

The same argument again

A short book about having one recurring row with your partner in different costumes

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, and it belongs to two people. You have a row. It's about the dishwasher on Tuesday and about your mother-in-law at Christmas and about the phone at dinner and about who booked the thing on Saturday, and each time it feels like a different argument with its own facts and its own fair outcome, and each time it ends in the same place, with the same two sentences, and the same two people not speaking on the same sofa. You've had it, in one outfit or another, for years. You've never once called it the same row.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that treating each appearance as a new case makes sense from the inside. Tonight's topic is real. The dishwasher really was left. A new case can be won, and calling it the old row feels like giving up on it. The second is that the topic is a costume, and that solving the topic has never once ended the row, because the row isn't about the topic. There's research on arguments that come back, and it points somewhere useful. What wears couples down isn't how often the row returns. It's the belief that it has to be settled for good and hasn't been. What's underneath, when researchers ask thousands of married people what they were actually feeling, is usually one of two ordinary worries, and neither of them is the dishwasher. The third is practical. Find the one row. Give it a plain name you both accept. Agree in two sentences what it's about. And when it turns up in a

new costume, say the name, deal with tonight's costume, and leave the record of every past instance shut. Chapters 20 to 23 cover how, and none of it takes longer than ten minutes.

This book won't tell you to stop arguing, or that the row will go away, or who's right. It's about the fresh case, the habit of fighting a row you've had fifty times as if it were the first.

Three cautions.

If your rows come with contempt, threats, control, or fear, or if one of you isn't free to leave the room or the house, that isn't a habit and this isn't the book. The NHS page on domestic abuse lists who to call. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, is free and open day and night on 0808 2000 247, and the page gives the lines for men and for LGBT+ people. In an emergency, call 999.

If the rows are the surface of a low mood in either of you, low most of the day for a fortnight or more, the NHS says that's a GP conversation, and the rows will be easier to handle once it's had.

And if what you're arguing about is whether one of you is right about a fact, that's the earlier book You don't have to win this one. If the row happens at midnight, Go to bed cross if you have to is about the hour. This book is about the row that comes back.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Tuesday, the dishwasher, and March

It's Tuesday, about half past eight. You come into the kitchen and the dishwasher is open and full and clean, and the dirty things from dinner are on the side next to it, and you say something. Not much. "You didn't empty it, then." Your partner, on the sofa, says they were going to. You say that's what they said on Sunday. They say they did it on Sunday, you just didn't notice, and in fact they do it more than you do. You say that's not the point. They say what is the point, then, and they've got the tone now, and so have you.

Four minutes later it isn't about the dishwasher. It's about how you always have to ask, and how they can never do anything right, and how you were on your own with the children all of Saturday, and how they work every hour they have, and then one of you says the thing from March, and the other says that's typical, dragging that up, and it's over. Not resolved. Over. You're in different rooms, and the dishwasher is still full, and some part of you knows, with a tired certainty, that you've had this exact evening before. Not a similar one. This one.

That's invented, but I'd guess yours is close, and I'd guess it's got a different costume. Some words. **The one row** is the argument the two of you keep having, whatever it's wearing. **The costume** is what it's about tonight, the dishwasher, the in-laws, money, the phone, the plan for Saturday. **An instance** is one appearance of the one row. **The fresh case** is what this book is about, the habit of treating each instance as a new argument with its own facts and its own verdict. **The record** is the past instances brought into tonight's, the thing from March, the thing from Sunday, and **the**

record shut is what it looks like when you don't. **The underneath** is what the one row is actually about, which chapter 11 goes into. **The final version** is the conversation you keep imagining, the one after which the row never comes back. **The between** is the days between instances. And **the name** is what chapter 20 is for.

Before you go on, do one thing, and do it on your own for now. Write down the last five rows you can remember with your partner. For each one, write the first sentence anyone said, as near as you can get it, and the last sentence. Then look at the five first sentences, and then at the five last sentences. The first ones will be five different topics. The last ones, I'd expect, will be about two, and you'll have heard them before.

Why the fresh case makes sense

Nobody fights the dishwasher row as though it were the first one because they've thought it through and decided that's the best approach. They fight it that way because that's how the row arrives. It arrives as a dishwasher. It's worth being honest about what the fresh case gives you, because if it gave you nothing you'd have stopped years ago.

It gives you a real topic. The dishwasher really was full. The in-laws really are coming for four days. The phone really was on the table through dinner. Tonight's costume is made of facts, and facts feel like something you can argue about and win. It gives you the chance of a verdict. A new case has a right answer, and if you can just get it agreed, this one at least will be settled. It gives you a way of not looking at the pattern. Saying "here we go again" out loud feels like admitting something is wrong with the two of you, and fighting about the dishwasher instead feels like keeping that admission at bay. And it gives you hope. Each new instance carries the possibility that this is the one where it finally gets said properly and finally goes in, and that possibility is worth a lot to someone who's tired.

Underneath those there's usually a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That this time it really is about the dishwasher. That once your partner finally understands, it'll stop. That couples who are right for each other don't have a row like this. That you'd let it go if they'd only admit it. That you've talked about it a hundred times, so talking is clearly what's needed, only better. That if you don't push, nothing will change, or that if you go quiet,

it'll blow over. That it always happens at the same time so there's nothing to be done. That you need to get to the bottom of it, and that you already know what's at the bottom. Each has something true in it, and each is doing the same job, which is keeping tonight's instance looking like a new case.

The fresh case is an answer to a real situation. The dishwasher is full. This book won't tell you that doesn't matter. It'll look at whether the fresh case is the only way to answer it, because I don't think it is, and the research on arguments that keep coming back doesn't think so either. Then it'll look at what the fresh case costs, which is more than an evening. And then it'll give you a way of handling the next instance in ten minutes, with the record shut, so that the dishwasher can go back to being a dishwasher.

"This time it really is about the dishwasher"

It is about the dishwasher. I'm not going to tell you it isn't, and I'm not going to tell you that the dishwasher doesn't matter, because a full dishwasher at half past eight is a small real thing and small real things are most of a shared life. The belief this chapter is about is a different one. It's the belief that the dishwasher is the row, so that if the dishwasher question were answered, the row would be over.

Here's the test, and you can run it on your list from chapter 1. Has answering the topic ever ended the row? Take any instance. The dishwasher got emptied, eventually, by someone. The in-laws came and went. The phone went in a drawer for a week. And the row came back, in a fortnight or a month, wearing something else. If the topic were the row, solving the topic would have solved it, once, in all these years. It never has. That's not a failure of your solutions. It's information about what the row is.

Lauren Papp, Mark Cummings and Marcie Goeke-Morey had a hundred married couples keep diaries of every conflict at home over a fortnight, seven hundred and forty-eight of them in all. They were looking at money. Money wasn't the most frequent topic, which surprised them, but money rows were more pervasive, more problematic, more recurrent and more likely to be left unresolved than the others, and here's the part I'd underline, they contained more attempts at problem solving, not fewer. The couples who fought about money tried harder to solve it than they tried with anything else, and it stayed unsolved and kept coming back. More

solving didn't end it. That's what a costume looks like from the outside. It's a topic that attracts solutions and isn't changed by them.

