can call a ceasefire and the other simply says okay. Almost every couple wants to set it at 8. Set it at 6.

OUR EXIT NUMBER IS

DATE AGREED

The version of you at an 8 is not qualified to decide whether you are at an 8.

Conflict Temperature Scale — Post This

Where the fights happen

Cut this out and post it. Refrigerator, closet door, back of a phone case. Not because you will consult it mid-fight — you will not — but because seeing it twenty times a day builds the number into how you think.

WHERE YOU ARE	WHAT YOU DO
0–3	Talk freely. This is where the hard conversations belong.
4–5	Slow down. Sit back down. One person speaks at a time. Say your number out loud.
6	Ceasefire. Either of you. No justification required, no follow-up sentence.
7+	Ceasefire, not optional. Above your exit number and still talking is gambling.

OUR SCALE

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

OUR EXIT NUMBER

Calling the Number

Two rules, and one of them is absolute

TWO RULES

One. You report your own number. You never assign your partner's. "I'm at a seven" is a report. "You're at a seven" is a diagnosis, and it will be received as one.

Two. Nobody argues with a number. The second the scale becomes something you can dispute, it stops being a tool and becomes another thing to fight about.

If you think the scale is being misused, that concern is real and it has a home: the Weekly Relationship Meeting, when you are both at a 1. Not in the moment.

PRACTISE

Say your number out loud once this week, during a live disagreement. Just the number. Nothing after it. Then write down what happened.

SAY IT WHEN IT DROPS, TOO

"I'm down to a three" is useful information, and it is a repair attempt.

The Horseman Tracker

Seven days. Your own tally only.

Seven days. Mark a tally each time you catch **yourself** — not your partner. Your count will go up over the week. That is not deterioration; it is your noticing improving.

DAY	CRITICISM	DEFENSIVENESS	CONTEMPT	STONEWALLING
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				
MY DOMINANT HORSEMAN			TOTAL FOR THE WEEK	

You may only name your own. Naming your partner's mid-fight is criticism with a research citation attached.

Antidote Drills

One a day, in your own words

One antidote, run deliberately, once a day, for a week. Write the line you will actually use — in your words, not mine.

CRITICISM → SOFT START-UP

Start with I and a behaviour. “I felt worried when the call didn’t come.”

DEFENSIVENESS → ACCEPT TEN PERCENT

Find the part that is true and say that part first. “You’re right, I did check out on that.”

CONTEMPT → SPOKEN APPRECIATION

One concrete thing they did today, said to their face, no qualifier attached.

STONEWALLING → THE CEASEFIRE

Announced, timed, with a guaranteed return. You do not have to stop needing space.

The Trigger Map

Event, meaning, emotion, behaviour

A trigger is not a thing that annoys you. It is a thing that produces a reaction out of proportion to what just happened — and that gap is the tell. Map five.

TRIGGER 1

EVENT	WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN	WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH	WHAT I THEN DO

TRIGGER 2

EVENT	WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN	WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH	WHAT I THEN DO

TRIGGER 3

EVENT	WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN	WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH	WHAT I THEN DO

TRIGGER 4

EVENT	WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN	WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH	WHAT I THEN DO

TRIGGER 5

EVENT	WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN	WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH	WHAT I THEN DO

Family-of-Origin Conflict Inventory

The rules you are still running

WHICH HOUSE DID YOU GROW UP IN?

- ☐ The explosion house — loud, fast, frightening
- ☐ The silent house — nobody named it, sometimes for days
- ☐ The eggshell house — one person's mood set the weather
- ☐ The 'we don't have problems' house — everything was fine

Most people are a blend, and some of you had two very different parents and learned two contradictory sets of rules.

FINISH THESE HONESTLY — FIRST THOUGHT, NOT BEST THOUGHT

When people I love are angry with me, it means...

If I raise a problem, what happens is...

When someone goes quiet, they are...

If I really said what I wanted...

