A PRACTICAL WORKBOOK FOR TWO PEOPLE PREPARING TO BUILD A FAMILY

THE LIFE WE WILL BUILD

A shared family design workbook

Not two individual plans negotiated into one.

A family life understood, designed and practiced together.

FIVE CONVERSATIONS / PRACTICAL WORKSHEETS / A FAMILY CHARTER / A 90-DAY TEST

Person one _____

Person two _____

Date _____

Begin with the family

This is not a compatibility test or a promise to agree on everything. Its purpose is to examine what family life is for, then design an everyday life that can fulfil that purpose.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

DISCUSS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

What can we make possible as a family that we cannot make possible in the same way by living separately?

THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

A family is not one person enlarged. Both people retain their judgment, dignity, friendships, privacy and the freedom to say no.

A family is not a compromise of two wish lists. Explore the purpose behind each wish, then look for a way of living that meets real needs fairly.

A family exists in relationships. Include parents, extended family, possible children, friends, those who support your home, society and nature.

WHAT YOU WILL LEAVE WITH

01 A shared definition of a good family life and the evidence that would show it is real.

02 Concrete designs for relationships, resources, work, care, time and major decisions.

03 A one-page charter, a list of unresolved questions and three experiments to begin now.

A USEFUL STANDARD Do not measure success by how many answers you agree on. Measure it by how accurately you understand the questions, how freely each person can speak and what you can responsibly practice.

Five conversations, not one meeting

Choose a quiet setting. Leave time between conversations to reconsider assumptions and check facts. This exercise is more valuable when neither person is rushed to a conclusion.

SITTING	FOCUS	PAGES / PROPOSED TIME
01	Purpose, human needs, assumptions and the future picture	4-7 / 90-120 min
02	How we treat each other, relatives, children and elders	8-10 / 90-120 min
03	Material sufficiency, work, care and the weekly rhythm	11-14 / 90-120 min
04	Wider responsibilities, autonomy and difficult choices	15-19 / 90-120 min
05	Open questions, charter and 90-day experiments	20-23 / 90-120 min

THE FIVE-STEP METHOD

01 Reflect separately. Write initial thinking privately for 10 minutes. This protects each person from simply echoing the other.

02 Listen and reflect back. Each person speaks without interruption. The listener restates what they heard and asks whether it was accurate.

03 Examine. Separate a fact, a personal preference, a family expectation and an untested belief. Ask what evidence would change your view.

04 Design together. Choose a specific practice or arrangement. Write in "we" language only if both freely agree.

05 Mark the status. Agreed / experiment / unresolved / requires outside information. Never write a forced agreement.

NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITIONS

Either person may pause, disagree, keep a private matter private, or decline a commitment. Silence is not agreement.

Neither family pressure nor a signature substitutes for consent. Major decisions require genuine mutual choice.

If intimidation, coercion, threats or control are present, stop the joint exercise and seek independent support.

WHAT TO BRING Two notebooks, this workbook, a pencil and access to real household or financial information when appropriate. Sharing sensitive records is voluntary and should be discussed safely.

Why form this family?

Do not begin with a house, income, ceremony or social expectation. First examine what kind of life your relationship is intended to make possible.

What becomes possible through living and taking responsibility together?

What do we hope a family can offer its members beyond convenience, comfort or social recognition?

Who is affected by the family we build? What do we owe them, and what are the limits of that responsibility?

If nobody praised our lifestyle, what would still make it worth choosing?

WORKING PURPOSE

We want our family to make possible...

CHECK YOUR REASONING Is this an inherited expectation, a personal preference, a belief you can examine or something you have already observed in real life?

What are we actually seeking?

Consider two different kinds of requirements: those that involve understanding and relationships, and those that can be met through physical resources. Both matter, but they are not interchangeable.

DIMENSION	QUESTIONS TO EXAMINE	HOW WOULD WE RECOGNIZE IT?
Understanding	Can we reason clearly, learn from mistakes, remain curious and resolve questions?	
Relationships	Can we live with trust, respect, care, honesty and mutual participation?	
Physical well-being	What food, shelter, health care, rest and tools do we actually need?	
Wider belonging	Does our life help people around us and avoid damaging the living world?	

Which things have given us a brief pleasure without resolving a continuing concern?

Which conditions must remain present even if our income or status changes?

OUR FIRST DEFINITION

For our family, a good life means...

