WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE IS STRUGGLING

I Love You. I Need a Life, Too.

Practical steps when someone you love is struggling.



BELLE MOREY

Progress is Progress LLC / Mile or a Millimeter

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An adult family-support workbook

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Progress is Progress LLC

A few important details

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What this book offers

Original educational explanations, fictional examples, scripts, and handwriting activities. This is not diagnosis, treatment, legal advice, a safety assessment, or emergency care. It does not replace advice tailored to your circumstances.

About the images and examples

Names and scenarios are fictional. Photographs are AI-generated illustrations and do not identify clients or document real events. No personal outcome, endorsement, or professional credential is implied.

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There is room for you here

You may be the one everyone calls

The person who answers, organizes, drives, pays, translates, or keeps the day moving. You may also be tired of hearing that you simply need better boundaries, as if your life has no responsibilities or complications.

We are going to get specific

This book is for adults affected by a loved one's substance use or mental health struggles. It makes room for partners, parents of adults, siblings, friends, and caregivers. When children are involved, adults keep responsibility for care.

You do not have to make one enormous decision

You can start with a ride, a bill, a conversation, or one protected hour. You may love someone, feel angry, hope for change, and need rest at the same time. You do not need to tidy those feelings before using the next page.

Progress is the way we work

Progress may be a clearer question, a more honest offer, a safer plan, or a page you return to after a difficult week. There is no requirement to be perfectly calm, permanently certain, or finished.

Use the book like a workbench

Read, then try

Each chapter has an everyday situation, a short explanation, and a completed example. Then you get space to work on one situation of your own. Fictional examples show possibilities, not instructions for every family.

Keep one problem on the page

Use a recent request or decision. You can use initials, skip details, dictate answers, or work with a trusted support person. The activities are designed for handwriting; this edition has no fillable PDF fields.

Try, notice, adjust

A follow-up page helps you record what happened. A complicated result is information. You can revise your plan without deciding that the attempt was pointless.

Go in an order that fits

Start with the safety page. After that, read straight through or use the contents to find the issue you have today. You can stop, skip a question, or return later. Do not complete joint activities with someone who is using fear or coercion against you.

Protect your privacy

Consider who can see a printed book, shared device, saved file, or account. If recording information could increase risk, leave the page blank and seek support in a safer way.

Safety comes before the worksheet

When help cannot wait

For a medical emergency, immediate danger, or suspected overdose in the United States, call 911. Do not delay urgent help to finish a conversation, set a limit, or complete an activity.

When a conversation could increase danger

If a person threatens, stalks, controls money or movement, or retaliates when you disagree, this book's scripts may not be safe to use. Confidential individual safety planning can help you explore options. You do not need to confront the person or announce that you are seeking support. [S3]

When someone depends on you

Children and dependent adults still need essential care. Do not use a boundary to withdraw necessary supervision, food, medication access, or other required support. Seek qualified help about care duties, parenting arrangements, housing rights, and obligations.

When distress needs more support

For suicidal crisis or emotional distress in the United States, call or text 988. Use the resource pages for support options. This book is not a crisis plan or a substitute for professional assessment.

You can pause

You do not have to write a detailed account of harm. If a page leaves you overwhelmed, stop and choose something grounding or supportive that works for you. Outside help is a valid next step.

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Before you begin

No score and no diagnosis. Notice what brought you here. You can answer briefly and keep identifying details out.

01 The situation taking up the most space in my life right now

02 What I hope will become clearer through this book

03 One essential responsibility my plans must protect

04 What a small, useful change would look like for me

Who can support you?

Support can come from people, services, community, or practical assistance. Ask about availability rather than assuming someone can help.

01 Someone I can speak honestly with, and how I can reach them safely

02 Practical help I need: care, transport, food, housing, access, or another need

03 A professional or service I could ask about options

04 If the first person is unavailable, my next contact or step

What this is costing you

You can name the cost without putting your love on trial.

You know the sound of your phone vibrating before you know what you need for breakfast. You have a backup plan for their backup plan. When someone asks how you are, you explain how they are doing. Somewhere in there, your own life gets reduced to whatever is left. This chapter begins with noticing. You do not have to decide the future of a relationship today. Start by making room for an honest description of the present.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The appointment she kept moving

Robin has rescheduled her own dental appointment twice to drive her adult brother to appointments. This morning he cancels again. She says it is fine, then spends lunch snapping at a coworker. Robin is not angry that her brother needs care. She is exhausted by being the only person expected to rearrange everything. She has begun treating every request as urgent because deciding otherwise feels disloyal. Tonight, she writes down the appointments, wages, and rest she has been giving up. The list does not tell her to stop caring. It gives her something specific to discuss: which rides she can offer, how much notice she needs, and who else might help.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

The cost can be quiet

Notice the trade

An offer has a cost even when no money changes hands. A late call may cost sleep. An unplanned ride may cost wages. Repeatedly canceling a walk may cost the one hour when you feel like yourself. Name the actual exchange rather than deciding whether you are a good enough relative.

Separate willingness from capacity

You may want to help and still have no workable way to do it. Capacity includes disability, work hours, money, transportation, care for children, and the support available to you. It changes. An offer you managed last month may be too much this month.

Keep the description specific

Try: I missed two appointments this month. Avoid: You destroy everything. A specific description gives you a place to act. It also lets you recognize the support you still want to give. This is a practical inventory, not a scorecard to present during an argument.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A completed cost check

What happened
I agreed to a 10 p.m. ride before checking my work start time.

What I gave up
Sleep before a 6 a.m. shift; I was too tired to drive comfortably.

What I can actually offer
A ride Saturday afternoon, arranged the day before.