One comparison, and then I'll leave it. A stain on a ceiling can be painted over, and it comes back, because the leak is above it, and painting the stain was never going to touch the leak. The dishwasher is the stain.

So yes, tonight is about the dishwasher, in the sense that the dishwasher needs emptying and someone should do it. Chapter 22 will say that tonight's costume gets tonight's answer, and the answer to the dishwasher takes four minutes. What the belief in this chapter does is spend the evening on the stain and call it the leak. The rest of the book is about the leak.

"Once they finally understand, it'll stop"

This is the belief that keeps you in the kitchen past the point where you'd have stopped with anyone else. Somewhere in you there's a final version of this row, the one where you say it clearly enough and your partner hears it properly, and something goes in that has never gone in, and it never comes back. You've been trying to have that conversation for years. Each instance is another attempt at it. And because it's never happened, each instance also feels like a failure to get there, and you go to bed with the row unsettled and the final version still owed.

Kristen Johnson and Michael Roloff studied what they called serial arguments, the same argument between the same two people, repeated. They surveyed people in dating relationships about an argument that kept coming back, and what they wanted to know was which mattered more for how the relationship was doing, how often the argument recurred, or whether the person believed it could be resolved. It was the belief. How often the row happened mattered less for the relationship than whether the person thought it was resolvable. And the things that went with thinking it wasn't resolvable were a specific list. Rows that came from expectations being let down. Complaining back when complained at. One partner pushing while the other backed off. Being able to predict when the row would happen. Mulling it over between instances. Pulling away from each other afterwards.

Read that list against your own row and I'd guess you'll tick most of it. That's the finding, and I'll be careful with it. It's a survey, it can't say what causes what, and it's dating couples, not marriages. But it

points at something the final version can't see. The weight you're carrying isn't the row. It's the sense that the row is unresolvable and ought to be resolved. Every instance that fails to be the final version adds to that sense, and the sense, not the dishwasher, is what's doing the damage.

Which means the final version is doing something backwards. The harder you try to have the conversation that ends it, the more each instance becomes a conversation that didn't, and the less resolvable the whole thing feels. Understanding isn't the missing piece. Your partner has understood you many times. They've understood you on Tuesdays and Sundays and once at length in a car park. What they can't do is make the row not exist, because it's the row two different people have, and chapter 5 is about that.

"Couples who are right for each other don't have the same row"

Underneath the final version there's often a quieter and worse belief, which is that having one row for years is a sign. A sign that you picked wrong, or that something has gone wrong that better couples don't have go wrong, and that the couples you know who seem easy with each other don't have a dishwasher. This belief is why "here we go again" is so hard to say out loud. Saying it sounds like confessing.

I think the belief has it the wrong way round, and I'll give you the reasoning and then some evidence that points the same way. Two people who live together are two different people. One of you wants the kitchen clear before sitting down and the other wants to sit down first. One of you was raised in a house where family came for four days and the other in a house where nobody came. One of you handles worry by talking and the other by going quiet. Those differences don't get resolved, because they're not disagreements, they're the two of you. Put two people together for long enough and the differences will produce a row, and the row will come back, because the differences do. A couple with no recurring row is either very new or not telling you.

Andrew Christensen and colleagues ran a trial of couple therapy with a hundred and thirty-four married couples who were seriously and chronically distressed, meaning years of it, not a bad month. Half got a traditional therapy that works on changing behaviour, the other half an integrative version whose distinctive addition, as its designers describe it, is acceptance, meaning

helping each partner live with the differences that aren't going to change. Both groups improved. At the end, seventy-one per cent of the acceptance group and fifty-nine per cent of the traditional group were reliably improved or recovered. Five years on, the two had converged, about half of each group were still clinically improved, and around a quarter had separated. I'm not citing that for the numbers, which are for couples far more distressed than I'm assuming you are. I'm citing it because a whole branch of couple therapy is built on the premise that some differences don't resolve, and that the useful work is living with them, and that premise held up in couples who'd been stuck for years.

So the row isn't a verdict on the match. It's what the match produces. The couples who look easy have one too. What they may have that you don't yet is a way of handling it that doesn't treat every instance as evidence.

"I'd let it go if they'd just admit it"

Every instance of the one row carries the record with it. Not just the thing from March, though that's usually in there, but the whole shape of the past, how it's always you who asks, how they've said they'd change and haven't, how last time they promised. The record feels like evidence. It feels like the thing you're being reasonable about, and the reason you can't let tonight go is that letting tonight go means letting the record go, and the record is what you've got.

Bradbury and Fincham, reviewing the research on how married people explain each other's behaviour, found a consistent pattern. Dissatisfied spouses explained their partner's behaviour in ways that cast it in a negative light, and satisfied spouses didn't, and there was evidence that the explanations weren't just a symptom of dissatisfaction but helped cause it. Their word for these explanations is attributions, and the plain version is this. The same full dishwasher can be read as "they forgot" or as "they don't think it's their job", and which reading you make isn't decided by the dishwasher. It's decided by the record, and the record is made of earlier readings.

That's what I'd ask you to notice about the record. It's not a file of facts. It's a file of readings, each of which was made in the middle of an instance, at the angriest moment, in the version of your partner you see when the row is on. Sunday's "they said they'd do it and didn't" was a reading. March was a reading. Some of the

readings are fair. But the file was compiled by a witness who was upset every time, and it's being consulted as though it were a record of what happened.

There's another thing about the record. Your partner has one too, and theirs has you in it, with the same fairness and the same problems, and when you open yours they open theirs, and now there are two files on the table and no dishwasher. If you find yourselves keeping a running count of who did what around the house, that's a habit of its own, and it's fed from the same file.

The earlier book *You don't have to win this one* is about the argument over who's right about a fact. If your instance is that, go there. And if you've noticed, in the middle of an instance, that you've stopped believing the point you're defending, You can be wrong out loud is about the next five words. This chapter is only about the record, and what it asks is small. The next time the one row starts and you reach for March, notice that you're reaching for a reading, and put it back. Chapter 22 will say the record stays shut. Here I only want you to see what it's made of.

"We've talked about it a hundred times"

You have, and this is offered as proof that talking is the answer, only you haven't yet done it well enough. So the next instance gets more talking. Longer, later, more carefully worded, with examples. And it goes the way the last hundred went, and the conclusion drawn is that you need to talk about it more.

Go back to Papp's couples and their money rows. Those rows had more attempts at problem solving than the couples' other rows, and they were the rows most likely to be left unresolved. More talking about the topic didn't move the topic. I'd say that's because the talking was about the costume. A hundred conversations about the dishwasher, or about money, or about your mother, are a hundred conversations about a stain. They can be careful and long and honest and they'll still be about the wrong thing, and the row will still come back, because you've never once talked about the row. You've talked about what it was wearing.