What do we know, and how?

A convincing family design must survive questions. Identify assumptions you inherited from family, culture, advertising, work or personal experience without treating any source as automatically right or wrong.

EXAMPLE OF AN ASSUMPTION AUDIT

CLAIM	WHY WE THINK THIS	WHAT WE SHOULD CHECK
We must buy a home immediately.	Family pressure; feeling of security.	Housing cost, actual needs, flexibility and debt risk.
The higher earner should decide.	Assumption that income defines contribution.	Fairness, unpaid work and both people's freedom to decide.

OUR ASSUMPTIONS TO EXAMINE

CLAIM OR EXPECTATION	SOURCE / REASON	FACT OR EXPERIENCE WE CAN CHECK

ONE BELIEF WE MAY CHANGE

What have we realized we cannot yet justify?

WORKING RULE A different opinion is not automatically a misunderstanding. Some differences concern real priorities or boundaries. Understanding can lead to a joint design, an open question or a decision not to proceed.

An ordinary day, ten years from now

Imagine a normal weekday with ordinary tasks, no celebration and no audience. Describe actions and relationships, not just a beautiful home or ideal careers.

TIME	WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR HOME?	WHAT SHOWS WE ARE LIVING WELL?
Morning		
Midday		
Afternoon		
Evening		
Before sleep		

What happens on a tiring or disappointing day? How do we behave then?

What would a guest notice after spending a full week with us?

THE REAL TEST

Which part of this day can we start living before marriage?

What can we count on from each other?

Replace abstract qualities with observable actions. Consider both intention and ability, but evaluate harmful behavior by its actual impact and make repairs where needed.

WHAT WE VALUE	ONE PRACTICE WE CAN OBSERVE
Trust and honesty	
Respect and equality	
Affection and kindness	
Care for health and well-being	
Helping one another learn	
Gratitude and appreciation	

What will we do when someone makes a mistake, feels misunderstood or changes a view?

How will we make it safe to say "I do not know," "I disagree" or "I need space"?

ONE RELATIONSHIP PROMISE

A practice that both of us freely choose and can observe...

IMPORTANT Good intentions do not erase harm. Care does not permit control, monitoring or ignoring boundaries.

Who is part of our family life?

Plan with the larger network in view without assuming every relationship requires the same degree of time, closeness, money or responsibility.

PERSON OR GROUP	RESPONSIBILITY OR CARE WE RECOGNIZE	BOUNDARY / CONSULTATION NEEDED
Each other		
Both sets of parents or guardians		
Siblings, relatives and elders		
Friends and mentors		
People who support our household		

What have our families taught us that we would like to continue? What do we choose to change?

Which family expectations require a conversation before the wedding?

ONE SHARED PRACTICE

How will we stay connected and care for important relationships?

Children, elders and the future

Some questions require an explicit decision; others must stay open. If children become part of the family, their well-being and independent development are responsibilities, not extensions of the parents' ambitions.

QUESTION	OUR CURRENT VIEW / OPEN QUESTIONS
Do we both want children? If so, under what conditions and when?	
How would we share childcare, learning and household work?	
What values would children learn simply by observing us?	
What support may parents or elders need from us?	
What financial and practical boundaries make this sustainable?	

If one person cannot, does not wish to or later changes their position about having children, how will we respond?

OPEN DECISIONS

Topics where a genuine shared answer is still needed...

CONSENT Marriage does not create automatic consent to parenthood, physical intimacy or any irreversible decision.

How much is enough?

Estimate what the family actually needs, rather than treating every available purchase as necessary. Use real amounts where possible and mark estimates requiring verification.

MONTHLY FAMILY NEEDS FRAMEWORK

NEED	SUFFICIENT STANDARD	MONTHLY ESTIMATE	HOW WE KNOW
Food and household essentials			
Housing and utilities			
Health, care and protection			
Travel and tools			
Learning and development			
Support for dependents			
Savings and contingency			

Monthly total estimate: _____ Annual / irregular costs: _____

What are we calling a need that may actually be a habit, comparison or wish for recognition?

SUFFICIENCY TEST

We would consider our family's material needs reliably met when...

CLARIFICATION A target amount is an estimate, not a moral measure. Revise it as health, dependents, prices and circumstances change.

How will we create and use resources?

Material security depends on skills, productive work, reliable access to resources, realistic savings and mutual care. Earning money and contributing unpaid work both matter.