What needs another plan
Weeknight transport. I can help look for options once; I cannot promise an option exists.

A smaller next step
I will check my calendar before answering the next non-emergency request.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

Where is your life getting squeezed?

Choose one recent week. Use rough descriptions rather than perfect totals. You can keep this private.

01 Time or sleep I gave up, and the request connected to it

02 Money, work, or appointments affected

03 Something I still want to offer because it fits my values

04 One cost I need to reduce first

Words for a pause

Before an automatic yes
“I need to check my day. I can answer by four.”

When your capacity changed
“I could do that last month. I cannot keep doing it this month.”

When you need a smaller offer
“I can help with this part for twenty minutes.”

When a request is not workable
“I cannot make that trip today. We need another plan.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

Urgent, important, or uncomfortable?

A request can feel urgent because somebody is upset. First check for immediate danger, medical needs, and dependent-care responsibilities. Use emergency help when needed; do not delay it to finish this page.

01 What is happening, using only what I know?

02 Is someone unsafe, without necessary care, or in need of urgent medical help?

03 If this can wait, when can I realistically respond?

04 What feeling makes me want to answer before checking?

A second situation: the late call

Your sister calls late most nights. You want to stay connected, but you are falling asleep at work. She says you are the only person who understands. There is no immediate emergency in this example. What kind of contact could you sustain? What would need a separate crisis plan?

01 One specific cost of the current pattern

02 A contact plan that fits my actual schedule

03 A sentence that is kind and clear

Protect one small piece

Pick a modest change you can make safely. You do not need to overhaul every relationship at once.

01 The request or pattern I will pause before answering

02 The time, appointment, or activity I am protecting

03 The words I will use, and when

04 Who can help me make this possible?

What happened when you paused?

Complete this after a real attempt. If you did not try it, record what made it difficult. That is useful information.

01 What I said or did

02 What happened next, including anything I did not expect

03 What felt easier or harder than I expected

04 One adjustment for next time

When a pause is not available

Some responsibilities cannot simply be declined. A child needs supervision. A dependent adult may need essential care. A work arrangement may have formal requirements. Your next step may be asking for a care assessment, backup coverage, an accommodation, or advice about your duties. When another person retaliates or controls your access to money or transport, a polished script is not the whole answer. Consider confidential safety support before announcing a change.

01 A responsibility or safety issue my plan must account for

02 A person or service I can ask about backup or options

03 The smallest change that remains possible

Notice what is different

A pause before yes is progress. You are allowed to find out whether an offer fits.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 One cost I can now name clearly

02 A request I checked instead of answering automatically

03 One part of my life I want to keep on the calendar

04 My next small step

What belongs to whom

Responsibility gets clearer when you stop calling everything yours.

You can offer a ride. You cannot make another adult use the appointment. You can speak honestly. You cannot choose their reaction. You may also have real duties that do belong to you: caring for a child, following an agreed care plan, or meeting a formal responsibility. The point is to sort these carefully. Putting every problem in somebody else's column is no more useful than putting every problem in yours.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

A calendar is not a guarantee

Andre helps his adult daughter schedule a treatment appointment. He takes a morning off and offers a ride. She decides not to go. Andre spends the afternoon trying to find a sentence that would have made her agree. Later he separates what he did from what he hoped would happen. His offer was real. Her decision was not his to make. They also share a lease, so the unpaid rent still requires a practical conversation and advice about their obligations. Sorting responsibility does not erase shared problems. It helps Andre stop using his daughter's choices as the only measure of whether he has done enough.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Use three working categories

My actions

What I say, what I offer, how I use my own time and resources, and how I seek support. These choices may still be constrained by safety, disability, money, or formal duties.

Their actions

Another adult's choices about participation, honesty, appointments, and behavior. Illness can affect functioning and the support someone needs. It does not give you the power to control their actions, and it does not excuse harm.

Shared or formal responsibilities

Parenting, shared bills, tenancy, guardianship, and agreed care arrangements need a specific plan. Ask qualified local help when duties or rights are unclear. A worksheet cannot cancel a legal or caregiving obligation.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

Sorting one real situation

Situation
My partner missed an agreed bill payment.

My part
Check the account, protect access to essentials, and identify the amount and due date.

Their part
Explain what happened and participate in a workable payment plan.

Shared or formal part
We both signed the account. I need accurate information about our obligations.

Next step
Discuss the specific bill at a safe time; seek financial or legal guidance if needed.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

Make your responsibility map

Choose one situation rather than trying to sort an entire relationship. Include responsibilities to children or dependent adults.

01 The situation I am sorting

02 My actions and actual responsibilities

03 The other adult's choices and responsibilities

04 Shared duties, agreements, or questions needing qualified advice

Words that return the right task

Offering support
“I can sit with you while you make the call, if you want.”

Naming a shared task
“We both have responsibilities for this bill. Let us look at what is due.”

Declining to take over
“I cannot make that decision for you.”

Naming your own action
“I will arrange safe care for the children. We can discuss the rest later.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

Support, substitution, or a real duty?

Doing a task for someone may be necessary or freely chosen. Ask what the situation requires before labeling your help.

01 What task am I considering taking over?

02 Does age, disability, illness, or an agreed duty change what support is needed?

03 Could I offer part of the task while leaving a choice with the other adult?

04 What needs to happen for a dependent person to remain cared for?

A second situation: the adult son

Your adult son asks you to call his employer and explain a missed shift. He can make the call himself, but feels embarrassed. There is no safety emergency. You want to help him keep the job. Explore an offer that supports him without inventing a story or speaking as him.

