



THE 30-DAY WORKBOOK

Back to Each Other

The 30-Day Reconnection Workbook for Couples.

closen

Closer, a little each day.

Why you picked this up

You weren't looking for a relationship book. You're not in crisis — nobody's slamming doors. From the outside it probably looks fine: you're a good team, he's a good dad, the calendar runs.

But somewhere in the last few years, the two of you quietly turned into the people who manage a household together. The talking is logistics now — who's got pickup, the orthodontist on Friday, what's for dinner. At 9:30 you both fold onto the couch, each on your own phone, the TV talking to nobody.

"Night." "Night." And you lie there thinking the thing you never say out loud: *I miss him. He's right here, and I miss him.*

That's the feeling. Not a fire — an erosion. Slow, quiet, easy to keep ignoring because nothing is technically wrong. You picked this up because some part of you has stopped being willing to ignore it. Here's the whole promise of the next 30 days: small. No weekend away. No therapist's office. No two-hour conversations you don't know how to start. One short thing a day, built to fit the life you already have — until "roommates" stops being the word for the two of you.

A note to him

Hey — quick one. This page is for you.

Your wife picked up this book. Before you file it under "a relationship thing," here's what it actually is, straight:

It isn't therapy. Nobody's going to ask you to dig through your childhood or talk about your feelings for an hour. It isn't a verdict on you — she didn't choose this because you're the thing that needs fixing. And it isn't one more big commitment on a calendar that's already full.

What it is: about 30 minutes a day, split so you're rarely doing more than 15 at a stretch. Most days you get a clear thing to do — a script, a timer, one specific question — not "so... let's talk." (If open-ended talking makes you want to leave the room — same. That's exactly why this isn't that.) The first week is easy on purpose, so you can see it's not a trap.

She's not asking you to fix anything. She's asking you to do one small thing with her, most days, for a month. That's the entire ask.

You've got this.

How this works

Every day has the same simple shape, so you never have to wonder what to do.

A short **title** — a real moment, not a chapter heading. A two-minute "**Today's why**" so you know the point of it. Then **your minutes**, split in two: a **Solo** part (5–10 minutes — a little writing or thinking you can do on a lunch break or in the car) and a **Together** part (15–20 minutes — the actual thing you do as a couple, usually in the quiet before bed). Some days, a quick **note for him**. And room to write.

A few days each week are lighter — ten minutes, on purpose. Thirty days flat-out, for two tired people, is how a book like this ends up face-down in a drawer. We'd rather you finish.

The one rule that matters: this is not a streak. The days aren't tied to dates. Miss a day, miss a week, miss the kids' entire spring break — it's fine. Pick up exactly where you left off. Nothing resets, nobody's counting. The only way to fail at this is to decide that falling behind means quitting. It doesn't.

The 5 pressure points

Before Day 1, a quick read on where the strain is actually coming from. This isn't a test and there are no wrong answers — you're just naming the weather before you head out.

Each of you, on your own, give every line a number from **1** (we're okay here) to **5** (this one's heavy right now). Don't show each other yet.

Money. The quiet math — the thing you avoid bringing up because it turns into *that* conversation.

Work, and what's left of you after it. Most evenings you hand each other the leftovers. Whoever's less wiped out wins.

The kids come first. Always. They get the best of both of you; you two split whatever's left, which lately is the dregs.

Closeness. The hugs got shorter, the bed got quieter, and neither of you really says anything about it.

Actually talking. When did "how was your day?" stop being a real question?

Now compare. You're not looking for matching numbers — you're looking for the lines *either* of you marked high. Those are the days in here that'll land hardest for you, and the direction this whole month is quietly pointing.

Heads up for him. five numbers, two minutes, no conversation required yet. You're just taking the temperature.

The map of the month

Thirty days, five phases, one direction. You don't need to memorise any of this — every day tells you exactly what to do when you get there. But if you like knowing where a road goes before you take it, here it is.

DAY 0 – 1

PHASE 0

Where Are We?

DAYS 2 – 3

PHASE 1

Find Each Other Again

DAYS 4 – 10

PHASE 2

The Little Things

DAYS 11 – 20

PHASE 3

Bringing Back the Joy

DAYS 21 – 25

PHASE 4

Really Talking Again

DAYS 26 – 30

PHASE 5

Closer Than Roommates

Remember the one rule: this is not a streak. The days are numbered, not dated — pick up exactly where you left off.