Notice what the hundred conversations have in common. They start from the topic. They try to settle the topic. They drift, within minutes, to the two sentences at the bottom of your chapter 1 list, and then they stop, because those two sentences are where the row lives and neither of you has a way of talking there. So you go back to the topic, because at least the topic has facts. The hundred conversations aren't evidence that talking doesn't work. They're evidence that talking about the costume doesn't.

There's a related habit, which is waiting to raise something until it's grown, and then raising it badly. The earlier book *Say it this week* is about that, and it's worth reading if the one row tends to arrive as a build-up. What this book adds is that the one row can't be raised in the usual way, because it isn't a thing to be raised. It's a shape the two of you make. Chapters 20 and 21 give you a different conversation to have, and it's shorter than any of the hundred, and it's not about the dishwasher. It happens once, on a calm day, and after that you don't need the hundred-and-first.

"If I don't push, nothing changes"

If you're the one who raises it, you'll have this belief, and it has a good pedigree. Things do get done because somebody asks. The dishwasher got emptied on Sunday because you said something on Saturday. If you stopped saying something, you're fairly sure the kitchen would silt up, and so, in the one row, you push, and pushing feels like the only thing standing between the house and entropy.

Andrew Christensen and Christopher Heavey watched thirty-one couples discuss a change one of them wanted, and then a change the other wanted. The pattern they described, and named, is demand and withdraw. Whoever wanted the change pushed, and whoever was being asked to change backed off, and the roles swapped when the topic swapped. It wasn't a fixed feature of either person. It was a feature of wanting something from someone who isn't sure they want to give it. Johnson and Roloff, in the serial argument survey from chapter 4, found that this exact pattern, one partner pushing while the other backed off, went with believing the row couldn't be resolved.

Here's the part the belief can't see from the inside. The push is half the row. The quiet one's backing off is the other half, and each one produces the other. You push because they've gone quiet, and they've gone quiet because you're pushing, and the row has a shape now that neither of you chose and both of you are keeping. Pushing harder doesn't break the shape. It's what the shape is made of. That's not blame. If you're the pusher, you've very likely got the fairer point on the topic, and the topic still isn't the row.

I'd separate two things the push is doing. One is asking for a real thing, the dishwasher, the phone away at dinner. That's fine and often necessary, and a plain request for it on a calm day, which the earlier book *They can't read your mind* covers, gets it done more often than a push at half past eight. The other thing the push is doing is trying to get the underneath heard, and the underneath can't be pushed into anyone. Chapter 21 gives it a different route. When you take the underneath out of the push, what's left is a small request, and small requests don't need pushing.

"If I go quiet, it'll blow over"

If you're the other one, this is your belief, and it's the mirror of chapter 8. You've learned that answering back makes it longer. You've learned that after a while it stops. So when the row starts you get quieter, and you agree with things you don't agree with, and you go and do the dishwasher, and later you'll be told that you went quiet, and you'll wonder what you were supposed to do instead.

Going quiet isn't leaving the row. It's your move in it. Christensen and Heavey's withdrawing partner was still in the conversation, in the sense that mattered, because the withdrawal was the thing the other partner was reacting to. Johnson and Roloff's list of what went with an unresolvable row included pulling away from your partner after an instance, and I'd say going quiet during one is the same thing brought forward. From the pusher's side, quiet reads as "I don't care", or "I'm waiting for you to finish", and it produces more push, which produces more quiet.

The belief that it'll blow over is half right. The instance blows over. The row doesn't, because nothing about it has been touched, and the between fills up with the pusher's sense of not having been heard and your sense of having been got at. The next instance arrives sooner and bigger. Quiet isn't peace. It's a postponement that accrues interest.

There's a version of quiet that's fine, and I'd distinguish it. Saying "I can't do this properly right now, can we do it at eight tomorrow" is quiet with a time on it, and the earlier book *Go to bed cross if you*

have to is built on it. What that gives the pusher is the one thing quiet on its own never does, which is a sign that you're still in. The quiet this chapter is about has no time on it and no sign, and from the outside it looks like a door closing.

If you're the quiet one, the method in chapter 22 gives you a sentence to say instead of nothing, and it's short, and it's not agreement. If you're the pusher reading this to understand the quiet one, the thing to take is that their silence isn't the absence of a position. It's a position they've stopped expecting you to hear.

"It always happens at the same time, so there's nothing we can do"

You could set a clock by it. It's Sunday evening, or the night before a visit, or the second glass of wine, or bath time, or the drive home from their parents'. You both know the row is coming, and the knowing makes it feel like weather. This is one of the things Johnson and Roloff found went with believing a row was unresolvable, being able to predict when it would happen. The predictability itself seems to make it feel hopeless.

I'd turn that over. A row you can predict is a row you can see coming, and a row you can see coming is the easiest kind to handle differently, because you're not ambushed. Most of the reason an instance goes the way it goes is that it starts before either of you has decided anything. The dishwasher is seen, the sentence is said, and you're four minutes in before there's been a thought. If you know it's Sunday at seven, you can have the thought at six.

That's not the same as avoiding it. Couples try that, and what it produces is a row about avoiding the row. The bath-time instance doesn't stop happening because you've arranged never to be in the bathroom together. It moves to bedtime. What predictability gives you isn't a way of dodging the instance. It's the chance to say the name, from chapter 20, before the costume's on, which takes the instance from four minutes of drift to one sentence.

There's a plain reason the same times come up, and it's worth saying because it takes some of the weather out of it. The one row is about the underneath, and the underneath surfaces when you're

both tired, or one of you is about to be judged by their family, or the week has run out of patience. Sunday at seven is when the underneath is nearest the surface. That's not fate. It's the fixture list, and knowing the fixture list is the beginning of being ready for the match rather than surprised by it every week.

"We need to get to the bottom of it"

At some point in most one rows, one of you says this, and it sounds like the mature view. Stop fighting about the dishwasher and find out what's really going on. The trouble is what the sentence assumes. It assumes the underneath is deep, and single, and hidden, so that getting to it means digging, probably at length, probably late, and probably through some old material that neither of you wants to handle. Which is why you don't do it and go back to the dishwasher.

Keith Sanford asked married people, in two studies, twelve hundred and then twenty-three hundred of them, to think of a specific row and rate a long list of words for how they'd felt and how they'd seen their partner during it. Two things came out, over and over, in every group he checked. He called them perceived threat and perceived neglect. Perceived threat is the feeling that your partner is blaming you and trying to control you. Perceived neglect is the feeling that your partner isn't putting in what they should, isn't contributing, isn't investing in the two of you. Each one came with its own set of emotions and its own reading of the other person, and each one went with how satisfied people were and how they handled conflict.

I'll use plainer words for the rest of the book. Being blamed, and being left to it. And here's what I'd take from Sanford's finding. The underneath isn't deep. It isn't some buried thing that needs an evening and a bottle of wine to reach. It's one of two ordinary worries that most people who live together have, and it's sitting right there in the first sentence of the instance, said in the wrong

words. "You didn't empty it, then" is "I feel like I'm doing this on my own", said as a dishwasher. "I do it more than you do" is "I feel like I can't do anything right", said as a dishwasher. Neither of you needs to dig. You need to translate.

