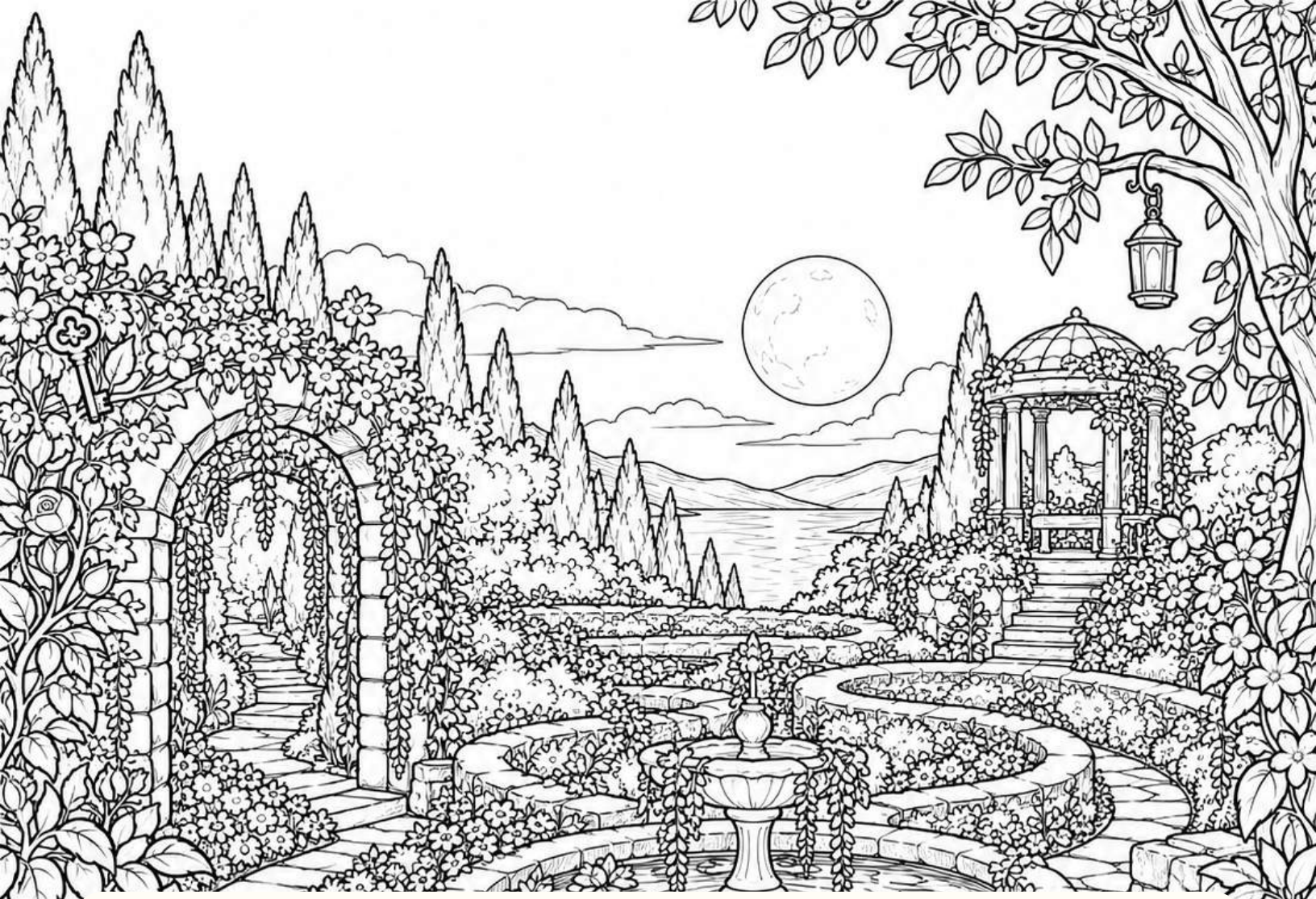


Our Work And Life Our Team Couples Workbook

A gentle way to use this resource

Begin anywhere. Read one section at a time, choose only what fits, and skip, adapt, pause, or stop as needed. Try one practice before adding another. Reflection is an invitation, not a requirement.

Created by Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | My Reflective Collective

Educational wellness material. Not therapy, diagnosis, medical advice, crisis care, or a substitute for individualized professional support.