01 What is his task in this example?

02 What support could I honestly offer?

03 What would I say if he asks me to take over again?

Return one task thoughtfully

Choose a task the other adult can undertake, with appropriate support. Do not use this exercise to withdraw essential care.

01 The task and who is responsible for it

02 Support I can offer, if it is wanted and feasible

03 What I need to clarify before changing the arrangement

04 My exact words and review date

What happened after you clarified?

Another person may agree, disagree, or need different support. Describe what happened without turning the outcome into a verdict on your worth.

01 The part I handled

02 The part I left with the other adult

03 A shared duty or access need I discovered

04 What I will clarify next

When support needs are substantial

A child, an adult with significant support needs, and an independent adult do not have the same responsibilities. Capacity may vary across tasks and days. Supported decision-making, accommodations, and care coordination may be relevant. Ask the person what support works when possible, and involve appropriate professionals when care needs exceed what you can provide. The goal is a realistic arrangement that respects the person and protects essential care.

01 A task that needs more support than I first assumed

02 Who could help assess or coordinate that support?

03 One assumption I need to replace with a question

A clearer division is progress

You can care about the outcome without being in charge of every choice.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 One responsibility I can describe more accurately

02 One choice I cannot make for another adult

03 One shared task that now has a next step

04 A question I still need help answering

Help you can sustain

An offer needs edges if you are going to keep making it.

Money, rides, meals, a place to sleep. The requests are practical; the feelings around them rarely are. You may be afraid that saying no makes you uncaring. You may also be offering help you cannot afford. This chapter asks a smaller question than whether you should always help or never help: What is this particular need, what are your responsibilities, and what offer can you make without pretending your resources are unlimited?



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The grocery money was already spent

Marta sends money to her adult nephew for the third time this month. Then she uses a credit card for her own groceries. She worries that asking questions would sound judgmental, so she never says what she can afford. This week she checks her actual budget before responding. She cannot send money. If her nephew wants, she can help look for a food resource during lunch tomorrow. That resource may have limits too. Marta does not turn her offer into a test of whether he deserves food. She names what she can do and what needs another plan. The need may remain real even when her wallet is empty.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Build an offer you can describe

Name the need

Ask what is needed and by when. A request for cash may involve food, transport, housing, or something you do not yet understand. Do not assume a motive. You can ask a practical question without demanding a confession.

Check your resources and duties

Count your own food, rent, medication, work, and dependent-care needs. Shared finances and housing may involve rights or obligations. Get appropriate advice before changing access to essentials or a living arrangement.

Specify the offer

Describe what, how much, when, and for how long. Include a review date for ongoing support. The person can decline your offer. Your offer does not entitle you to passwords, medical information, gratitude, or control over their life.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A completed offer with edges

The request
A ride to a weekly appointment.

My capacity
I can drive on two Mondays this month, not every week.

My offer
I can drive on the 9th and 23rd if we confirm the day before.

The gap
Other weeks need another arrangement; accessible transport may take planning.

Review
We will revisit next month rather than assuming this continues indefinitely.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

Check one offer before you make it

Choose a real request. If you do not know something, write the question you need to ask.

01 The need, amount, deadline, and what I actually know

02 My available money, time, transport, or care capacity

03 An offer I can make without neglecting essentials

04 What remains unresolved, and who else might help?

Specific offers, honest limits

When money is not available
“I cannot send money. I can help look for food options tomorrow.”

When you can offer part
“I can cover this amount once. I cannot promise another payment.”

When the arrangement needs a review
“This has become more than I can manage. We need to review it on Saturday.”

When housing is involved
“We need a workable housing plan. I am getting advice about our responsibilities before changing anything.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

What will this offer require later?

Look beyond the moment of relief. Do not make emergency aid, child safety, or essential dependent care conditional on compliance.

01 Is this a one-time offer or an ongoing expectation?

02 What happens to my essential expenses or care duties?

03 What am I quietly expecting in return?

04 How will I explain the limit and review date?

A second situation: one more night

A relative who has been staying with you asks to extend the stay. You are losing sleep and space. There may be tenancy rights, safety concerns, and children in the home. The next step is not an impulsive threat to lock the door. What information and support do you need before proposing a change?

01 A practical concern I can describe without a label

02 A housing, legal, or safety question that needs qualified advice

03 A first conversation or support call I can prepare

Write an offer with a review date

You may choose no offer, a smaller offer, or a different form of help. Account for genuine duties and immediate safety.

01 What I can offer, including amount or time

02 When it begins, ends, or gets reviewed

03 What I cannot promise

04 How I will communicate this safely

Did the offer fit real life?

An arrangement can look sensible on paper and still need adjustment. Notice actual cost and access barriers.

01 What I offered and what I actually provided

02 What the offer cost me in practice

03 Whether the other person wanted or could use it

04 What needs to change before I offer again

When there is no easy alternative

Sometimes the bus does not run, the service has a waitlist, or nobody else answers. That is a real resource gap. It does not become evidence that you personally have unlimited capacity. Ask services about eligibility, cost, accessibility, and waitlists. Keep an emergency need separate from the longer-term arrangement. If you must stretch today, write down what support is needed so the emergency does not silently become the permanent plan.

01 The resource gap in my situation

02 An essential need that cannot wait

03 Who can help plan beyond today?

Help that leaves room for you

A smaller, honest offer is worth more than a promise your life cannot hold.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 An offer that fits better now

02 A quiet expectation I have named

03 One limit I need to revisit

04 My next practical step

Conversations that go somewhere

One clear point can do more than a speech you have rehearsed all night.