Conflict in a marriage means the marriage is...

Conflict is not evidence of a bad marriage. Stable, happy couples argue plenty.

The Three Minutes

No examples from your marriage

Three minutes each, timed, one at a time. **No examples from your marriage.** The moment you say “like that time you—” you have stopped explaining yourself and started prosecuting them.

THE SHAPE

“In my house growing up, conflict looked like _____. What I learned that meant was _____. So now, when you _____, what I hear is _____. That’s not you. That’s the old circuit. But it’s what happens in me.”

MINE, WRITTEN OUT

The listener’s job is one thing only: listen, and say thank you. No fixing. No “well I only ask because.”

The Under-the-Anger Ladder

What your partner never sees

Take your most recent fight. Work down the rungs. The last line is the only one you read out loud.

1. WHAT I SHOWED – WHAT MY PARTNER ACTUALLY SAW

2. WHERE I FELT IT IN MY BODY, AND WHAT IT WANTED TO DO

3. WHAT WAS UNDERNEATH IT – ONE WORD

4. WHAT I ACTUALLY WANTED IN THAT MOMENT

5. THE TEN WORDS I COULD HAVE LED WITH

Real vulnerability makes no claim about the other person. If your feeling sentence contains a verdict about them, it isn't one.

The Feeling-Word Bank

Twenty-four words. Circle five.

Most people run a marriage on four feeling words. Circle five of these. They are yours for the next month.

HURT	AFRAID	SMALL	ALONE	OVERWHELMED
Dismissed	Anxious	Ashamed	Lonely	Swamped
Rejected	Uneasy	Embarrassed	Shut out	Exhausted
Let down	Worried	Not enough	Invisible	Stretched thin
Betrayed	Dreading	Foolish	Forgotten	Done

MY FIVE

WHERE I FEEL IT

Chest hot, wants to move toward → usually threat. Stomach dropping → fear or shame. Throat tight, eyes stinging → hurt. Heavy, wants to lie down → sadness or defeat. Face hot, wants to disappear → shame.

Story vs. Facts

What happened, and what you decided it meant

Write an account of the same recent fight, separately. Then go through your own account and sort every sentence. “He slammed the cabinet” is a fact. “He slammed the cabinet to punish me” is a story.

WHAT A STRANGER COULD HAVE OBSERVED	WHAT I DECIDED IT MEANT

THE SENTENCE

“When you did that, what happened in me was _____. I don’t know what you meant by it.”

Impact is yours. Intent is theirs. Both halves have to stay attached.

The Distortion Spotter

Seven days of catching your own

Seven days. Mark a tally each time you catch yourself. Do not use this on your partner — “that’s mind reading” mid-fight is a horseman with a footnote.

DISTORTION	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE	TALLY
Mind reading	You did that on purpose to make a point.	
Always / never	You always do this. You never think about me.	
Character attribution	Late equals disrespectful. Quiet equals uncaring.	
Discounting the good	He only did that because he felt guilty.	
Catastrophising	If this is how it is now, we’re not going to make it.	
The prosecution file	Producing evidence from 2019 in under two seconds.	

ONE REAL QUESTION I ASKED INSTEAD

Pursue / Withdraw Role Card

Your role, and the fear underneath it

Fill this in for yourself. Read them to each other, pursuer first.

MY ROLE

- ☐ I move toward — I raise it, I follow, I send the second message
- ☐ I move away — I go quiet, I give short answers, I leave the room
- ☐ It depends on the topic (say which)

WHAT I DO, IN ONE OR TWO WORDS

THE FEAR UNDERNEATH IT

WHAT I MOST WANT MY PARTNER TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT IT

Both roles are made of fear, and neither one is the problem. The pattern is the problem, and it requires exactly two people to run.

The Reversal Experiment

One week. Both halves at once.

One week. Both halves at the same time. The pursuer waits twenty minutes before following. The withdrawer returns in twenty minutes, on time, without being retrieved.