That's the change this chapter is for. Getting to the bottom of it isn't an excavation. It's noticing which of two worries you were in when the sentence came out, and chapter 20 will ask you to name it. The bottom is about four inches down, and it's the same bottom every time, and once you've seen it you'll see it in every costume.

"I know exactly what it's about, they just won't admit it"

If chapter 11 landed, you may have had a fast reaction to it, which is that you've known for years what's underneath, and the problem is that your partner won't accept it. You feel left to it. That's the underneath. Case closed, and the row is now about getting them to see that.

Sanford's two worries weren't offered as a choice between the two of you, and he measured them one person at a time. But I'd put an interpretation on his finding, and I'll be clear that it's mine. In most one rows, the two of you aren't in the same worry. One of you is in left to it, and the other is in blamed. The pusher from chapter 8 is usually the one who feels left to it, and the quiet one is usually the one who feels blamed, and each one's worry is produced by the other's behaviour. You feel left to it, so you push. They feel blamed, so they go quiet. Their quiet is what leaves you to it. Your push is what blames them. It's one row, seen from two sides, and each side's underneath is real.

Which is why "I know what it's about" gets nowhere. You know what it's about for you. They know what it's about for them. And each of you is trying to get the other to admit to an underneath that isn't theirs. When you say "you leave me to do everything", they hear "you're being blamed", which is their worry, and they defend, and when they defend, you hear "I'm on my own with this", which is yours. Both of you are right about your own underneath and wrong about the row, because the row has two.

The earlier book *It wasn't about you* is about assuming someone's remark was aimed at you when it came from their day. This is a cousin of that. Your partner's quiet isn't aimed at you. It's what someone does when they feel blamed. Your push isn't aimed at them. It's what someone does when they feel left to it. Once you can see the other person's worry as a worry rather than as an attack, the instance has somewhere to go that isn't the record.

Chapter 21 will ask you to agree what the row is about, and the agreement has two halves, one each. Not one underneath that the other has to admit to. Two, said side by side, without deciding which is the real one. That's a shorter and stranger conversation than the one you've been trying to have, and it's the one that works.

"Naming it would make it worse"

Suppose you accept all this. You still might not want to say it out loud, and the reasons are decent. Saying "this is the same row" mid-instance sounds dismissive, as though the dishwasher didn't count. Giving the row a name sounds like something you'd do with a therapist, and having a named row sounds like having a diagnosis. And there's a fear that once it's named you'll both be watching for it, and the watching will bring it on.

Eli Finkel and colleagues followed a hundred and twenty married couples for two years. In the first year, everyone's marital quality declined, which the researchers said is the usual pattern. In the second year, half the couples were asked, three times over the year, to write for seven minutes about their most recent significant disagreement from the point of view of a neutral outsider who wanted the best for both of them. Twenty-one minutes in total. The couples who did it stopped declining. The couples who didn't kept going down. And the thing that carried the effect was how distressing the couples found their conflicts. They didn't argue less. They minded less, and minding less was what held the marriage steady.

That task is a form of what researchers call reappraisal, which is seeing the same event from a different position. And I'd say that a name for the one row is reappraisal in a word. The moment you can say "it's the on-my-own row again", you've stepped out of the instance and looked at it from the side, which is what Finkel's

couples were asked to do at length. You can't be fully inside a row you've just named. The name puts a small distance in, and the distance is where the distress drops.

As for watching for it bringing it on, I'd say the opposite. What brings it on is the between, the unwatched days in which the underneath builds and the record gets consulted. Watching for it means seeing the fixture list from chapter 10 and being ready. The couples who don't name it aren't free of it. They're just surprised by it every time.

The name doesn't say the dishwasher doesn't count. Said properly, it says "the dishwasher counts and I'm not going to fight the other thing tonight", and chapter 22 gives you the words for that. What's dismissive is the fresh case, which treats your partner's worry as a dishwasher.

"Once we've named it, we'll have to fix it"

There's a fear that goes with naming, which is that a named row becomes a project. If you both agree that this is the on-my-own row, then surely the next step is to sort out the on-my-own-ness, which means a plan, and a chart on the fridge, and a review in a month, and the row has become a piece of work that will fail like the others.

Nickola Overall and James McNulty, reviewing when it helps to push directly for change in a relationship, drew a line that I find useful here. Direct opposition, meaning saying plainly that something has to change and pressing for it, helps when the problem is serious and the partner can actually change it. When the problem is minor, or the partner can't change it, direct opposition does harm, and a softer approach does better. Not everything in a relationship is a problem to be fixed, and treating the unfixable as fixable is one of the ways couples wear each other out.

So the step after naming isn't fixing. It's sorting. Take the one row and separate what's in it. Some of it can change, and is worth a direct request. The dishwasher can be emptied by whoever's up first, and if that's agreed on a calm day it'll mostly happen. The phone can go in a drawer at dinner. Some of it can't change, because it's the two of you. One of you will always want the kitchen clear before sitting down, and the other will always want to sit down first, and that will be true in twenty years. That part isn't a

project. It's a difference, and the acceptance-based therapy in chapter 5 exists because differences are livable when they stop being fought.

I'd also say the naming does most of the work on its own, before any fixing. What wears you down, from chapter 4, is the sense that the row is unresolvable and ought to be resolved. Naming it and sorting it takes away the "ought to be resolved" half. The row is still there. It's just no longer a failure, and a row that isn't a failure is a much smaller thing at half past eight.

Fix what can be fixed, with a plain request on a calm day. Leave the rest named and unfixed, and handle the instances. That's the whole of what the name commits you to.

"It'll get better when things calm down"

You've had the row more since the baby, or since the move, or since one of you changed jobs and the hours got worse. So the belief is that it's circumstances, and when they ease, the row will ease with them. Get through this year. It'll be different when they're at school.

Brian Doss and colleagues followed two hundred and eighteen couples through the first eight years of marriage, and compared those who had a first child with those who didn't. After the birth, parents showed a sudden drop in how well the relationship was functioning, on what they reported and on what observers saw, and the drop was small to medium in size and, this is the part, it tended to persist for the rest of the study. Mothers and fathers changed about the same amount. The couples without children declined too, more gradually, without the sudden step. So the baby did make it worse, and the worse didn't lift when the baby became a toddler.

I'd read that alongside the costume idea. Circumstances don't cause the one row. They change its costume and its frequency. Before the baby it was the weekend plan. After the baby it's who got up in the night, and it's more often, because both of you are more tired and the underneath is nearer the surface, as chapter 10 said. When things calm down, the frequency may drop, and the costume will change again, and the row will be waiting under the new one, because it travels. It travelled from your first flat to this house. It'll travel to the next.