Before you begin

Take a moment to notice where you are starting. There is no correct answer and no requirement to complete every prompt.

What is most present?	What would feel supportive?
[ ] Tension or restlessness [ ] Heavy emotion [ ] Numbness or shutdown [ ] Racing thoughts [ ] Low energy [ ] Something else: _____	[ ] More steadiness [ ] More clarity [ ] Comfort or rest [ ] A practical next step [ ] Connection or support [ ] Something else: _____

A simple rhythm

1. Notice	Name what is happening without judging it.
2. Choose	Select one prompt or practice that fits your energy and circumstances.
3. Try	Use it gently for a clear amount of time. Smaller still counts.
4. Check	Notice whether you feel even slightly steadier, clearer, safer, or less alone.

Low-energy option

Read only the headings. Circle or note one sentence that feels useful. Then choose one action that takes five minutes or less. You can return later; stopping is allowed.

A trauma-informed educational wellness worksheet for reflection, choice, self-care, and support.

Use this at your own pace. Skip, adapt, pause, or stop. You are allowed to choose what fits your body, culture, privacy, energy, safety, access needs, and real-life limits today.

A printable reflection and practice resource

OUR WORK & LIFE, OUR TEAM

A Couples Playbook for Work-Life Balance, Burnout & Employment Transitions A shared aim Work affects time, money, identity, energy, household capacity, health, and connection. The goal is not perfect balance every day. It is a responsive system in which both people's labor, rest, dignity, goals, and changing capacity matter.

Includes a dedicated job-search and employment-transition edition for unemployment, re-entry, career changes, layoffs, underemployment, education, disability, and uncertain seasons.

NOTICE - VALIDATE - REBALANCE - RECONNECT

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PART FOUNDATION

Work Is More Than a Job

Paid work is only one form of labor. Caregiving, household management, education, recovery, disability management, emotional labor, community work, and job searching also require time and energy.

PERSON-CENTERED Employment status, income, productivity, and job title do not determine human PRINCIPLE worth. Each person is the expert on their values, capacity, access needs, and definition of a meaningful life.

Labor currently present in our lives

-] Paid employment [ ] Job searching
-] School or training [ ] Childcare
-] Elder or family care [ ] Household management
-] Health/disability care [ ] Emotional labor
-] Transportation/admin [ ] Volunteer/community work
-] Recovery and rest [ ] Other invisible labor

Work means more than income to me because:

A form of my labor I want recognized is:

A strength I bring during demanding seasons:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

Choice first: Either person may write privately, pass, ask for a different question, or pause. Sharing is invited - never owed.

1. Settle: If comfortable, feel your feet or the chair supporting you. Let your eyes

orient to the room. Take a natural or slower breath. Notice emotion, body sensations, energy, and any urge to protect yourself.

2. Self-reflection: What belief about worth, productivity, or success am I

carrying?

3. Together: Take turns sharing without comparing contributions. Reflect the

value and effort you heard.

4. Reconnect: Each person may name one appreciation, one need, and one small

request. "Not yet" is a valid response; agree on what happens next.

Supportive practice: Validate effort and impact without romanticizing overwork or requiring productivity as proof of worth.

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PART 1

Our Work & Family Stories

Early experiences can shape expectations about earning, caregiving, ambition, rest, gender roles, security, and sacrifice.

Growing up, work and success were talked about as:

I learned that the "responsible" partner should:

Rest was treated as:

A family or cultural value I want to keep:

An expectation I want to question:

My hopes about work and partnership are:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Which expectation feels chosen, and which feels inherited or

required?

3. Together: Each person shares one value they want honored. Ask curious

questions rather than debating whose upbringing was right. next.

Supportive practice: Culture and family context deserve respect; couples can preserve meaningful values while revising roles that no longer fit.

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PART 2

Our Current Work-Life Reality

Balance begins with an honest picture of time, energy, predictability, commute, caregiving, and recovery needs.