Her twenty minutes of not chasing is only survivable because his return is guaranteed. His twenty minutes of space is only available because she is not at the door.

DAY	WHAT I FELT THE PULL TO DO	WHAT I DID INSTEAD	HOW IT WENT
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

ONE TRUE SENTENCE ABOUT WHAT THAT WAS LIKE

The Cycle Map

One page, both handwritings, and a name at the top

One page. One pen, passed back and forth. Both of you at a 3 or below — say your numbers out loud before you start. Twenty minutes, timed. Use a fight that is finished, not tonight's.

You describe only your own moves. You may ask questions about your partner's boxes. You may not correct them.

THE TRIGGER — YOU SHARE THIS ONE

PARTNER ONE

2. MY MOVE

3. WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN

4. WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH

5. WHAT I MOST WANT

6. WHAT I DO TO GET IT

PARTNER TWO

2. MY MOVE

3. WHAT I MAKE IT MEAN

4. WHAT I FEEL UNDERNEATH

5. WHAT I MOST WANT

6. WHAT I DO TO GET IT

THE
CYCLE

WHAT WE ARE CALLING IT

Short, yours, and a little bit funny if you can manage it. Couples land on the Spin, the Freeze, the Wall, the Chase, Tuesday, the Slow Cooker. "The Nag" is not a name — it is a horseman.

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

The Three-Minute Listen

Seven days, both directions

Three minutes, once a day, both directions, on something low-stakes. Not about the relationship — that comes later.

THE LISTENER DOES FOUR THINGS

Slows down. Reflects the emotion, not the content. Pauses two seconds. Then says one sentence: **“That makes sense. Anything else?”**

DAY	SPEAKER	TOPIC	EMOTION I REFLECTED	THEIR NUMBER BEFORE / AFTER
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Guessing the feeling slightly wrong is often better than getting it right — the correction makes them say the true thing out loud.

The Complaint Converter

From what came out to what you meant

Write down three criticisms you have actually said out loud in the last month, in the words you used. Then convert each one.

WHAT I SAID	WHAT A STRANGER COULD HAVE OBSERVED THE VALUE UNDERNEATH IT	

THE SHAPE THAT WORKS

“I felt [feeling] when [specific behaviour, one instance]. What I care about is [value]. Would you be willing to [one specific ask]?”

MINE, WRITTEN OUT

Make the ask a behaviour, not an attitude. Nobody has ever successfully complied with “care more.”

The One-Sentence Ask

One sentence. One issue. One ask.

One sentence. One issue. One ask. Say it and then close your mouth — the silence after a clean complaint is doing an enormous amount of work.

ASK 1

I FELT

WHEN

WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO

ASK 2

I FELT

WHEN

WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO

ASK 3

I FELT

WHEN

WHAT I CARE ABOUT IS

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO

Make the first ask so modest that saying yes costs almost nothing. You are not solving the pattern tonight. You are getting one clean transaction.

The Ceasefire Conversation

Hold this in your hand the first few times

Print this and hold it in your hand the first few times. It feels artificial for about four attempts, and then it feels like the only sane way to have ever done this.

BEFORE YOU START — ALL FOUR, OR NOT TONIGHT

- ☐ Both under our exit number (say the numbers out loud)
- ☐ Twenty minutes, timed, one issue
- ☐ Sitting down, same room, phones elsewhere
- ☐ Somebody asked, and the other said yes or named a time

1 • SPEAKER (5 MIN) — ONE ISSUE, ONE FEELING, ONE NEED

Own experience only. No verdicts about character, motive, or history. If a sentence contains “you always,” start it over. Then stop early.

2 • LISTENER REFLECTS (3 MIN) — THIS IS THE GATE

“What I’m hearing is _____. And the feeling underneath it is _____. Did I get that?” Keep going until they say yes. Not until you think you understood — until they say so.