That's not a counsel of despair. It's the opposite. If the row were caused by circumstances, you'd have to wait for them, and the waiting is its own strain, because every instance during the wait is a reminder that the calm hasn't come. If the row is the two of you, then it's available to be handled now, this Tuesday, in this kitchen, with the baby monitor on the side. You don't need things to calm down to say the name. You need to say the name, and things will be a bit calmer for it.

Chapter 24 has a case for the couple since the baby, because that period does need some adjustments to the method. But the belief here, that the row is a phase, is worth putting down, because the phases change and it doesn't.

"The children don't notice"

You keep it down. You don't shout, mostly, and you take it to the kitchen, and the children are in the other room with the television on. So the belief is that the one row is between the two of you and the children are out of it, and it's a belief you need, because the alternative is another thing to feel bad about.

Mark Cummings, Marcie Goeke-Morey and Lauren Papp had parents in a hundred and sixteen families, with children between eight and sixteen, keep diaries of their conflicts at home, including the ones in front of the children, and record how the children reacted. The children weren't reacting to whether there was a row. They were reacting to how it was done. Some tactics distressed them, threats, insults, hostility in the voice or the face, defensiveness, one parent walking off. Other tactics made them feel more secure, calm discussion, support, affection. And the children's reactions in the moment were linked to how they were doing generally.

Two things follow. The first is that children notice, including through a wall, including at eight, and what they notice isn't the topic. They don't care about the dishwasher. They notice the tone and the walking off, and they notice whether it ended or just stopped. The second is more useful. A row handled well in front of children isn't harmful on that evidence. Calm discussion was on the secure list. What children need to see isn't two parents who never disagree. It's two parents who disagree and can handle it.

Put that next to the fresh case. The fresh case, with the record open and the drift to the two sentences and the different rooms afterwards, is the distressing kind, and it's the kind children get to see fifty times, because it's the one row. The short version from chapter 22, ten minutes, the name said, the costume dealt with, and the two of you in the same room afterwards, is the kind on the other list. You don't have to hide the row from the children. You have to handle it in a way you'd be content for them to see, and the method in this book was designed with that in mind.

If the instance has already gone the other way in front of them, the earlier book *Not in front of the children* is about the same-day repair, and it applies here too. What you say afterwards, in their hearing, about how the two of you sorted it, is part of what they learn.

"We should be able to sort this ourselves"

The last belief is about help. You're both reasonable adults. You've talked about the row, you've read about it, and now you're reading this, and the idea of sitting in a room with a stranger and going through the dishwasher feels like a failure, or like something for couples who are about to split up. So counselling is on a list of things you'll do if it ever gets that bad, and it never quite gets that bad, and the row goes on.

I'd move it off that list. Christensen's trial from chapter 5 took couples who'd been seriously distressed for years, and both therapies helped most of them, with effect sizes at five years that the authors described as comparing well with other long-term results. If it works for couples that far in, it's not a last resort. It's a tool, and the sensible time to use a tool is before the job has become an emergency. The couples who wait until it's that bad are the ones for whom a quarter separated anyway.

Practicalities, as of September 2026. The NHS counselling page says counselling can help with problems in your relationships, but that the NHS itself only offers counselling for certain conditions, such as depression, so a couple wanting help with a row will usually be looking at a charity or at paying. If you pay, the NHS says to check the counsellor is on a register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority, and names the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy as one. Some employers offer a few free sessions. It's worth asking.

There's a middle route that doesn't need a stranger. The method in chapters 20 to 22 is a version of what a counsellor would help you do, naming the row and agreeing its underneath, and many couples can do it at the kitchen table on a Sunday afternoon. Try that first. If you can't get through chapter 21 without it turning into an instance, that's not a failure either. It's the sign that a third person in the room would help, and getting one isn't an admission of anything except that the two of you would like to stop having this row.

What the fresh case costs you

Add it up. Not the dishwasher, which costs four minutes, but the fresh case, which is the way you've been handling it.

It costs the evening, every time. An instance handled as a new case runs for an hour and ends in different rooms, and the evening was the only time you had together, and it's gone, and it'll go again in a fortnight. Over a year that's a lot of evenings spent on one row that never got settled.

It costs the between. Johnson and Roloff's list of what went with an unresolvable row included mulling it over between instances, and that's what the fresh case leaves you with. The instance ends unresolved, because it was never going to be resolved on its topic, and you carry it into Wednesday and Thursday, going over it, and the going over compiles the record, and the record is what you'll open next time. The between was supposed to be your life. It's become the preparation for the next instance.

It costs the record, in both directions. Every fresh case adds an entry, and every entry is a reading made at the worst moment, and the file now describes a partner who leaves you to it or who blames you constantly, and that partner is not the person you married. They're the person you see when the row is on, and the file means you see them more often.

And it costs something harder to name, which is the sense that the two of you are stuck. That's Johnson and Roloff's central finding, turned round. The belief that the row can't be resolved was what

went with the relationship doing badly, more than the row itself. The fresh case manufactures that belief. Fifty instances, each one a new case, each one unresolved, and the conclusion that forms isn't "we have a row". It's "we can't sort things out", and that conclusion doesn't stay on the dishwasher. It spreads to the whole of the two of you, and you start to wonder, on a bad night, whether you're right for each other, which is chapter 5, and which the row never justified.

The fresh case turns two people with a difference into two opponents with a case. That's the cost, and none of it was charged by the row. It was charged by the way of handling it.

What it does to the row

There's one more cost, and it's to the row itself. The fresh case doesn't just fail to end the row. It trains it.

Each instance handled as a new case makes the next one more likely and more automatic. The path is worn a little deeper. Two people who've walked the same line across a lawn a hundred times don't decide to walk it the hundred-and-first time. Their feet know it.

Look at what each fresh case adds. It adds an entry to the record, so the next instance has more to open. It confirms the pattern from chapters 8 and 9, so the pusher pushes a little sooner and the quiet one goes quiet a little sooner, because both of them know what's coming. It raises predictability, which Johnson and Roloff found went with hopelessness about the row, so the next instance arrives with more dread attached. And it leaves the underneath untouched, so the underneath is exactly where it was, and nearer the surface, because the last instance didn't drain it.

That's what I mean by the row getting better at itself. After enough fresh cases, an instance can run from the first sentence to the thing from March in under two minutes, with neither of you having decided anything, because every step has been rehearsed. That speed feels like the row being deep-rooted. It's the row being practised.

The good news is buried in that. A row that's been trained can be retrained, and it doesn't take fifty instances, because the training in the other direction is deliberate rather than accidental. The name from chapter 20 is a new first step, and it's put in on purpose, at the point where the old path starts. The first few times you say it, it'll feel odd, and your feet will want the old way. By the fifth or sixth instance, the name arrives on its own. Chapter 23 says what to expect, and this is my expectation rather than a finding, but the mechanism runs the same way in both directions. Whatever you do at the first sentence, fifty times, becomes what the row does.

Name it

The method is three things, and they happen in order. Name the row. Agree what it's about. Handle the next instance. The first two are done once, on a calm day, and the third is done every time. This chapter is the first.