Current load check

-] Long or unpredictable hours [ ] Commute burden

-] Night/weekend work [ ] Emotional labor at work

-] Physical demands [ ] Remote-work interruptions

-] Job insecurity [ ] School/training

-] Caregiving [ ] Chronic illness/disability

-] Financial strain [ ] Little recovery time

My typical workday takes this much from my energy:

The part of my week that feels least sustainable:

What my partner may not see about my workload:

One existing support or privilege we can use:

CAPACITY IS Two people can spend the same number of hours working and have different CONTEXTUAL remaining capacity because demands, health, sensory load, discrimination, autonomy, sleep, and support differ.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What is my body telling me about the pace I am keeping?

3. Together: Compare capacity without competing. Complete: "I believe you

when you say ___ is taking a lot from you." next.

Supportive practice: Fairness is better informed by impact and available capacity than hours alone.

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PART 3

Boundaries Between Work & Home

Boundaries are practices that protect attention, recovery, relationships, and health; they are not punishments.

Possible boundaries

-] Defined stop time [ ] No-work meal

-] Phone/email cutoff [ ] Transition ritual

-] Closed-door focus time [ ] Shared interruption rules

-] Protected sleep [ ] Limited overtime

-] No work talk during connection time [ ] Planned decompression

-] Vacation actually off [ ] Emergency exceptions defined

A work boundary I need:

A home boundary that helps me focus:

How I will signal that I am transitioning:

What counts as a true work emergency:

TRANSITION Try changing clothes, washing hands, walking, sitting quietly, music, stretching, or a

RITUALS 10-minute buffer. Ask: "Do you have capacity to connect now, or do you need a transition first?"

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Do I need closeness, quiet, movement, food, or practical help

after work?

3. Together: Each person describes their ideal first 20 minutes at home. Design a

sequence that protects both needs. next.

Supportive practice: A decompression need is valid; pair it with a reliable reconnection time so space does not become abandonment.

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PART 4

Unequal Schedules, Income & Power

Differences in earnings or hours do not create greater authority, ownership, entitlement, or freedom from shared responsibility.

Topics to discuss openly

-] Access to money [ ] Decision-making power

-] Personal spending [ ] Benefits/insurance

-] Career sacrifices [ ] Relocation

-] Whose work is prioritized [ ] Unpaid labor

-] Leisure time [ ] Retirement impact

-] Financial dependence [ ] Emergency access

A power imbalance I worry about is:

What fairness would look like in decisions:

How unpaid labor will be recognized:

How both partners retain dignity and reasonable autonomy:

IMPORTANT Financial control, withholding access to necessities, sabotaging employment, forced debt, threats, monitoring, or preventing a partner from working may be forms of abuse. A joint workbook is not a substitute for individualized safety support.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Can both of us disagree, access essentials, and make choices

without fear or retaliation?

3. Together: Name one way decision-making can become more transparent and

shared. If fear is present, do not require joint disclosure. next.

Supportive practice: Equality of dignity is not dependent on equality of income.

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PART 5

Burnout, Stress & Compassion Fatigue

Burnout can include exhaustion, cynicism, reduced effectiveness, irritability, numbness, sleep disruption, and loss of meaning. It is not a moral failure.

Signs we notice

-] Dreading work [ ] Short temper
-] Emotional numbness [ ] Trouble sleeping
-] Physical tension/pain [ ] Frequent illness
-] Withdrawal [ ] Loss of pleasure
-] Difficulty concentrating [ ] Overworking harder
-] Feeling trapped [ ] Using substances to cope

My early warning signs:

What I tend to need but struggle to request:

What support helps - and what feels like pressure:

Recovery menu

-] Sleep protection [ ] Medical/mental health support
-] Workload discussion [ ] Time off
-] Sensory rest [ ] Movement
-] Peer support [ ] Reduced standards at home
-] Nutrition/hydration [ ] Pleasure without productivity

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Am I depleted, disconnected, distressed, or in danger?

3. Together: Ask: "Would you like comfort, practical help, quiet companionship,

advocacy, or space?" next.

Supportive practice: Persistent or severe symptoms deserve professional assessment. Partners can support; they cannot be each other's sole treatment plan.

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PART 6

Rebalancing Home During Heavy Work

Seasons

Temporary imbalance can be fair when it is named, consented to, supported, and revisited.

Seasonal rebalancing plan

The demanding season and expected duration:

What must continue:

What can be simplified, outsourced, paused, or lowered:

What the higher-capacity partner can realistically carry:

How the overloaded partner will still contribute or show care:

Our review date:

AVOID THE Add a review date. Name limits. Protect both partners' sleep and essential needs. "TEMPORARY" Appreciation matters, but it does not replace consent, rest, or renegotiation.