3 • LISTENER VALIDATES (2 MIN)

“That makes sense to me, given _____.” Not agreement. If you genuinely cannot: “I don’t fully understand it yet, but I can see it’s real for you.” No “but” after it.

4 • LISTENER RESPONDS (5 MIN)

Now your side, your context, your disagreement if you have one. You are not giving up your position. You are postponing it by ten minutes.

5 • ONE SMALL AGREEMENT (5 MIN)

Not a solution. One thing, small, specific, doable this week. Write it down — unwritten agreements evaporate and then become evidence of bad faith later.

Either of you may call a ceasefire at any point, without justification. When you come back, you resume where you left off. That exit is what makes the depth possible.

The Sorting Worksheet

Solvable, perpetual, gridlocked

List your top ten recurring conflicts and sort them independently, then compare. The disagreements about which pile something belongs in are the most interesting part.

#	THE CONFLICT	SOLVABLE	PERPETUAL	GRIDLOCKED
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

The tell: when you imagine it resolved and what you are actually imagining is your partner becoming a different person — that one is perpetual, and treating it as solvable is where contempt comes from.

The Dream Questions

What is being protected

Ask these about your most gridlocked issue, inside a Ceasefire Conversation, one person at a time. This is not dinner-table material.

What does your position on this mean to you?

Is there a story behind it — something in your history this connects to?

What would it cost you to give this up?

What is your ideal version, if nothing were in the way?

What is the nightmare version? What are you protecting against?

Is there a value underneath this that matters more than the specific thing?

The listener is not evaluating and not preparing a counter-position. You are finding out what your partner is protecting.

Temporary Compromise

Three months, then you revisit

For a perpetual problem. Three months, then you revisit. The time limit is what makes it possible — people can agree to almost anything for three months.

MY CORE NEED — WHAT I CANNOT GIVE UP

THEIR CORE NEED, IN MY WORDS

WHERE I HAVE ROOM

WHERE THEY HAVE ROOM

WHAT WE ARE TRYING, FOR THREE MONTHS

START DATE

REVIEW DATE

AGREED BY

If your core need is the entire position, you have not found the core yet.

The Influence Inventory

When did you last let it move you?

Five recent decisions. Be honest about the last column — agreeing and then making sure everyone knows what it cost you is not accepting influence.

THE DECISION	WHOSE VIEW PREVAILED	DID I GENUINELY LET IT MOVE ME?

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME I SAID ONE OF THESE AND MEANT IT?

“I hadn’t thought about it that way. Let’s do it your way.” · “You’re right and I was wrong about this.” · “I’m not fully convinced, but I trust you on it.”

The Scoreboard

What you are keeping, and what it costs

Write down three items from your scoreboard — real ones, the ones you would bring up in a fight. Read them to each other without discussion, defence, or correction. The listener says only “I hear that.”

1. WHAT I AM KEEPING

WHAT IT IS COSTING ME

2. WHAT I AM KEEPING

WHAT IT IS COSTING ME

3. WHAT I AM KEEPING

WHAT IT IS COSTING ME

THE ONE I AM RETIRING

Not that it was fair. That you are done collecting on it. You can do this unilaterally, tonight, without telling anyone.

DATE RETIRED

LOOK AT THIS AGAIN ON

Both of your scoreboards say you are ahead. They cannot both be right, and neither of you is lying — each of you has full records of what you gave and partial records of what you got.

The Repair Menu

Thirty attempts. Circle five you would actually do.

Circle five you could actually imagine yourself doing. Not the ones you admire — the ones you would do.