Find it. Go back to your chapter 1 list, the five rows with their first and last sentences. The first sentences were five costumes. The last sentences were the row. Look at them and find the two worries from chapter 11, being blamed and being left to it. One of your last sentences is probably a left-to-it sentence, "I have to do everything", "it's always me". One is probably a blamed sentence, "nothing I do is right", "I can't win". Those two sentences are the one row. Everything above them was costume.

Name it. The name should be plain, short, and yours. It shouldn't be clever and it shouldn't be an accusation. "The on-my-own row" is a name. "The row about you never helping" isn't, because it's one side's underneath dressed as the title. Some couples name it after the first costume it ever wore, "the dishwasher", said with a slight smile, and that works if both of you can say it without an edge. What matters is that both of you would say "yes, that one" when you hear it. If one of you winces at the name, it's the wrong name.

Say which worry you carry. This is the part that takes some nerve. Each of you says, out loud, which of the two worries is yours in this row. "When it starts, what I feel is that I'm on my own with this." "When it starts, what I feel is that I'm being told I'm useless." You may find that you're both in the same worry, and that's fine, but

chapter 12's guess is that you're in different ones, and that hearing your partner name theirs will be the first time you've heard the row from their side.

Do it on a calm day. Not during an instance and not the evening after one. A Sunday afternoon, a walk, a drive. Say beforehand that you'd like ten minutes to talk about the row you keep having, not the last instance of it, and that you're not going to raise the dishwasher. Keep to that. If the conversation starts sliding into an instance, one of you says "this is turning into the row" and you stop and try again another day. That isn't failure. It's the row showing you where its first step is.

Naming it isn't solving it. It's the difference between a thing that happens to you and a thing you can see. The next chapter is what you do with the view.

Agree what it's about

Once the row has a name and each of you has said which worry you carry, there's one more conversation to have, and it's short. You agree what the row is about. Not who's right, not what should change, not whose worry is more justified. Just what it is.

Two sentences, one each. The form is "when this happens, I feel this". "When the kitchen's left and I'm the one who notices, I feel like I'm on my own here." "When I'm told about the kitchen the moment I sit down, I feel like nothing I do counts." Each of you says yours. The other one doesn't answer it. They don't say "but you're not on your own" or "but I don't mean that". They say "all right", or they say it back, "so when I go on about the kitchen, you feel like you can't do anything right", and the other says "yes". That's the whole exchange.

Agreed, not adjudicated. The point of the two sentences is that they're both true at once, and that neither cancels the other. You feel left to it. They feel blamed. The row is what happens when those two worries meet over a dishwasher. Agreeing that is different from agreeing whose fault it is, and you'll feel the pull to adjudicate, to establish that yours is the real underneath and theirs is a reaction to it. Don't. Both are the underneath. The earlier book *They can't read your mind* has a good deal on saying what you feel in one sentence without dressing it up, and *You were waiting to talk* has the pause before you answer, and both apply here.

Say what you already know. Johnson and Roloff's follow-up study found that two things went with believing a serial argument could be resolved. Confirming the relationship during the argument, small signs that you're still on the same side, and, between arguments, comparing your relationship favourably rather than dwelling on the row. The second sentence of this conversation can be one of those. "We've been having this for six years and we're still here" is a sentence worth saying out loud, because it's true and because the row makes you forget it.

Write it down, once. The name and the two sentences, on a card or in a note on one of your phones. Not to be consulted mid-instance, but because a row that's been written down in two sentences is smaller than a row that lives in the record, and because in a month you'll want to check that the name you're saying still means what it meant.

That's the second conversation, and it's the last long one you need. From here the row is handled, not discussed.

Handle the instance

The row is named, its two sentences are agreed, and then it's Tuesday and the dishwasher's full. This is what you do, and the whole of it takes ten minutes.

Say the name. Whoever notices first says it. "This is the dishwasher." Not "here we go again", which has an edge, and not "you're doing it again", which is an accusation. The name, flat, as a statement of what's in the room. It can be said at the first sentence, which is best, or four minutes in when one of you recognises the drift. Late is fine. The name works at any point before the record opens.

Answer tonight's costume. The dishwasher needs emptying. Someone empties it, or you agree who'll do it in the morning, and that's the costume dealt with. If the costume is the in-laws, the answer is what dates and how many nights, decided in a sentence. If it's the phone, the phone goes in the drawer. Tonight's topic gets a small, literal answer, because it's a small, literal thing, and the fresh case only ever made it big by loading the row onto it.

One sentence each on the underneath. This is where the ten minutes go, and it's the part that makes the difference. Each of you says your sentence from chapter 21, in the present tense, about tonight. "I felt on my own when I saw it." "I felt got at when you said it." The other one says "I know" or "all right". Not "but", not "you always", not March. Just the sentence heard. You've each said the true thing, and the true thing has been heard, and that's what the fresh case never managed in fifty attempts.

Leave the record shut. Nothing from before tonight. If you catch yourself reaching for Sunday or March, that's the moment to say "that's the record, I'm not opening it". If your partner opens it, you don't answer the entry. You say the name again. The record is the fresh case's fuel, and an instance with the record shut runs out in minutes.

Then stop. Same room, ideally. Ten minutes in, the dishwasher's sorted, two sentences have been said and heard, and the evening is still there. That's what handled looks like. It isn't resolved, because the two of you are still two different people, and next month there'll be another costume. But nothing has been added to the record, nothing's been carried into the between, and the row is a thing that happened for ten minutes rather than a thing that took the evening.

Two pointers. If the instance is about a fact, who said what, which day it was, You don't have to win this one has the move for that. If it's after ten at night, Go to bed cross if you have to says to name a time tomorrow, and the name from this chapter is a good thing to say as you do.

The decision

You've got the argument and the method. What's left is to decide, and I'd like the decision to fit in one sentence, and I'd like both of you to make it, though chapter 24 covers what to do if only one of you will.

When the one row turns up in a new costume, we say its name, deal with tonight's costume, and leave the record shut.

Three parts.

The first is the name, said by whoever sees it first, flat, as early as possible.

The second is the costume, answered as the small thing it is, tonight, in a sentence.

The third is the record, which stays shut, tonight and every night, by both of you, and which is the part that takes the most practice.

There's a form of planning that helps with rules like this, and it's been tested many times. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran reviewed ninety-four studies of it in 2006. You decide in advance what you'll do and when, in the form "when this happens, I'll do that", and people who plan that way follow through much more often than people who only hold the intention. So write three, each of you.

When I notice the row starting, I'll say its name before I say anything about the topic.

When my partner opens the record, I'll say "that's the record" and say my one sentence instead of answering.

When the ten minutes are done, I'll stay in the room.