TRAP

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What am I freely offering, and what am I beginning to resent?

3. Together: Each person names a limit and a form of support they can genuinely

offer. Record the next review date. next.

Supportive practice: Care should not require one partner to disappear. Reduce demands before repeatedly exceeding capacity.

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PART 7

Rest, Leisure & Connection Are Real Needs

Rest supports health and functioning. Leisure does not have to be earned by reaching exhaustion.

Our current access

-] Each has protected alone time [ ] Each has social time

-] Both can rest without guilt [ ] Leisure is not distributed by income

-] Caregiving breaks are planned [ ] Connection time is protected

-] Sleep is treated as essential [ ] Fun fits our budget/capacity

Rest feels difficult for me because:

The kind of rest I actually need:

A low-cost way I restore myself:

A form of connection that does not feel like another task:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What guilt, fear, or resentment appears when either of us rests?

3. Together: Choose one individual rest block and one shared connection block

for this week. next.

Supportive practice: Equal leisure may be a clearer fairness measure than equal chores when paid and unpaid demands differ.

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PART 8

Career Dreams, Sacrifices & Decisions

Career choices affect both partners while each person retains agency over their own life and identity.

A career hope I want you to understand:

What I fear I may have to sacrifice:

What support would feel encouraging rather than controlling:

A sacrifice my partner has made that I recognize:

Decision factors

-] Income/benefits [ ] Meaning/values

-] Hours/commute [ ] Location

-] Health/accessibility [ ] Caregiving

-] Training cost [ ] Risk/security

-] Growth [ ] Relationship impact

-] Community/support [ ] Recovery time COLLABORATIVE Identify shared impacts, personal non-negotiables, unknowns, and reversible DECISION experiments. Avoid using guilt, money, or urgency to force agreement.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What part of this decision belongs to me, to my partner, and to

us together?

3. Together: Reflect each person's dream and fear before discussing logistics.

next.

Supportive practice: Supporting a partner's growth does not require agreeing to every cost; boundaries and aspirations can both be real.

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PART JOB SEARCH

Employment Transition: Worth, Loss &

Identity

Job loss, rejection, underemployment, re-entry, disability, graduation, or career change can affect safety, identity, confidence, routine, and belonging.

What I may be experiencing

-] Grief [ ] Shame

-] Relief [ ] Fear

-] Anger [ ] Embarrassment

-] Loss of routine [ ] Isolation

-] Hope [ ] Decision fatigue

-] Rejection sensitivity [ ] Pressure to prove myself

What this transition means to me:

The hardest part to explain:

A strength or value that remains true regardless of employment:

How I want my partner to talk with me about the search:

VALIDATION "This is a difficult season; it is not your identity." "Rejection can hurt even when it is not a measure of ability." "I see the effort that applications, networking, preparation, and waiting require."

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What feeling needs company before we make a plan?

3. Together: The job seeker chooses: listening, encouragement, brainstorming,

practical help, celebration, or space. next.

Supportive practice: Do not turn every interaction into a progress report. Preserve parts of the relationship unrelated to employment.

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PART JOB SEARCH

A Sustainable Job-Search System

Job searching is work, but endless searching can increase exhaustion and reduce effectiveness.

My manageable search rhythm

Days/times I will search or apply:

A realistic weekly application or outreach range:

Tasks I will rotate:

-] Search roles [ ] Tailor resume

-] Write cover letters [ ] Network

-] Practice interviews [ ] Follow up

-] Learn/build portfolio [ ] Track applications

How I will stop for the day:

Recovery or rewarding activity afterward:

Accessibility tools or accommodations I may need:

SMALLER STEPS Open the document. Save one role. Edit one paragraph. Send one message. Practice one answer. Progress can be measured by actions within your control, not only offers.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Is today a search day, preparation day, recovery day, or

support day?

3. Together: Agree on when job-search talk is welcome. The partner asks before

reviewing materials or offering leads. next.

Supportive practice: Structure can protect energy; it should not become surveillance or a daily test of worth.