What You Miss, Exactly

You've called it "off" so many times the word's gone soft — a flat dinner, a goodnight with your backs already turning, that lonely-in-the-same-room feeling on the couch at 9:30. The vagueness is comfortable. It's also exactly why nothing moves: you can't reach for something you've never named. So today isn't about him, and it isn't about fixing anything — it's just you, on paper, putting a finger on the one thing you actually miss. Out loud, that's a heavy two-hour conversation. Written down, just for you, it's one quiet sentence.

YOUR 5 MINUTES — SOLO

On paper, nobody reading over your shoulder. Below are three half-sentences. Finish whichever one catches — you only need one to land, as long as it's true. And push past the first easy answer: the honest one is usually the second thing you think of.

The thing I miss isn't _____ — it's _____.

The last time I felt genuinely close to him was _____.

Lately, the version of me he gets is _____.

YOUR 3 MINUTES — TOGETHER

Tonight, somewhere quiet. You read out loud just one line you wrote — the one you're willing to say. His whole job is to hear it. No response, no "well, actually," no fixing, no asking to see the rest of the page. You're not solving anything tonight; you're letting one true sentence sit in the room between you. It's allowed to be a little awkward — that's just what day one feels like.

Heads up for him. tonight she's going to read you one sentence — one. You don't have to answer it, fix it, or match it. Just hear it and let it land. The worst move is to problem-solve it; the easiest win is to not. Three minutes and you're done. You've got this.

Find Each Other Again

You've named where it's worn thin, and the one thing you miss. Here's the first step back — and it's smaller and stranger than you'd expect. Not a grand gesture, not a four-hour talk. Just this: figuring out how the two of you actually take in love, which is almost never the way you're each currently handing it out. Right now you're both pouring effort into a cup the other doesn't drink from — trying hard, feeling unseen, both of you. Two short days fixes the aim. By the end you'll each be holding the other's cheat sheet, and you'll have spent it once.

The One That Landed

Here's the quiet trap of a long marriage: you're both still trying. He does the things he thinks say *I love you*; you do yours. And you both go to bed feeling like it didn't reach anyone. It's not that the effort's gone — it's that you're each handing it over in your own currency, and it's not the one the other one spends. So today you stop guessing what he needs, and you stop theorizing about yourself too. You look at evidence instead: the last time something he did actually landed — actually reached you — and you work out *why*. One real moment tells you more than any quiz could.

YOUR 7 MINUTES — SOLO

On paper, just for you. Think back to the most recent time you felt genuinely cared for by him — not a big occasion, probably something small and ordinary. Write down what happened. Then the part that matters: what *about* it reached you? Push past "he was being nice." Was it that he noticed the thing you never said out loud? That he took a job off your plate without being asked? That he just wanted you near, no reason attached? That he said the specific thing instead of "love you" on the way out the door? Strip it down to one sentence: *What reaches me is when he* _____

YOUR 10 MINUTES — TOGETHER

Tonight, trade. Each of you reads out your one sentence — "*what reaches me is when you...*" — and the small moment behind it. Two rules. You don't get to argue with the other's sentence ("but I do that all the time" — not tonight). And you don't defend your own track record. You're not keeping score; you're each collecting one piece of information about the other you didn't have this morning. Hear it, and write theirs down so you don't lose it — you'll want it tomorrow.

Heads up for him. nothing to fix here — you're just trading notes. She tells you the one thing that reaches her, you tell her yours. Fight the urge to defend yourself ("I do that!") — just collect hers like a tip you don't want to forget. Ten minutes. You'll use it tomorrow.

Landing One Back

Yesterday you each handed the other something most couples spend years guessing at: the exact thing that reaches them. Today you spend it — once, on purpose. Not your version of love, *theirs*. Look at the sentence they gave you and do one concrete thing that fits it: if what reaches her is being noticed, notice out loud; if what reaches him is a clear win instead of a vague "we should talk," hand him one. It'll feel a little deliberate, maybe even unnatural. Good — that's the sign you're doing theirs and not just defaulting to yours. The natural one is the one that's been quietly missing the mark for years.

YOUR 2 MINUTES — SOLO

Look at the one sentence your partner gave you last night. Decide one specific thing you'll actually do today that spends exactly that currency — not a someday intention, a today one. Write it in a few words so it's real: *Today I'll* _____.

TODAY — TOGETHER / APART

Do it. Some of these are a moment tonight; some happen mid-day — a text, a job just taken care of, a few minutes of full attention with the phone face-down. Either way, one rule: it has to be *their* currency, not a nice thing you'd have done anyway. You're not asking for it back today, and you're not pointing it out afterward. You just spend it, and let them feel it land.