You have explained it in the shower, in the car, and while trying to fall asleep. In your head the words are perfect. In the room, you end up discussing five old arguments and apologizing for bringing anything up. This chapter helps you prepare one conversation with one purpose. It cannot make another person listen. It can help you decide what you want to say, what you are asking, and what you will do next.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.
One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The kitchen conversation that became everything

Sam wants their partner to stop agreeing to pickups they cannot reliably manage.

The conversation begins with Tuesday and ends with every disappointment since spring. Both people leave unsure what was requested. Before trying again, Sam writes one fact: there have been two missed pickups this month. They identify one need: a dependable adult arrangement for the child. They prepare one ask: can we confirm tomorrow's pickup by six tonight? Sam also names the backup they can actually arrange. This does not solve the relationship. It turns one urgent practical problem into something that can be answered.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Prepare four small parts

A specific observation

Describe an event rather than assigning an identity. Two missed pickups is clearer than You never care. You do not need to erase the impact or sound cheerful.

A need and an ask

State what needs attention and make one request that can be understood. Include the task and time. A request gives the other adult a choice; you can then decide your own next step.

A workable next action

Decide what you can do if the answer is no, unclear, or delayed. Do not invent a consequence you cannot carry out. If speaking up may trigger retaliation, prioritize safety support instead of rehearsing a confrontation.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A conversation prepared on paper

Observation
Our last two calls continued after I said I needed to sleep.

Impact
I was exhausted at work the next morning.

Ask
Can we talk from seven to seven-thirty tonight?

My action
I will end the call at seven-thirty. A genuine emergency needs a separate response plan.

Short version
I want to talk. I have half an hour tonight.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

Find the one point

Start with the practical issue you need addressed now. You can make a separate plan for the larger relationship questions.

01 What happened, without always or never?

02 What practical need or impact matters here?

03 One specific request, including timing

04 What I can realistically do if the answer is no

Words for ordinary pushback

That is not how I remember it
“We remember it differently. I still need a plan for tomorrow.”

You are being selfish
“I hear that you are upset. This is what I can offer.”

You always used to do it
“I did. I cannot keep that arrangement now.”

This is going nowhere
“I am pausing this conversation. If it is safe and useful, we can return to the practical question tomorrow.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

Is this a workable time to talk?

Do not try to resolve a relationship during an overdose, medical emergency, or unsafe situation. Impairment or escalating behavior may make a later conversation more workable.

01 What would make this conversation unsafe or unproductive?

02 What setting, communication method, or support would help?

03 Can I leave or end contact safely if needed?

04 What practical issue must be addressed before the conversation?

A second situation: the long text

You receive a long message listing everything youhave done wrong. You start typing a point-by-point defense. The actual question is whether you can provide a ride Friday. Assume it is safe to respond. Practice answering the practical question without trying to win the entire argument by text.

01 The practical question underneath the message

02 The answer I can give in two or three sentences

03 What I will leave for a separate discussion, if any

Your words, in your voice

Borrow a structure, then use words that sound natural to you. You are allowed to read from the page.

01 My opening sentence

02 My one ask and the time involved

03 My action if the request cannot be agreed

04 My pause or exit line, if safe to use

What did the conversation accomplish?

Success is not limited to agreement. You may have asked clearly, learned something important, or recognized that a different kind of support is needed.

01 What I said clearly

02 What the other person actually agreed to, if anything

03 What remains unresolved

04 What needs a different time, approach, or outside support

When words are not the main problem

Threats, intimidation, stalking, sexual pressure, or control of money and movement are not problems you can solve by finding a nicer sentence. Abuse is the responsibility of the person using it. A joint conversation or shared worksheet may increase risk. Seek confidential individual safety support; you do not need to announce that plan. If you notice yourself using threats or control, stop and seek qualified help to change your behavior rather than using this book to justify it.

01 A sign that I need more than a conversation script

02 A safe way to ask for individual support

03 A worksheet or conversation I should postpone

Clearer does not have to mean louder

You can finish your sentence without finishing every argument.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 One sentence I can keep short

02 One practical question I now know how to ask

03 One outcome I cannot control

04 My next safe step

When children are in the middle

Children need dependable adults, not adult-sized jobs.

Children may notice far more than adults realize, while understanding far less of what it means. A missed pickup, a changed voice, a parent sleeping through dinner: they may be filling the gaps with guesses. You do not need to share adult details to be honest. This chapter helps you prepare a simple explanation and a practical care plan. It is written for adults, including parents, relatives, and other caregivers.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.
One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The question on the way to school

Nine-year-old Eli asks whether his dad missed the weekend because Eli was bad. His aunt starts to say that everything is fine. Then she hears the question he is really asking. She tells him the missed visit was an adult responsibility and not something he caused. She says what she knows about today: she will pick him up after school, and another known adult is the backup. She does not ask Eli to monitor his dad or report what happens at home. Later she contacts an appropriate support person about the care plan. Eli gets an answer he can use today, with room to ask again.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Prepare the truth they need today

Use age-appropriate honesty

Answer the question the child is asking, in concrete language. Younger children often need shorter explanations; teens may want more detail. Avoid humiliating labels and promises about another adult's future choices.

Put adult tasks with adults

Do not ask a child to hide substance use, manage medication, judge sobriety, deliver messages, or comfort an adult about the harm done. If a plan requires adult judgment, an adult needs to own it.

Make daily care specific

Who is responsible for meals, pickup, supervision, and a backup? Confirm the adults know their roles. A child can know how to ask for help without being assigned responsibility for keeping the whole household safe.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

Two versions of an honest answer

For a younger child
Dad was not able to pick you up safely. That was an adult responsibility, and it was not your fault. I am picking you up today.

For an older child or teen
The missed pickup affected you. You do not have to cover for it. I do not know what Dad will choose next. We do have a plan for your ride today.