STOP THE ESCALATION

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ “Can we start over?” | ☐ “I’m getting it wrong. Let me try again.” |
| ☐ “That came out worse than I meant.” | ☐ “I need us to be on the same side.” |
| ☐ “Ceasefire, twenty minutes.” | ☐ “I’m at a seven.” |

CONCEDE SOMETHING

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ “You’re right about that part.” | ☐ “That’s fair.” |
| ☐ “I did do that.” | ☐ “I hadn’t thought about it that way.” |

SOFTEN

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ “I’m not the enemy here.” | ☐ “I’m scared, that’s what this is.” |
| ☐ “I don’t want to fight with you.” | ☐ “I miss you and we’re standing right here.” |

BODY

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ A hand on their arm | ☐ Sitting down when you had been standing |
| ☐ Coming into the room and not saying anything | ☐ A glass of water |
| ☐ Sitting on the same side | |

RIDICULOUS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ A stupid voice | ☐ Our private joke |
| ☐ A note | ☐ Something only we would find funny |

THREE MY PARTNER ALREADY DOES THAT I HAVE BEEN MISSING

Accepting a repair and keeping the complaint are entirely compatible. “I see you’re trying. I’m still upset, but I see it.”

The Apology Builder

Five components. Miss one and it does not work.

Pick one real incident from the last few months — not the biggest thing in your marriage. Build it on paper first. Real apologies take a few minutes to construct; fake ones are instant.

1. THE SPECIFIC BEHAVIOUR – THE THING, NOT THE CATEGORY

2. THE IMPACT, FROM INSIDE THEIR EXPERIENCE – AND NO EXPLANATION

3. READ IT BACK. IS THERE A “BUT” IN IT?

☐ No “but.” No “if.” No “you have to understand.” No explanation in the same breath.

4. WHAT I WILL DO DIFFERENTLY – SPECIFIC AND SMALL

5. WHAT I AM OFFERING RIGHT NOW

THE FOUR COUNTERFEITS – TICK ANY YOU HAVE PRODUCED THIS MONTH

- ☐ “I’m sorry you feel that way.”
- ☐ “I’m sorry, but...”
- ☐ “I’m sorry, I’m just a terrible husband/wife.”
- ☐ “I already apologised.”

If your apology ends with your partner comforting you, something has gone wrong. An apology does not obligate forgiveness.

The Aftermath Protocol

Thirty minutes, at least a day later

At least 24 hours after the incident. Both at a 3 or below, said out loud. Thirty minutes, timed. Start with something medium, not the biggest thing in your marriage.

THE RULE: you are processing the event, not relitigating the facts. Neither of you has a reliable record — you were both flooded. If either of you starts a sentence with “that’s not what happened,” the other says one word: “facts.”

STEP 1 • FEELINGS (5 MIN) — FEELINGS ONLY, NO STORY, NO BECAUSE

ME

THEM

STEP 2 • SUBJECTIVE REALITIES (8 MIN) — THEN REFLECT, THEN VALIDATE ONE PIECE

“So from where you were sitting, _____. I can see how it looked that way from there.” This is the step that heals.

MY EXPERIENCE

WHAT I HEARD IN THEIRS

STEP 3 • TRIGGERS AND HISTORY (7 MIN)

WHAT GOT ME, AND WHAT IT CONNECTED TO

WHAT GOT THEM

STEP 4 • OWNERSHIP (5 MIN) — YOUR OWN PART ONLY

If your ownership statement contains the word “you,” start over. Full ownership of a small share does more than partial ownership of a large one.

MY PART

THEIR PART, IN THEIR WORDS

STEP 5 • ONE PREVENTION AGREEMENT (5 MIN)

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

The “Not the Facts” Card

Put this on the table

Cut this out and put it on the table during the Aftermath.

**WE ARE PROCESSING THE EVENT,
NOT RELITIGATING THE FACTS.**

*If either of us starts a sentence with “that’s not what happened,”
the other says one word: FACTS. We both stop and restart the step.*

It is not a penalty. It is a reset.

WHERE IT BROKE DOWN, IF IT DID

If you end up in the facts three times, you are not ready for this incident. Pick a smaller one.

The Forgiveness Roadmap

Six stages, and an exit at every one

Six stages. Every one has a legitimate exit. “Not yet” is a real answer at every stage, and saying it out loud beats pretending.