Heads up for him. this is the one where you actually do something — but she handed you the exact instructions yesterday, so no guessing and no romance-improv required. Do the one thing she said. Just one, just today. If it feels slightly forced, that means you're doing hers instead of yours — which is the whole point. That's genuinely it.

PHASE 2 • DAYS 4 – 10

The Little Things

You've just done the opening move — one deliberate thing in each other's currency. Now the easy part. The next week is the easiest on purpose. Nothing here asks you to Talk About The Relationship. We're just rebuilding the small, ordinary moments that quietly went missing — because that's what a day is actually made of, and because it's the gentlest way back in.

(Mike: this week is low-effort by design. No deep conversations. You have my word.)

The First Five Minutes

When one of you walks back through the door, the first thing you say is almost always logistics — "Did you grab the milk?", "Where are the kids?", "What's for dinner?" Somewhere along the way the reunion quietly turned into a handover. It's not cold, exactly. It's just efficient. But those first five minutes set the temperature of the whole evening, and right now they're being spent on admin.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

think back to when you first lived together. What did seeing each other again actually feel like then? Write down one small thing you used to do at hello and don't anymore.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

tonight, agree on one rule for the first five minutes after the second person gets home — no logistics, no phones, no kids' schedule. One question each: "What was the best part of your day?" — and actually listen to the answer before anyone says the word dinner. The milk can wait five minutes.

Heads up for him. Five minutes. One question. Then talk about whatever you want — including dinner. Nobody's asking you to process feelings. Just don't lead with the to-do list.

The 10-Second Goodbye

Most couples have stopped saying goodbye like they mean it — a distracted "bye" tossed over a shoulder while hunting for car keys. It's tiny. But it quietly sets the temperature of the whole day apart.

Your 20 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

write down one thing you genuinely appreciated about how your partner handled this morning.

TOGETHER (10 MIN)

tomorrow, before either of you leaves the house, stop. Face each other. A real goodbye — eye contact, a proper hug, ten unhurried seconds.

Heads up for him. This one's easy. No talking required. Ten seconds. You've got this.

The Six-Second Hug

There's a hug that says hello, and a hug that says "I'm holding a coffee and we're both late." Most couples only do the second kind now — a one-armed sideways bump on the way past each other. You don't need a study to know the difference; your body knows it. A hug that lasts a beat longer than it's polite to is the one that actually lands. It takes six seconds. You have six seconds.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

today, just notice every time you and your partner touch by accident — passing in the hallway, reaching for the same thing. Write down how many times. Most people are surprised how few.

TOGETHER (10 MIN)

once today, hug each other and don't let go at the normal moment. Count to six in your head. It will feel slightly too long — that's the point. The too-long part is the part that went missing.

Heads up for him. This isn't a conversation. It's a hug that lasts two seconds longer than usual. That's the entire ask.

One Thing You Don't Know Anymore

When you first got together you were a student of each other — you knew their favorite everything, the band they were into, the coworker they couldn't stand. Then life got logistical, and somewhere you stopped updating the file. The person across the dinner table has had new thoughts this year you've never heard. The good news: you're allowed to get curious again, and curiosity is the least threatening way back in.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down three things you're honestly not sure you know about your partner's life right now — what's stressing them at work, the last thing that made them laugh, something they've been wanting to do and haven't.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

ask one of them tonight. Not as an interview — just "I realised I don't actually know what's been the hardest part of your week. What is it?" Then listen, without turning it into fixing.

The Silent Thank-You

You notice things. He topped up your car without mentioning it. She handled the school thing so you didn't have to. Most of these observations quietly die in your head, because saying them out loud feels like making a thing of it. But the unspoken noticing is exactly what turns a partner into a roommate — seen, never said.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

write down one specific thing your partner did in the last few days that you noticed and didn't mention. Be specific — not "you're helpful" but "you took the bins out in the rain."

TOGETHER (5 MIN)

tell them. One sentence. Don't build it into a speech — the specificity is the gift.

Heads up for him. This is a ten-second sentence, not a card or a grand gesture. "Hey — I noticed you did X. Thanks." Done. That's genuinely it.

The Text You Stopped Sending

Your texts used to have no reason. Now they all have a subject line — "can you grab milk," "running late," "did the school call." The channel became a logistics tool, which is fine, except it means the only time your phone lights up with their name, it's a task. One message today with no agenda changes, just a little, what the sound of their name does to you.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

think of one small thing from earlier today you'd have told them about back when you told each other everything — a song, a thought, something daft you saw.