What to expect. This is my expectation, not a finding. The first instance after the name is agreed will be strange. One of you will say the name and the other will say "don't do that" and you'll have a short row about the name, which is the row in a new costume, and you can say so. The second and third instances will be better, and you'll notice the evening still there afterwards and not quite trust it. Somewhere around the fifth, the name will arrive on its own, from whichever of you is less tired, and you'll deal with the dishwasher and say your sentences and be done, and it'll take eight minutes, and you'll feel slightly cheated that it was that simple. By a month, the between will have changed. You'll notice you're not going over it on Wednesday, because there's nothing to go over, and the record will have stopped growing because nothing's been added to it. The row won't be gone. It'll be a thing the two of you have, like the way one of you loads the dishwasher wrong, and you'll find that a row you have is far lighter than a row you're losing.

Phillippa Lally and colleagues, following people forming a new daily habit, found that a missed day didn't materially set back the habit's formation. There'll be an instance where the name doesn't get said and the fresh case runs. Chapter 25 is for that.

Only one of you, the children, the in-laws, money, the quiet one, since the baby, and when it's more than a row

The method assumes two people at a kitchen table on a calm day. Here are the cases where it needs adjusting.

Only one of you will read this. The naming in chapter 20 and the two sentences in chapter 21 are better done together, but one person can do most of it. Name the row for yourself. Work out which worry you're in, and take a fair guess at which one your partner is in, using chapter 12. Then, at the next instance, say the name anyway, "I think this is our on-my-own row again", answer the costume, say your one sentence, and leave the record shut, on your side only. You can't shut theirs. What you'll find is that an instance where one person won't open the record is much shorter than one where both do, and that after a few of them your partner will start to hear the name as something other than a trick. Don't hand them the book mid-instance. Hand it over on a calm day, or don't hand it over at all and just do your half.

The children. When the costume is the children, who does bedtime, whose rule about screens, one of you being too soft and the other too hard, the underneath is usually the same two worries with higher stakes, and the instance is more likely to happen in front of them. Cummings' finding from chapter 16 is the guide. The short version, with the name said and the costume answered and the two of you in the same room afterwards, is on the secure list.

Fighting the fresh case about the children in front of the children is on the other one. If you can, agree the costume answer away from them, and let them see the ending.

The in-laws. The in-law row has a particular feature, which is that one of you is also defending your family, so the blamed worry gets doubled. Name it as the in-law row, not as anything about the family. Answer the costume as dates and nights. And keep the sentence about the underneath about the two of you, "I feel on my own with the arrangements", not about the mother-in-law, because the moment it's about her, it's a different row with a third person in it who isn't in the room.

Money. Papp's couples had more trouble with money rows than any other kind, and more attempts at solving them, and they stayed unsolved. If money is your costume, be especially firm about separating the costume from the row. The money question, the budget, who spends what, is real and needs a calm-day conversation with numbers in it, and the earlier books Open the envelope and Put the card away cover different parts of that. The row underneath, left to it or blamed, is not a money question, and no budget will settle it. Handle them separately or you'll handle neither.

The quiet one. If your partner is the quiet one and you're worried the method just gives them a shorter route to silence, notice that the method asks them for one sentence, and that one sentence is more than the fresh case ever got. If you're the quiet one, your sentence is the thing to practise, because it's the thing you've been

leaving out. "I felt got at" is not agreement and not surrender. It's the position you've been holding silently, said once, out loud, and it changes what your partner hears your silence as.

Since the baby. Doss's couples showed a lasting drop after a first birth, and the method needs three adjustments in that period. The calm day for chapters 20 and 21 will be a calm twenty minutes, and it'll need arranging. The costumes will nearly all be about who's more tired, and that one has no answer, so the costume answer is "we're both wrecked" and the underneath gets the sentences. And the record will be tempting, because there's so much new material in it, and shutting it matters more than ever. If either of you has been low most of the day for a fortnight or more since the birth, the NHS says that's a GP conversation, and the NHS talking therapies service takes self-referrals for postnatal depression, and the row is not the thing to work on first.

When it's more than a row. This book is for two people of good will who have a difference. If your instances come with contempt, if one of you is frightened of the other, if one of you controls the money or the phone or who the other sees, or if one of you can't leave the room or the house, that isn't a recurring row and the method doesn't apply. The NHS domestic abuse page says to call 999 in an emergency and to tell someone, including your GP. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline, run by Refuge, is on 0808 2000 247, free, day and night. The Respect Men's Advice Line is on 0808 8010 327. Galop, on 0800 999 5428, is for LGBT+ people. And if you've been trying the method in good faith and your partner uses the name against you, or the instances are getting worse rather than shorter, McNulty's finding is worth knowing. In seventy-two

new marriages, being forgiving kept people satisfied when their partner rarely behaved badly, and went with steeper declines when their partner behaved badly often. Handling an instance well is for a partner who's also trying. If they aren't, counselling from chapter 17 is the next step, and it's not the last one.

When you fought the fresh case again

It'll happen. It'll be a Thursday, both of you will be tired, the costume will be a new one you didn't recognise, and by the time either of you thought of the name you were four minutes in with March on the table and the record wide open, and it ran the way it used to run and you ended up in different rooms. And the thought that arrives afterwards is that the name didn't work, or worse, that it was never going to, and that the row is just what you are.

The name didn't fail. An instance happened, and the name wasn't said, which is a different thing. Lally's study of habit formation found that a missed day didn't materially affect whether the habit formed, and the extension from a missed day to a missed instance is mine, but I think it holds. A row that's been trained for years isn't retrained by four good instances, and the fifth going the old way doesn't undo the four. It means the path's still there. Of course it is.

The thing to do is say the name afterwards. Not to reopen the instance, and not that night if it's late, but the next morning, one sentence. "That was the dishwasher last night, and I didn't see it in time." That does two things. It puts the instance back into the row, where it belongs, instead of leaving it as a fresh case in the record, and it tells your partner that the method is still on, which they'll be wondering. If they say the name back, or say "no, I didn't either", the lapse is closed. If they use it to reopen the instance, say the name again and leave it.

Then ask which belief came back. It'll be one of the chapters. Usually it's chapter 3, the costume was so convincing that it looked like a genuinely new thing, and the answer is to add it to the list, because now you know the row wears that too. Sometimes it's chapter 6, the record got opened because an entry was too good not to use, and the answer is to notice that the entry was a reading. Sometimes it's chapter 4, and you caught yourself trying for the final version again, and the answer is to reread that chapter and remember that the final version is the fresh case's best disguise.

Don't count. Don't decide that three lapses in a month means the method's failed, and don't decide that no lapses in a month means the row's gone. The row isn't going. What you're building is a way of handling it that arrives on its own more often than it doesn't, and that's measured in months and in the between, not in any one Thursday. If the between is quieter than it was, if Wednesday isn't spent going over Tuesday, it's working, whatever Thursday did.