DECISION	OUR SHARED WORKING PLAN
Sources of livelihood and the work we want to do	
Minimum reserve and approach to debt	
How income, savings and decisions remain transparent	
How we recognize unpaid care and domestic work	
How we will use surplus beyond our needs	
What work we will not pursue, even if it pays more	

If we lost one income for twelve months, which commitments could we continue, pause or redesign?

OUR APPROACH TO PROSPERITY

What kind of security and useful contribution would allow us to feel that we have enough?

Who does what, and how do we review it?

Design roles as responsibilities, not ranks. Be explicit about both visible tasks and the invisible work of remembering, planning and coordinating them.

RESPONSIBILITY	LEAD	SUPPORT	BACKUP / REVIEW
Meals, groceries and kitchen			
Cleaning, maintenance and supplies			
Bills, records and administrative work			
Health and medical coordination			
Family contact and elder care			
Learning, scheduling and shared time			
Childcare if applicable			

If paid work, health, caregiving or time availability changes, how will we redistribute responsibilities?

FAIRNESS TEST

Would this arrangement still seem reasonable if our earnings or roles were reversed?

AIM An agreed role does not make one person permanently responsible. Design changes should be possible without guilt or resentment.

Design a week we can actually live

A family's priorities are visible in its calendar. Start with an ordinary week that includes work, health, rest, relationship time, household care, learning and contribution to others.

PERIOD	ORDINARY WEEKDAY	WEEKEND OR DAY OFF
Early day		
Midday		
Afternoon		
Evening		
Night / rest		

Where do we reserve time for individual friendships, solitude and personal growth?

What is our arrangement during illness, deadlines, travel or periods of intense caregiving?

THREE RECURRING FAMILY PRACTICES

Select practices that fit our life rather than symbolic promises we cannot sustain.

What does our family contribute?

Family well-being is connected to the well-being of other people and the natural world. Consider what our work, purchases, use of resources and daily conduct enable or damage.

WHERE WE PARTICIPATE	WHAT WE RECEIVE	WHAT WE CAN CONTRIBUTE
Neighbourhood and community		
Those who work with or for us		
Education and support of younger people		
Livelihood and economic exchange		
Food, water, energy and materials		

Would our way of living still seem fair if many families chose to live this way?

TWO REAL COMMITMENTS

One regular contribution to people outside our home, and one way to reduce avoidable waste.

What belongs to each person and what is shared?

A shared family purpose must not become a claim over the other person. Define how decisions will be made and how freedom, privacy, consent and access to resources will be protected.

AREA	DECISION APPROACH / SAFEGUARD
Major spending, housing and relocation	
Career changes and working hours	
Physical intimacy and reproductive choices	
Personal privacy, friendships and time alone	
Family obligations and visiting relatives	
Health decisions and personal information	

Which decisions require active agreement from both? Which can each person make independently?

NON-NEGOTIABLE BOUNDARIES

What must never be obtained through pressure, fear, guilt or concealment?

REMEMBER Respect includes the freedom to withhold consent, ask for time, retain independent support and decline a relationship that does not feel safe.

How will we handle differences?

A disagreement is information. Sometimes it reveals a misunderstanding, but sometimes it shows a genuine difference in needs, values or boundaries. The goal is accurate understanding and a responsible choice, not a forced consensus.

1 **Name the issue.** Describe one observable concern without blame or "always" and "never" statements.

2 **Hear each account.** Give both people uninterrupted time. Reflect back before replying.

3 **Distinguish facts from interpretation.** What happened? What do we assume? What else might explain it?

4 **Identify the needs and limits.** What must be protected for each person and for others affected?

5 **Generate options.** Find at least two workable possibilities, including postponing a decision.

6 **Check consent and consequences.** Can both say yes freely? What happens if it does not work?

7 **Record and review.** Decide whether to agree, experiment, seek more information or keep the question open.

PRACTICE ON A GENUINE DISAGREEMENT

What do we disagree about? What meaning or concern lies beneath each position?

Which facts would help? What alternatives have we not yet considered?

WHAT WE CAN RESPONSIBLY DO NEXT

Agreement / experiment / further information / unresolved

SAFETY RULE Either person may take a break and propose a reasonable time to return. There is no requirement to reopen a distressing conversation before it is safe to do so.