TOGETHER / APART (5 MIN)

send it during the day, with nothing attached. No question, no task. Just the thing. (If you're together all day, say it out loud at a moment that isn't about logistics.)

What Felt Like You Two

You've just spent a week on small things — a real goodbye, a hug that lasted, a text with no task in it. Some felt natural. At least one probably felt forced, and that's fine. The point of this week was never all seven — it was finding the one or two that fit your actual life. The little things aren't the destination; they're proof the wiring still works. Next week we use that wiring for something bigger: bringing back the moments you used to enjoy together, not just the ones you keep running.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

look back over Days 4–9. Which small thing surprised you by how much it landed — the one you'd miss if it vanished?

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

agree to keep that one — not as a rule, just "let's keep doing this." Then, looking ahead: each of you name one thing you used to love doing together and haven't done in too long. Don't plan it. Just put it on the table. That's where next week starts.

Heads up for him. Week one's done — and notice it wasn't a trap. No big talks, nothing dragged out of you. Next week is the good part: stuff you actually used to enjoy.

Bringing Back the Joy

Last week was maintenance — the small things that keep a day from going cold. This week we're not maintaining, we're adding back. Somewhere in the logistics, the two of you stopped doing the things you actually enjoyed together — not the big holidays, the small pleasures. They didn't end on purpose; they got crowded out by everything louder. This week we make a little room for them again.

(Mike: still no heavy talks. This week is mostly doing, not discussing.)

What You Used to Do

At the end of last week, each of you named one thing you used to love doing together and hadn't in too long. Look at what you named. It probably wasn't expensive or complicated — a particular walk, a show you watched together, cooking something properly on a Sunday. These didn't stop because you fell out of love with them. They got crowded out by everything louder. And the good thing about a small pleasure is that it's small — you can put it back this week without clearing your calendar.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down the thing you named, then strip it to its smallest version. Not "a weekend away hiking" but "twenty minutes walking the long way home after dinner." Not "a proper date night" but "the show we used to watch — one episode, no phones."

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

pick one of your two answers and do the 20-minute version tonight or tomorrow. Don't upgrade it into an Occasion — the point is to prove it still fits your life, not to plan a production.

Heads up for him. This is the opposite of a relationship task — it's literally doing something you used to enjoy. No feelings to discuss. Pick whichever one sounds least like work.

The Friend You Married

Think about how you treat a good friend. If a friend turned up twenty minutes late, you'd say "no worries, you're here now." If a friend told you the same story twice, you'd let it slide. Somewhere, your partner stopped getting the friend version of you and started getting the spouse version — the one that sighs, corrects, keeps score. It isn't cruelty; we just save our worst manners for the people we're surest of. The friendship is still in there. It mostly needs you to stop being the household manager for a minute and be the mate again.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down one thing your partner does that you react to more sharply than you would if a friend did it — the chewing, the repeated story, the running late. Just naming it loosens its grip.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

two parts. First, today, catch yourself once in that exact moment and give the *friend* response instead — the "no worries," the laugh, the let-it-go. Then, tonight, tell them one small thing from your day you'd have told a friend but wouldn't normally bother mentioning. That's the friendship — the pointless sharing, not just the logistics.

Something Neither of You Has Done

Long-term couples run on autopilot — same dinners, same side of the bed, same Friday. Autopilot is efficient, and it's also exactly why the weeks blur into each other. You don't need a grand adventure to break it; you need one small thing neither of you has done before. Novelty is what made the early days feel vivid — everything was a first. You're allowed to borrow a little of that on an ordinary Tuesday.

Your 20 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

jot down three tiny things neither of you has done together — a cuisine you've never tried, a street in your own town you've never walked, a daft game, a song neither of you knows. Keep them small enough to actually do this week.

TOGETHER (15 MIN)

pick one and do it this week. The smaller and slightly sillier, the better — the goal isn't a great experience, it's a *new* one.

Heads up for him. Nothing romantic or heavy here. It's trying a new takeaway, or a street you've never walked down. Low bar — and possibly a laugh.