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PART JOB SEARCH

Partner Support Without Managing

Support is collaborative. Taking over can communicate doubt, create a parent-child dynamic, or increase shame.

Support menu - job seeker chooses

-] Listen without fixing [ ] Review a document

-] Practice an interview [ ] Help identify strengths

-] Share a lead with permission [ ] Protect focused time

-] Take one household task [ ] Celebrate an application

-] Plan a no-search evening [ ] Help research resources

Helpful support looks like:

Support that feels like pressure or monitoring:

How often we will check in about progress:

What information remains private unless I choose to share:

Partner reflection

My anxiety about this transition is:

How I can manage my anxiety without placing it entirely on my partner:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Am I supporting, rescuing, supervising, avoiding, or

pressuring?

3. Together: Use: "Would support be helpful? Here are two things I can offer. You

may say no." next.

Supportive practice: The job seeker retains ownership. The supporting partner is also allowed to name real financial or capacity needs respectfully.

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PART JOB SEARCH

Rejection, Interviews & Recovery

Applications and interviews can activate shame, past exclusion, trauma, or fear about survival.

Before an interview

-] Review strengths [ ] Prepare examples

-] Plan clothes/technology [ ] Practice grounding

-] Arrange privacy/transport [ ] Prepare questions

-] Plan accommodation request [ ] Choose post-interview support

A truthful strength statement:

What I want to remember if anxiety rises:

After rejection, the story my mind tells is:

A more compassionate and accurate response:

AFTER A "NO" Name the disappointment. Separate outcome from identity. Limit rumination time.

Record any useful learning. Return to food, sleep, movement, connection, or another stabilizing routine before deciding what the rejection means.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What hurts about this outcome, and what remains outside my

control?

3. Together: The listener validates first. Ask before offering feedback or

searching for the "lesson." next.

Supportive practice: Bias, labor-market conditions, timing, fit, and chance affect outcomes. Compassion and strategy can coexist.

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PART JOB SEARCH

Practical Transition Plan

Create enough structure for security without turning uncertainty into blame.

Our immediate financial or benefits priorities:

Resources or professionals we may contact:

-] Unemployment benefits [ ] Health coverage

-] Food/housing support [ ] Career center

-] Vocational rehabilitation [ ] Disability accommodations

-] Training grants [ ] Legal/worker resources

-] Community network [ ] Mental health support

Expenses we can pause or adjust:

Tasks the job seeker will own:

Tasks the partner will own:

Our next review date:

SCOPE NOTE Eligibility and rights vary by location and circumstance. Use qualified local employment, benefits, legal, disability, or financial resources for decisions.

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Which concern is urgent, which is important, and which can

wait?

3. Together: Choose no more than three next actions. Assign ownership and a

date without moralizing. next.

Supportive practice: Concrete planning can reduce uncertainty; it should not erase grief, rest, or each person's voice.

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PART 9

Our Weekly Work-Life Huddle

Keep this brief, predictable, and separate from spontaneous criticism.

What is coming up at work, home, school, or in the search?

_____
_____ Who has less capacity this week? _____
_____ What must happen?
_____
_____ What can be simplified or wait? _____
_____

What support is requested - not assumed?

_____
_____ When will each person rest?
_____
_____ When will we connect?
_____
_____ What effort or care did I notice? _____
_____

Capacity rating

-] Green - enough capacity [ ] Yellow - stretched

-] Orange - near limit [ ] Red - urgent support/rest needed

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: What do I need my partner to understand about this week?

3. Together: Reflect first, plan second. End with one clear agreement and one appreciation. next.

Supportive practice: The huddle coordinates care; it is not a performance review.

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PART 10

Our Two-Week Experiment

Choose one change small enough to learn from.

_____

_____

-] Work cutoff time [ ] Transition ritual

-] Protected job-search block [ ] No-search evening

-] Fair-leisure plan [ ] Weekly huddle

-] Reduced household standard [ ] Ask before advice

-] One career-support action [ ] One connection ritual

We will try:

What we hope it supports:

Likely barrier:

Backup plan:

How we will measure usefulness:

After two weeks

-] Less tension [ ] More energy

-] Clearer expectations [ ] More connection

-] Better follow-through [ ] More dignity/choice Keep, change, or release it - and why?

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Are we measuring learning or demanding perfection?