Test a difficult family choice

Read the scenario, then use the previous page. Do not pick a quick compromise. Find the underlying purpose, protect both voices, compare alternatives and leave irreversible choices open until both are ready.

SCENARIO A: THE OFFER

One person receives a compelling job offer in another city. Income increases, but one partner would leave their work and a parent nearby needs regular help.

What would each person be trying to protect, and what facts are missing?

What are three different arrangements we could seriously consider?

SCENARIO B: A DIFFICULT SEASON

For six months, one person cannot earn. Household work and care needs increase. Savings cover essentials but not everything originally planned.

Which needs, promises and relationships should we protect first?

OUR DECISION PRACTICE

What would make a response fair, workable and reviewable in both scenarios?

Explore three possible family designs

There is rarely only one way to live well. Design three viable forms of family life, then compare them by how well they support the purpose you defined, not by external prestige.

FAMILY MODEL	WHERE AND HOW WE LIVE	BENEFITS	REAL COSTS / RISKS
A Current trajectory			
B Different living or work arrangement			
C Simpler or more community-oriented arrangement			

EVALUATE, DO NOT VOTE

Which elements are essential across all three? Which depend only on habit or image?

What could we prototype or ask an experienced family before deciding?

OUR PROVISIONAL DIRECTION

We are leaning toward... because... We will check...

What must be understood before commitment?

A high-quality conversation can end with a well-defined open question. Record what is not yet settled, its importance and the next responsible action. Never turn uncertainty into a promise.

TOPIC	STATUS	WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW OR DISCUSS	NEXT REVIEW
Location / household			
Children / parenting			
Parents / elder care			
Money / work			
Privacy / boundaries			
Other			

A SIMPLE STATUS KEY

Agreed Both understand and freely choose the same concrete decision.

Experiment We agree only to try a reversible approach and review the result.

Open We need time, a different option or an honest acceptance of the difference.

Check facts A decision depends on information we have not yet verified.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CONVERSATION STILL AHEAD

What cannot responsibly be left to chance?

Our family charter

Summarize only commitments that both people genuinely understand and freely accept. This is a living draft, not a contract that makes either person subordinate to the other.

OUR PURPOSE

Our family exists to make possible...

A GOOD LIFE, IN OBSERVABLE TERMS

We will know we are living well when...

OUR CONDUCT TOWARD EACH OTHER

People in this home can count on...

OUR CIRCLE OF RESPONSIBILITY

For parents, children if any, other people and nature, we will...

OUR SUFFICIENCY AND WORK

We will organize needs, work, money and resources so that...

OUR FREEDOM AND DIALOGUE

When decisions are difficult or we disagree, we will...

OPTIONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Person one: _____ Person two: _____

Date: _____ Next review date: _____

NO PRESSURE A signature does not erase the right to reconsider, disagree, choose differently or withdraw consent.

The first 90 days

Begin with reversible practices that are possible now. A good experiment observes what actually happens instead of assuming that writing a charter makes it real.

EXPERIMENT	START DATE	WHAT WE WILL OBSERVE	REVIEW DATE
1			
2			
3			

EXAMPLES TO ADAPT, NOT COPY

Conversation A 30-minute weekly review. Each person identifies one thing working and one difficulty, with no interruptions.

Resources Track actual shared living costs for one month and compare them with your needs estimate.

Responsibilities Run a two-week task-sharing trial and ask both people whether it feels fair and sustainable.

YOUR EVIDENCE

What action or repeated behavior would indicate genuine progress?

ONE CHANGE WE WILL MAKE IF THE EXPERIMENT FAILS

A failed test is information, not proof that one person has failed.

Review the life, not only the plan

A family is not completed by filling in a workbook. Its design becomes trustworthy through lived choices, honest evaluation and willingness to revise what does not work.

WHEN	WHAT WE WILL REVIEW
Every week	One appreciation, one difficulty, one useful action for the next week.
Every month	Compare actual time, responsibilities, resources and relationships with our intentions.
At major change	Revisit location, income, health, caregiving, children and commitments when circumstances change.
Every year	Reread the charter, rewrite assumptions and renew only the commitments that remain freely chosen.

A SHORT REVIEW CONVERSATION

Where did our actions match the family we said we wanted to build?

Where did the gap between intention and action appear, and what explains it?

What did we understand about each other that we had not understood before?

OUR NEXT STEP

One real action, the person or people involved and the day we will begin.