Tuesday, the name

It's Tuesday, about half past eight. You come into the kitchen and the dishwasher is open and full and clean, and the dirty things from dinner are on the side, and you feel it, the thing that used to become the sentence. And you say, to the sofa, "Dishwasher's clean and I can feel the row coming." Your partner says "oh, that one", and gets up, and you empty it together, which takes four minutes, and somewhere in the middle you say "I felt on my own with it when I walked in", and they say "I know, I was going to and then I sat down and I felt like I was about to be told off for it", and you say "yeah". And that's it. The kettle goes on. The evening is still there, and you're both in it.

Nothing has been resolved. You still want the kitchen clear before you sit down and they still want to sit down first, and in March there'll be some costume neither of you has seen yet. But the row has a name, and its two sentences have been said and heard, and nothing was added to the record, and tomorrow there's nothing to go over.

If you take one thing from this book, take this. On a calm day this week, tell your partner you'd like ten minutes to talk about the row you keep having, not the last instance of it. Do chapter 20. Give it a name. That's all. The rest follows from a name, and a row with a name is already a smaller row than the one you had last Tuesday.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical, psychological or legal advice. If your relationship involves fear, control or violence, the services named in the preface and chapter 24 are the place to start, not this book. The examples throughout, the dishwasher on a Tuesday, the thing from March, the in-laws at Christmas, the phone at dinner, the Saturday plan, the baby monitor on the side, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people. All timings are my estimates.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a study is a survey at one point in time, it describes an association and can't show what causes what, and I've tried to say so each time. Several of the studies are of married or dating couples in the United States, and I've applied them to couples generally.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 3. Papp, Cummings and Goeke-Morey, "For richer, for poorer: money as a topic of marital conflict in the home", *Family Relations* 58, 2009, pages 91 to 103. 100 married couples, diary reports of 748 conflicts. The extension from money rows to costumes generally, and the leak and the stain, are mine.

Chapter 4. Johnson and Roloff, "Serial arguing and relational quality: determinants and consequences of perceived resolvability", *Communication Research* 25, 1998, pages 327 to 343. A survey of people in dating relationships, sample size not given in the abstract. The claim that the sense of unresolvability rather than the row does the damage is my reading of a correlational finding, and the claim that trying for the final version makes it worse is my interpretation.

Chapter 5. Christensen, Atkins, Berns, Wheeler, Baucom and Simpson, "Traditional versus integrative behavioral couple therapy for significantly and chronically distressed married couples", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 72, 2004, pages 176 to 191. Christensen, Atkins, Baucom and Yi, "Marital status and satisfaction five years following a randomized clinical trial comparing traditional versus integrative behavioral couple therapy", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 78, 2010, pages 225 to 235. 134 couples. The description of the integrative therapy's emphasis on acceptance is from general knowledge of the approach and is stated as its designers' description. The claim that two different people produce a row is mine.

Chapter 6. Bradbury and Fincham, "Attributions in marriage: review and critique", *Psychological Bulletin* 107, 1990, pages 3 to 33. A review. The claim that the record is a file of readings is my extension. The earlier books referred to are *You don't have to win this one* and *You can be wrong out loud*.

Chapter 7. Papp and colleagues, as above. The earlier book referred to is *Say it this week*.

Chapter 8. Christensen and Heavey, "Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 59, 1990, pages 73 to 81. 31 couples. Johnson and Roloff 1998, as above. The claim that the push is half the row is mine. The earlier book referred to is They can't read your mind.

Chapter 9. Christensen and Heavey, and Johnson and Roloff 1998, as above. The extension from withdrawal after an episode to going quiet during one is mine. The earlier book referred to is Go to bed cross if you have to.

Chapter 10. Johnson and Roloff 1998, as above, for predictability. The rest is my interpretation.

Chapter 11. Sanford, "Perceived threat and perceived neglect: couples' underlying concerns during conflict", Psychological Assessment 22, 2010, pages 288 to 297. Two studies of 1,224 and 2,315 married people. The plain words blamed and left to it are mine, and the claim that the underneath is in the first sentence is mine.

Chapter 12. Sanford, as above. Sanford measured the two concerns in individuals, and the claim that the two partners in a recurring row usually carry one each is my interpretation and is said to be. The earlier book referred to is It wasn't about you.

Chapter 13. Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton and Gross, "A brief intervention to promote conflict reappraisal preserves marital quality over time", Psychological Science 24, 2013, pages 1595 to

1601. 120 couples. The description of the writing task is from the abstract and general knowledge of the paper. The claim that a name is reappraisal in a word is mine.

Chapter 14. Overall and McNulty, "What type of communication during conflict is beneficial for intimate relationships?", *Current Opinion in Psychology* 13, 2017, pages 1 to 5. A review. The sorting of the one row into what can change and what can't is my suggestion.

Chapter 15. Doss, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman, "The effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality: an 8-year prospective study", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96, 2009, pages 601 to 619. 218 couples. The claim that the row is portable is mine.

Chapter 16. Cummings, Goeke-Morey and Papp, "Children's responses to everyday marital conflict tactics in the home", *Child Development* 74, 2003, pages 1918 to 1929. 116 families. The application to the short version is mine. The earlier book referred to is Not in front of the children.

Chapter 17. Christensen and colleagues 2004 and 2010, as above. The NHS page on counselling, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any particular service.

Chapter 18. Johnson and Roloff 1998, as above. The costs are my observations.

Chapter 19. No research sources. The mechanism described is my interpretation, and the path across grass is mine.

Chapter 20. Sanford, as above. The method is my suggestion and hasn't been tested as a package.

Chapter 21. Johnson and Roloff, "Correlates of the perceived resolvability and relational consequences of serial arguing in dating relationships: argumentative features and the use of coping strategies", *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 17, 2000, pages 676 to 686. A survey of undergraduates. The earlier books referred to are *They can't read your mind* and *You were waiting to talk*.

Chapter 22. No research sources. The method is mine. The earlier books referred to are *You don't have to win this one* and *Go to bed cross if you have to*.

Chapter 23. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. What I say to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 24. Cummings and colleagues, Papp and colleagues, Doss and colleagues, as above. McNulty, "Forgiveness in marriage: putting the benefits into context", *Journal of Family Psychology* 22, 2008, pages 171 to 175. 72 couples over two years. The NHS pages on domestic violence and abuse, on counselling, on talking therapies and on low mood, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The

helpline numbers are as the NHS page gave them on that date and should be checked against it. The earlier books referred to are Open the envelope and Put the card away.

Chapter 25. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a missed instance is mine.

Looked up and not used. John Gottman's writing on what he calls perpetual problems, and the figure often quoted from his books that most couples' conflicts are of that kind, wasn't found in a peer-reviewed abstract available to me, and the figure isn't printed. Gottman, Coan, Carrère and Swanson's 1998 study of newlywed interactions had no abstract available. Wile's line that choosing a partner means choosing a set of problems is widely quoted but I couldn't confirm the book from here, so the point is made in my own words. Cloven and Roloff's 1991 paper on mulling and Bevan, Finan and Kaminsky's 2008 serial argument process model were found as records without abstracts and aren't cited. Karney and Bradbury's 1995 review of 115 longitudinal studies of marriage describes method rather than findings in its abstract and isn't cited.