When you do not know
I do not know that answer yet. Here is what I do know about today.

When you caused the harm
I missed your event. That was my responsibility. I am sorry. You do not need to make me feel better.

Follow-through
Match the words to one dependable action you can actually provide.

Prepare for one child, not every age

Use initials or no name if privacy matters. These are preparation prompts for the adult; do not turn them into an interrogation.

01 What this child has noticed or asked

02 A truthful explanation that fits their age and question

03 Something I cannot honestly promise

04 One dependable action I can follow through on

Words that leave the adult job with you

When they blame themselves
“This was not caused by something you did.”

When they want to fix it
“You can love them. Getting adult help is an adult job.”

When they have mixed feelings
“You can miss them and feel angry about what happened.”

When they do not want to talk
“We can stop. You can ask me later or talk with another safe adult.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

Who is actually responsible today?

Check this plan with the adults involved. Do not assume someone is available because you wrote their name. For immediate danger or absent essential care, seek appropriate urgent help.

01 Adult responsible for care and pickup today

02 Confirmed backup adult and how they will be reached

03 What the child needs to know in simple terms

04 A care or safeguarding concern needing professional support

A second situation: the family secret

A teenager says, Please do not tell anyone. I have been missing school to look after my little brother. Thank them for telling you. Do not promise secrecy you cannot keep. Think about immediate care, school support, and the safeguarding responsibilities of your role.

01 What I can say without blaming the teenager

02 What needs an adult care plan right away

03 Who is qualified to help, and what I will explain before involving them

One dependable routine

Choose a routine adults can maintain. A small reliable plan can be more useful than a dramatic promise.

01 The routine: meal, ride, bedtime, school check-in, or another need

02 The adult who has agreed to handle it

03 The backup if that adult becomes unavailable

04 When I will check how the plan is working for the child

Follow up without pressing

A child does not need to tell a detailed story or show a particular feeling for your support to count. Seek qualified help when concerns continue or safety is uncertain.

01 What I followed through on

02 A question or concern the child raised, if any

03 What I need to change in the adult care arrangement

04 The next calm opportunity to check in

Different households, the same adult responsibility

Care may involve separated parents, grandparents, foster or kinship carers, or a young person living between homes. Follow applicable care arrangements and get qualified local advice about disputes or changes. Do not use a child to collect evidence, choose sides, or negotiate contact. A child with communication or disability-related needs may need adapted explanations and support. Cultural and family values matter; ask rather than assuming what belonging or care looks like.

01 A household or access need this plan must reflect

02 An adult disagreement the child should not have to carry

03 A professional question I need answered

The care plan is the adult work

You do not need perfect words. You do need to keep the adult responsibility with adults.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 One message I want this child to hear consistently

02 One adult task I have taken out of the child's hands

03 One routine with an actual backup

04 My next follow-through step

Trust after hard things

You can notice change without rushing yourself.

They are doing better. You are glad. You also still tense up when the phone rings. Both can be true. An apology or a treatment milestone does not settle every question about money, parenting, closeness, or contact. This chapter gives those questions separate space. You do not have to decide everything at once, and you do not have to offer forgiveness or access as proof that you support someone's progress.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The dinner invitation

Dev's brother has been attending treatment and asks to come to a family dinner. Dev wants to acknowledge the effort but remembers a frightening argument at the last gathering. Other relatives say it is time to move on. Dev chooses not to use the dinner as a test of whether the past is over. He considers a shorter visit in a setting he can manage, then checks whether that feels safe at all. He can appreciate his brother's effort and still need distance. His brother's recovery is meaningful. So is the effect of what happened. Neither fact erases the other.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Separate the decisions

An apology and accountability

An apology names harm. Accountability also involves what happens afterward: taking responsibility, addressing practical effects, and respecting another person's choices. You can notice actions without deciding a person's entire future.

Trust in a specific area

Trust is not one switch. You may be comfortable sharing a meal but not lending money or relying on someone for childcare. Name the particular decision instead of asking whether you trust them completely.

Contact and forgiveness

Forgiveness is not an obligation in this workbook. Contact, closeness, and reconciliation are separate choices. When abuse or coercion is present, safety support takes priority over joint repair exercises or pressure to meet.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A specific trust decision

The request
My sister wants to borrow my car again.

The history that matters
The last loan ended with damage and no agreed repair plan.

What I can notice
She has acknowledged the damage and started making agreed payments.

My decision today
I am not lending the car. I can recognize her follow-through without changing that decision.

Review, if wanted
I may revisit it later. I do not owe a date or a promise.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

Name the decision in front of you

Choose one area of contact or reliance. You do not need to describe every painful event.

01 The specific request or decision

02 Past impact that is relevant to this decision

03 Actions I have actually observed, rather than hopes or rumors

04 What I am comfortable choosing today

Words for your own pace

Acknowledging effort
“I can see the effort you are making. I still need time with this decision.”

Keeping decisions separate
“I am comfortable having lunch. I am not ready to lend money.”

Responding to pressure
“I am not deciding this at the family table.”

Naming a limit
“I am not available for that kind of contact right now.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

What would make this contact workable?

You may choose no contact, limited contact, or more contact where safe and consistent with formal obligations. Get qualified advice about parenting or legal arrangements.

01 The kind of contact I am considering, if any

02 Conditions that support my safety and practical needs

03 What I will do if the arrangement no longer works

04 A question that needs individual professional support

A second situation: everyone says forgive

At a gathering, a relative says youare holding the family back by not forgiving. You do not want a public conversation about the harm. Write an answer that protects your privacy and leaves the decision with you. Assume it is safe to respond; otherwise plan support instead.