STAGE 1 • NAME IT PRECISELY

Not “how you treated me.” The specific thing, and specifically what it cost.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

STAGE 2 • FEEL THE SIZE OF IT

Most people skip here, and premature forgiveness is what results. It comes apart within months.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

STAGE 3 • DECIDE WHETHER YOU WANT TO

Genuinely optional. You can hold something longer and still be doing good-faith work.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

STAGE 4 • GIVE UP THE RIGHT TO COLLECT

The actual decision, and smaller than the word sounds: I will not use this in an argument.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

STAGE 5 • LET THE FEELINGS CATCH UP

It comes back. Its return does not mean you failed at stage 4. You decline to collect, again.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

STAGE 6 • DECIDE ABOUT RECONCILIATION, SEPARATELY

Its own question, depending on things forgiveness does not.

☐ Done

☐ Not yet

WHAT I GET FROM CARRYING IT

Leverage · protection · a record · identity. Everyone gets something. Name yours honestly, not nobly.

The Trust Bank Ledger

Fourteen days. Your own ledger only.

Fourteen days. **Your own deposits and your own withdrawals only.** Your partner’s ledger is not your project.

One withdrawal costs roughly five deposits. A person can be making four good moves a day and still running a deficit if they are making one bad one.

DAY	DEPOSITS I MADE	#	WITHDRAWALS I MADE	#

MY RECURRING WITHDRAWAL IS

The Deposit Menu

Five a day

Five a day, deliberately, tracked. It sounds mechanical and it will feel mechanical. The mechanical version works anyway — your partner's nervous system is counting events, not sincerity.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ A text mid-day with no request attached | ☐ Doing the thing before being asked |
| ☐ “Thank you for handling that.” | ☐ Following through on something I said this morning |
| ☐ Ten seconds of actual eye contact when I walk in | ☐ Answering a bid instead of finishing my sentence |
| ☐ Saying the admiring thing out loud instead of thinking it | ☐ Coming back at twenty minutes when I said twenty minutes |
| ☐ Handling the thing they were dreading | ☐ Asking about the thing they told me about yesterday |
| ☐ Putting the phone face down | ☐ Saying what time I will be home, and being home then |

THE ONES PARTICULAR TO US

The Bid Tracker

Seven days of looking up

A bid is any small attempt to get connection. Most of them do not look like anything. Count them for a week — you will discover you are missing more than you think.

DAY	BIDS I NOTICED	TURNUED TOWARD	TURNUED AWAY	TURNUED AGAINST
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Turning away is the one that does the damage, and it is the one nobody feels guilty about. You were not being mean. You were reading something.

The Admiration Exercise

Three things, each with a memory

Three things you admire, each with one **specific memory**. “He’s a good father” is a category. “He sat on the floor outside her door for forty minutes” is a memory, and memories do something categories do not.

1. WHAT I ADMIRE

THE TIME I SAW IT

2. WHAT I ADMIRE

THE TIME I SAW IT

3. WHAT I ADMIRE

THE TIME I SAW IT

If you cannot produce three, go back further — before the hard years. That counts. You are not certifying that it happened last week. You are re-opening a file.

The Daily Connection Ritual

Six minutes

Six minutes a day, phones elsewhere. Under an hour a week, and it does more than the weekend away because it happens seventy times before the weekend away comes around.

WHEN	TWO MINUTES	OUR QUESTION
Parting	Learn one thing about their day before it happens	What's the one thing you're dreading today?
Reunion	Before the schedule, before the mail, before the kids	How was it? — and then actually listen
End of day	One question, one answer each	What was the best part of today?
OUR TIME	WHERE	STARTING

The Relationship Constitution

Five agreements, signed and dated

Five agreements. No more, to start — a document with twenty items is a document nobody follows. Specific, behavioural, and mutual. If an agreement only constrains one of you, it is not an agreement.