3. Together: Each person names one effort they noticed and one adjustment they request. next.

Supportive practice: A system can fail without either person being a failure.

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PART 11

Our Work & Life Team Agreement

A flexible agreement for changing seasons of employment, caregiving, health, ambition, and rest.

-] Worth is not measured by income. [ ] Paid and unpaid labor both count.

-] Neither income nor job status grants control. [ ] We will discuss capacity without competition.

-] We will protect reasonable rest for both. [ ] We will ask before advising.

-] We will review temporary imbalances. [ ] We will seek outside help when needed.

What fairness means in this season:

How we will discuss work or job searching respectfully:

Our non-negotiable health, safety, or rest needs:

How often we will review this agreement:

THERAPEUTIC PAUSE & PARTNER CHECK-IN

2. Self-reflection: Does this plan protect both dignity and practical security?

3. Together: Read the agreement aloud. Each person may revise, pass, or

request professional support before signing. next.

Supportive practice: A shared plan should increase clarity and agency, not pressure or surveillance.

Partner: _____ Date: _____

Partner: _____ Date: _____

Educational-wellness disclaimer

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SAFETY, PRIVACY & EDUCATIONAL USE

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If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency: Call 911 in the United States or use your local emergency number. For U.S. suicide or mental-health crisis support, call or text 988. For relationship-safety support, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233, text START to 88788, or visit TheHotline.org from a safer device when possible.

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If someone may monitor your device, accounts, internet connection, location, downloads, or browser activity, consider using a safer device and a trusted network. Private browsing may reduce locally saved history but does not make activity invisible. Clearing history can also be noticed. A website Quick Exit button changes the page; it cannot erase browser,

download, router, account, employer, school, carrier, or device records. Choose only steps that feel safer in your situation.

Do not store identifying or safety-sensitive answers where another person may find them.

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It does not replace care from a licensed clinician, healthcare professional, attorney, trained advocate, emergency service, or other qualified professional. Laws, court procedures, services, and risks vary by location and circumstance.

Choice, pacing, and inclusion You may skip, change, discuss, dictate, draw, pause, or stop any activity. No exercise can determine what you experienced, diagnose a condition, prove a legal claim, guarantee safety, or tell you whether to stay, leave, report, reconcile, forgive, or pursue court action. Adapt language and activities for culture, identity, disability, neurotype, age, literacy, sensory needs, and personal preference. Automatic translation can make mistakes; confirm legal, medical, emergency, and safety-critical wording with a qualified person.

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EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE - NOT THERAPY OR INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

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Supportive practices and reminders

Trauma-informed choice

You are in charge of pace, privacy, and participation. Keep your eyes open if that feels safer. Change the words, position, movement, or environment. Skip any prompt that increases distress. You never have to describe a traumatic experience to benefit from grounding or reflection.

A one-minute mindfulness pause

Notice one point of support beneath you. Look around and name three neutral things you see. Notice one sound and one body sensation without trying to change either. Ask, 'What would support me in the next few minutes?' Choose the smallest workable response.

Believable affirmations

Choose language your mind can accept. Try: 'I can take one step at a time.' 'My needs and boundaries matter.' 'I am allowed to pause.' 'I can ask for support.' 'This moment is difficult, and it will not always feel exactly like this.' Edit any statement until it feels honest and respectful.

Practical tips

Pair reflection with water, food, movement, rest, medication as prescribed, or contact with a safe person when needed. Save the most helpful page where it is easy to find. Revisit the resource when you are relatively steady so the choices feel familiar during harder moments.

When more support is appropriate

A worksheet cannot provide emergency care, diagnosis, or individualized treatment. Consider a qualified health or mental-health professional when distress is intense, persistent, worsening, affecting daily functioning, or connected with safety concerns. In immediate danger, contact local emergency services or a crisis service available in your country.

Integrate and choose your next step

Pause after reading. More information is not always more helpful; the goal is to leave with one choice you can actually use.

What stood out?

_____

_____

What is one kind, realistic next step?

_____

_____

What support, boundary, or adaptation would help?

_____

_____

If this did not help

You did not fail. Try making the step smaller, changing from a thinking practice to a body or sensory practice, checking basic needs, or involving a safe person. Strong, persistent, or worsening distress may need professional or crisis support beyond a worksheet.