01 What I do not need to explain to the group

02 A short response I could actually use

03 Someone who can support me afterward

Choose one next step, not forever

Your nextstep can be gathering information, seeking support, holding the current limit, or trying a small change. Nothing here requires reconciliation.

01 My decision for now

02 The practical arrangements it requires

03 What would tell me to pause or reconsider

04 When I want to check in with myself, if useful

How did the decision feel in real life?

Relief, grief, doubt, and affection can coexist. Feelings give you something to notice; they do not require an immediate reversal.

01 What happened during or after contact, or after choosing distance

02 What I felt and what I actually observed

03 Whether my limit was respected

04 What support or adjustment I want now

Repair cannot be demanded

Ifyou are the person who caused harm, someone else's pace is nota punishment you need to overcome. Ask what practical repair is welcome, follow through where possible, and respect a refusal of contact. Do not request reassurance, access, or forgiveness as payment for doing better. If you experienced abuse, you do not have to tell your story jointly or confront the person who harmed you. Individual support can help you explore options safely.

01 An expectation about repair I need to reconsider

02 A choice that belongs to the other person

03 Support I can seek without pressuring them

Your pace has a place here

Their progress can be real. Your need for time can be real, too.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 A decision I have separated from the larger relationship

02 An action I noticed without overpromising

03 A limit or preference I can name

04 My next step for my own wellbeing

When things change again

A changed situation needs a changed plan, not a verdict on your worth.

A missed appointment. A return to substance use. A new diagnosis. A phone call that changes tonight's plans. You may feel the old urge to do everything immediately, or the opposite urge to shut everything down. This chapter gives you a place to slow the longer-term decisions while responding to what cannot wait. You are not responsible for predicting every turn in another person's life.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The call before work

Leah learns that her partner has used again after a period without use. She wants to settle the entire future before her shift starts. Instead, she first checks the situation: is there a medical emergency, and are the children with a safe, available adult? The relationship conversation can wait until it can happen safely. Later she reviews the practical arrangement that has changed. She does not call the previous months fake. She also does not pretend that today has no effect. She asks what support she needs and chooses one action she can take without promising to manage the whole recovery process.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Separate now from later

Immediate safety

Medical emergencies, suspected overdose, violence, and lack of essential dependent care need an immediate response. Use emergency or appropriate crisis support. A boundary exercise is not an emergency response plan.

The next practical day

Once urgent needs are addressed, identify meals, transport, work, care, and a safe place to be. Keep the list short. It is reasonable to need outside help rather than silently absorbing every task.

The longer arrangement

Later, review what actually changed and what support or limit needs adjustment. Returning use is not a character label. It also does not erase its impact on you. Treatment and medication questions belong with qualified care providers.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A completed two-timeframe plan

What I know
My relative missed an appointment and has said they used yesterday.

What I do not know
Their current condition or what care they need.

Right now
Check for urgent safety concerns and use appropriate help if needed.

Today
Confirm the child's care and my own work arrangements with adults who can actually help.

Later
Review my offer of rides and the backup plan. I will not make treatment decisions for them.

Facts, gaps, and today's needs

Use this page once immediate danger has been addressed. If you cannot establish safety, seek appropriate help rather than trying to investigate alone.

01 What I know directly

02 What I do not know and who could appropriately clarify it

03 Essential care or practical needs for today

04 A longer-term decision I can postpone

Words for a changed day

Separating the conversation
“First we need to address safety. We can discuss the arrangement later.”

Naming the impact
“This changes the care plan for today. I need another available adult.”

Avoiding an impossible promise
“I care about you. I cannot promise to manage every part of this.”

Asking for your own help
“I need support with what this is bringing up for me.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

What kind of help is needed?

This is a planning aid, not a diagnostic tool. For a possible overdose or other medical emergency, call 911. See the support pages for verified U. S. and Wisconsin resources.

01 Is there an immediate medical or safety concern requiring urgent help?

02 Is there an urgent gap in supervision or essential care?

03 What can an appropriate professional or service help assess?

04 What belongs on the later conversation list?

A second situation: the sudden discharge

A family member says they are leaving a care setting and expects you to collect them immediately. You are at work and do not know the discharge plan. With their permission where needed, you can ask the care team about arrangements, accessibility, medication questions, and support. You do not have to pretend you can provide care you cannot safely manage.

01 Questions I need answered before promising transport or care

02 What I can realistically offer today

03 Who needs to help coordinate the unresolved needs

Your next twenty-four hours

A shorter plan can keep practical needs visible. If circumstances remain unsafe or unclear, prioritize professional support.

01 Essential care, work, food, and transport needs

02 The adult or service handling each need

03 What I will do for my own rest or support

04 When and with whom I will review the next step

What needed changing?

Review the plan after the immediate disruption. You do not need to grade yourself on how calm you looked.

01 What helped keep people cared for

02 What I took on that was not sustainable

03 A gap that needs outside coordination

04 One change to the plan for next time

You are not the treatment team

Loved ones can share concerns and seek general guidance, but access to another adult's health information depends on consent and applicable rules. Do not use this workbook to diagnose, direct medication changes, supervise withdrawal, or test someone's recovery. Ask qualified providers about treatment questions and your own support needs. If information cannot be shared with you, you can still clarify what you personally can provide and ask about general resources.

01 A clinical question I should take to a qualified provider

02 A care task I cannot safely provide

03 What I can say honestly about my capacity

A revision is not a failure

Progress includes changing the plan when the facts change.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 A useful action I took during a changed situation

02 Something I learned about the support needed

03 One part of the plan I am keeping

04 One part I am revising

A life that includes you

Your life does not have to wait for someone else to be finished struggling.