Test each one: **could a stranger tell whether we kept this?** If not, rewrite it until they could.

AGREEMENT 1

AGREEMENT 2

AGREEMENT 3

AGREEMENT 4

AGREEMENT 5

WHEN ONE GETS BROKEN

A broken agreement is a repair event, not a trial. Name it once, apologise if warranted, return to the agreement. No punishments — marriages that run as legal systems do not recover.

WE REVIEW THIS ON

DATE SIGNED

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

The Boundary Builder

What I will do, and when

A boundary is a statement about **your own** behaviour. A demand is a statement about someone else's. Only the first is enforceable by you — and you have to actually do it.

BOUNDARY 1

WHAT I WILL DO

WHEN — THE SPECIFIC TRIGGER

- ☐ Check: does this contain a consequence meant to punish? If so, take it out.
- ☐ Check: is this actually a demand wearing better clothes?

BOUNDARY 2

WHAT I WILL DO

WHEN — THE SPECIFIC TRIGGER

- ☐ Check: does this contain a consequence meant to punish? If so, take it out.
- ☐ Check: is this actually a demand wearing better clothes?

A boundary you announce and do not follow through on is worse than none — you have taught your partner your stated limits are decorative.

The Weekly Relationship Meeting

Fifty-two of these a year

Twenty to thirty minutes, same time every week, on the calendar like a dentist appointment. A ritual that depends on both of you feeling like it will last three weeks.

PART	MINUTES	WHAT HAPPENS
1. Appreciations	5	Two specific things each, from the past week. This goes first, always, and is not skipped when you are annoyed.
2. What worked	5	Where a ceasefire held, where a repair landed. You are building evidence.
3. One issue	10	One. A Ceasefire Conversation, properly run. If there is not one, skip to part four.
4. Logistics and agreements	5	Calendar, money, kids — and which agreements got kept or dropped.
5. One thing each	5	“One thing I could use from you this week is _____.”

OUR DAY AND TIME

WHERE

NOTES

The Monthly Checkup

Six questions, on paper, before you talk

Once a month, twenty minutes. Both of you answer on paper **before** you discuss anything.

1. How connected did I feel this month, 0 to 10?

2. What was our worst moment, and how long did it take us to come back?

3. What is one thing my partner did that I should have said something about?

4. What is one thing I did that I owe an acknowledgement for?

5. Which stage of the method do we need to go back to?

6. What is one thing I want more of next month?

Question five is the one that keeps this from becoming a book you read once. Returning to an earlier stage is not regression. It is using the method correctly.

The Relationship Vision

What we want this to be

One page, both of you. Not what you want to avoid — what you want it to be. Most couples in chronic conflict have not done this in a decade, because when you are fighting weekly the future is a threat, not a plan.

IN FIVE YEARS

WHERE ARE WE, AND WHAT DOES AN ORDINARY WEDNESDAY EVENING LOOK LIKE?

WHAT ARE WE KNOWN FOR, BETWEEN THE TWO OF US?

WHAT DO THE CHILDREN SAY ABOUT US WHEN THEY ARE FORTY?

WRITTEN

READ ALOUD TO EACH OTHER ON

Writing it down says out loud that you both expect there to be one.

The Bad-Fight Agreement

Sign this now, while you are calm

Sign this now, while you are calm. Somewhere in the next few months you are going to have a bad fight with the old shape, and everything in the book will be sitting on the shelf unused. The danger is not the fight. It is the conclusion.

- We repair within 24 hours, even though we will not want to.
- We run the Aftermath on it within the week.
- Neither of us gets to say “this isn’t working” for seven days.

A ceasefire that needs renewing is not a failed ceasefire.

SIGNED / DATE

SIGNED / DATE

OUR REPAIR LATENCY, THEN AND NOW

AT THE START (HOURS)

TODAY (HOURS)

Go back to Chapter 1 and find your original number. That difference is what you built.