You may have stopped making plans because you never knew whether you would get to keep them. You may feel guilty enjoying a good afternoon while someone you love is having a hard one. This chapter does not ask you to stop caring. It asks what you want your own days to contain, and what practical support would make one small piece possible. Rest, friendship, interests, and ordinary pleasure belong in the plan.



READ. TRY. NOTICE. ADJUST.

One situation at a time. A smaller step still counts.

The class he almost canceled

Owen signed up for an inexpensive evening art class, then nearly canceled before the first session. His adult daughter had been having a difficult week. There was no immediate emergency, and no care task he had agreed to handle during that hour. He checked in with the adult involved in the existing plan and went to class. He still felt worried. He also enjoyed mixing paint for an hour without looking at his phone. The class did not solve his family's problems. It reminded him that his life contains more than waiting for news. Next week he may need a different arrangement. He can plan for that without abandoning the whole idea.



FICTIONAL EVERYDAY EXAMPLE

What part of this feels familiar? What would be different in your life?

Choose something small enough to live

Find what you miss

Think about a person, activity, place, or feeling you want back. It need not be impressive, productive, or expensive. Ten quiet minutes may be the realistic starting point.

Plan for real barriers

Care duties, disability, transport, finances, and safety affect what is possible. Ask what support or adaptation is needed rather than calling yourself unmotivated. A home-based or shorter version can still count.

Let enjoyment be ordinary

You do not need to earn a good moment by solving every family problem first. If grief or worry comes along, the activity is not ruined. You can notice both and decide what you want to do next.

Choose one point you can use today. You do not have to change everything at once.

01 One point I want to try in my own situation

A completed small return

What I miss
Walking with my friend after work.

What fits now
Fifteen minutes by phone while we each walk or sit outside.

What needs arranging
Confirm my partner's agreed care coverage for that time.

If the plan is interrupted
Try ten minutes the next afternoon rather than canceling for the month.

What counts
Making the plan, asking for support, or taking part for some of the time.

Your situation may need different support. Use the structure; change the details.

01 What would need to be different in my situation?

What do you want room for?

You can want something without knowing how to arrange it yet. Begin with your own preferences.

01 A person, interest, place, or routine I miss

02 What I liked about it before life got crowded

03 A smaller or more accessible version

04 A barrier that needs practical support

Words for keeping your place

Protecting a plan
“I have plans during that hour. I can talk afterward.”

Asking for coverage
“Can you handle this agreed care task from two to three on Saturday?”

Naming your own need
“I need some time that is not spent managing this situation.”

When you feel guilty
“I can care about them and keep this small plan for myself.”

Make the wording yours. A script is an option, not a safety guarantee.

01 My version, in words I would actually use

Make the plan possible

Account for essential responsibilities and immediate safety. This is not a test of whether you can leave the house or spend money.

01 What I want to do, including a free or home-based option

02 The time and any care coverage it needs

03 What would be a genuine reason to change the plan?

04 What feeling might show up even if it is okay to continue?

A second situation: the good afternoon

You have a pleasant afternoon, then feel guilty when you learn your sibling had a difficult day. There was no agreed task you missed. You start thinking you should stop making plans. Try a response that acknowledges care without making your enjoyment something you did wrong.

01 What I actually did, separate from the guilt

02 A kind response to my sibling that fits my capacity

03 A sentence that lets my afternoon remain mine

Put one thing back in your week

Choose something specific. It can last five minutes. Ask for the support it actually requires.

01 The activity, place, or person

02 The day, time, and realistic duration

03 The support or adaptation I will arrange

04 My smaller version if the original is not possible

What was it like to make room?

Enjoyment is not the only useful outcome. You may have learned about a barrier, asked for help, or noticed what you no longer enjoy.

01 What I tried or arranged

02 What felt good, awkward, tiring, or different

03 What support was missing

04 What I want to repeat, change, or replace

When even a small plan feels far away

There are seasons when care, illness, poverty, or danger leaves little room. A worksheet cannot supply money, childcare, accessible services, or safety. Use your answers to name a real support need. If you are persistently struggling to function, losing interest in everything, or feeling overwhelmed, consider support for your own mental health. You do not need to wait until someone else gets help first. The resource pages offer starting points, not guaranteed access.

01 A support need I cannot solve by trying harder

02 Who might help me explore options?

03 One gentle next step that fits today

Progress you can actually recognize

Your life is allowed to contain more than the hard thing happening in your family.

MILE OR A MILLIMETER. IT STILL COUNTS.

01 A part of myself I am making room for

02 A plan that became more realistic

03 A kind action toward myself that I want to repeat

04 The next small thing I choose

Your carry-forward plan

Choose what you want to take from the book into the next week. You do not need to change every pattern at once.

01 The situation I want to handle differently

02 One action or offer that fits my actual capacity

03 The words I plan to use, if safe

04 The support or practical arrangement I need

When the plan needs a backup

Complete this foran ordinary disruption once urgent safety needs have been addressed. It is not an emergency or clinical safety plan.

01 If my original arrangement falls through, what essential need remains?

02 The adult or service I can ask about backup, and whether they have agreed

03 A responsibility I cannot simply drop

04 When I will review the plan rather than silently taking on everything

Weekly check-in 1

Date:_____ Situation or chapter: _____ Use one specific example. You can return to this structure whenever it helps.

01 What I tried, asked, or noticed this week

02 What happened, and what I learned about capacity or support

03 A small piece of progress I might otherwise overlook

04 What I want to keep or adjust next week

Weekly check-in 2

Date:_____ Situation or chapter: _____ Use one specific example. You can return to this structure whenever it helps.

01 What I tried, asked, or noticed this week

02 What happened, and what I learned about capacity or support

03 A small piece of progress I might otherwise overlook

04 What I want to keep or adjust next week

Weekly check-in 3

Date:_____ Situation or chapter: _____ Use one specific example. You can return to this structure whenever it helps.

01 What I tried, asked, or noticed this week

02 What happened, and what I learned about capacity or support

03 A small piece of progress I might otherwise overlook

04 What I want to keep or adjust next week

Weekly check-in 4

Date:_____ Situation or chapter: _____ Use one specific example. You can return to this structure whenever it helps.

01 What I tried, asked, or noticed this week

02 What happened, and what I learned about capacity or support

03 A small piece of progress I might otherwise overlook

04 What I want to keep or adjust next week

Support in the United States

Immediate danger or medical emergency
Call 911. Suspected overdose needs emergency help; it is not a time to withhold aid or test a boundary.

Suicidal crisis or emotional distress
Call or text 988, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
988lifeline.org
You can contact support about your own distress.

Finding treatment and family resources
FindTreatment.gov offers a starting point for locating care. SAMHSA's family resources explain support options for families.
samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources

Relationship abuse and safety planning
TheHotline.org/plan-for-safety offers information about personalized safety planning. If device or account use may be monitored, consider a safer way to seek help.

Questions before choosing a service
Ask about eligibility, cost, insurance, waitlists, accessibility, language, confidentiality, and what happens if urgent intervention is needed. Availability is not guaranteed.

Wisconsin starting points

Community information
Call 211 or visit 211 Wisconsin for information about local services, including practical and mental health resources. This is a starting point, not a promise of funding or placement. [S6]

County crisis services
Wisconsin DHS lists county crisis contacts and other support options. Check the current listing for your county or location.
dhs.wisconsin.gov/crisis/talk.htm [S6]

Care and coverage
Wisconsin DHS provides information about mental health care and finding help.
dhs.wisconsin.gov/mh/hccindex.htm [S7]

Family and community options
You may also ask a healthcare provider, school support professional, community organization, or tribal service where applicable about available help. Ask about access and privacy rather than assuming all services work the same way.

Your next contact
Service or person: _____
Question I want to ask: _____
Contact method and time: _____

Sources behind the guidance

[S1] SAMHSA: family coping resources
Helping Families Cope with Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders. Supports the general guidance on family support and caregivers' own wellbeing.
samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources

[S2] SAMHSA: parent and caregiver resources
Resources for conversations and connecting children with appropriate help.
samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources/caregiver

[S3] National Domestic Violence Hotline
Plan for Safety. Supports the priority given to individualized safety planning where abuse or coercion is present.
thehotline.org/plan-for-safety/

[S4] NACoA: language with children and teens
Supports age-appropriate, non-blaming explanations and keeping adult responsibility with adults.
nacoa.org/language-when-talking-with-kids-and-teens/

[S5] National Domestic Violence Hotline
Healthy Relationships; Should I Forgive My Abuser? Background for respect, choice, safety, and separating forgiveness from reconciliation.
thehotline.org/resources/healthy-relationships/
thehotline.org/resources/should-i-forgive-my-abuser/

What is original, what is supported

[S6-S7] Wisconsin DHS

Crisis Services: Someone to Contact; Mental Health: Care and Coverage.
dhs.wisconsin.gov/crisis/talk.htm
dhs.wisconsin.gov/mh/hccindex.htm

[S8] Office of Head Start

Talking to Children About Parental Substance Use. Background on age-appropriate conversations and dependable adult support.
headstart.gov/video/talking-children-about-parental-substance-use

Original educational material

The stories, scripts, decision questions, planning tools, and progress prompts are original educational content. They are not standardized assessments, validated treatment exercises, or a named therapy protocol. The sources support limited general principles; they do not establish this workbook's effectiveness.

How the sources are used

Family wellbeing: [S1]. Child-related guidance: [S2, S4, S8]. Safety and coercion: [S3]. Respect and choice in repair: [S5]. Wisconsin resource details: [S6, S7]. No source organization endorses this book.

Review date
Resources checked October 28, 2026. Availability and contact details can change. Check current service information when seeking support.

About Belle Morey

Progress is Progress LLC

Belle Morey is the creator behind Progress is Progress LLC and its educational materials. Her work centers the philosophy that progress matters at every scale: a mile or a millimeter.

The approach in this book

Clear language. Everyday examples. Practical space to try something, notice what happened, and adjust. The aim is to make room for the reader's own life while recognizing the complexity of caring about someone who is struggling.

Explore the collection

This workbook accompanies When Someone You Love Is Struggling, a six-guide adult family collection. The guides offer shorter entry points; the workbook gives the reader more room to practice.

Find more

www.progresscounselingprograms.com

Notes & things to return to

Questions, reminders, words to keep, or something you are not ready to decide.

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Questions, reminders, words to keep, or something you are not ready to decide.

You still have a place in your own life.

You may leave this book with a clearer answer. You may leave with a better question. You may need to return to the same page more than once.

The point is not to become a person who never worries, never helps too much, or always has the right words. The point is to make the next step more honest, more workable, and more yours.

Progress is progress.
Mile or a Millimeter.

There is room for you, too.

You can love someone deeply and still need sleep, stability, honest answers, and a life that includes you.



For the person who keeps showing up.

Work through everyday decisions about money, rides, care, conversations, children, trust, and your own wellbeing. Explore completed examples, build words that sound like you, and make plans you can return to when life changes.

A practical adult workbook from Belle Morey and Progress is Progress LLC.

Progress is progress. Mile or a Millimeter.

www.progresscounselingprograms.com