The Last Inside Joke

Couples have a private language — the nickname no one else understands, the phrase one of you says that makes the other laugh for reasons you couldn't explain to anyone. Almost all of those were made early, and most couples quietly stop making new ones. They don't run out because you stopped being funny; they run out because making one means catching a small shared moment *together*, and you've both been too busy watching the calendar. A new inside joke is proof you're still a team of two — with a world only the two of you are in on.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

think of one inside joke or private phrase the two of you used to have and haven't used in ages. Write it down — just remembering it does something.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

two parts. Bring the old one back on purpose today — say it out loud in the right moment, watch them clock it. Then keep half an eye out tonight for one small absurd thing that happens to just the two of you — something on TV, something the kids said, a thing that goes wrong at dinner — and make it a thing. Repeat it. Name it. You're not forcing a joke; you're catching one and keeping it.

The One True Thing

There's a question the two of you ask every evening and have both quietly stopped really answering. "How was your day?" "Fine. Busy. You?" "Yeah, same." It's a reflex now — a status update, not a door. Somewhere along the way, telling each other the real answer started to feel like more than there was room for, so you both shrank it down to "fine," and the actual day — the bit where you felt sidelined in that meeting, or unexpectedly proud, or just flat — went unsaid. The thing about "fine" is that it's safe, and it's also where closeness goes to sleep. Tonight you swap one "fine" for one true thing.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down the honest answer to "how was today, really" — not the events, the feeling underneath them. If the word won't come, borrow one: was it closer to proud, lonely, relieved, invisible, steady, frayed? Pick the one that's true, even if it's small.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

tonight, tell them that one true thing — "Can I tell you the real answer to how today was?" — and then just say it. One rule for the listener: you're not fixing it, and you're not topping it with your own day. You receive it, you say "thank you for telling me," and that's the whole job. Then swap.

The Small Promise

Trust in a long marriage rarely breaks in one big dramatic moment. It thins out, one tiny dropped thing at a time — the "I'll sort it tonight" that didn't happen, the "give me five minutes" that became an hour, the small thing you said you'd handle and then both let slide. None of them is a betrayal. But they add up into a low background hum of "I can't fully count on this," and that hum is the opposite of the safe feeling that lets two people relax around each other. The repair isn't grand. It's keeping one small promise, completely, today.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down one small thing you said you'd do and didn't — or one you keep half-meaning to. Not the big stuff; the five-minute stuff that quietly never happens.

TOGETHER / APART (TODAY)

do that one thing today, fully, on time, without being reminded or chased. Then keep half an eye out for when your partner does one of theirs — and let them know you clocked it: "you said you'd do that, and you did — thank you." Being seen for it is half the point.

Heads up for him. This is the rare relationship task with a clear pass/fail and no feelings in it. Pick one small thing you said you'd do, and just do it — on time, no nudge needed. That's the entire exercise. Reliability is a love language she may not have told you she speaks.

Something That's Just Yours

Answer this quickly and honestly: when did you last do something that was just yours — not for the kids, not for the house, not for anyone else? For a lot of women in a long marriage, the honest answer is a blank, and it isn't because you're lazy. It's because the person you were — the one with the hobby, the opinions, the thing she did on a Sunday — slowly got reassigned into a role: manager, mum, the one who holds it all. Here's why this belongs in a couples workbook and isn't a self-care detour: your partner fell for a person, not a function, and there's only so much of a household manager to be curious about or drawn toward. Putting a little of *you* back in the room gives the relationship someone to reach for again. This one's short on purpose.

Your 20 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

finish this on paper — "The thing that used to be just mine, before all this, was ____." Then name the 20-minute version of it you could reclaim this week (not the someday-big version — the small one that actually fits).

TOGETHER (15 MIN)

don't ask permission — just let him back in. Tell him what you're reclaiming and why ("I'm taking twenty minutes for ____ on Thursday"). Then turn it on him: he's probably disappeared into a role too — provider, fixer, the-one-who-earns. Ask what got crowded out for him. You're not solving it tonight; you're both just admitting there's a person under the job.

Heads up for him. Short one today. She's going to claim a little time for something that's just hers — that's good for both of you, not a withdrawal. And she might ask what you've let go of for the same reasons. No wrong answer; "I honestly don't know" is a real one.

The Someday List

Early on, you talked about the future like it was a place you were going together — where you'd live, the trip you'd take, the thing you'd build, the someday. Now almost all your forward-looking talk is logistics: the mortgage, the school run, who's covering Thursday. You've still got a shared calendar; you've just stopped having a shared *someday*. That's the quiet difference between partners and very efficient roommates — roommates coordinate a household, partners are still aiming at something together. Tonight you put one someday back on the table.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down one thing you still genuinely want to do together — big or tiny, soon or far. The cabin, the language you'd both learn, the country, the side thing you'd start, the version of life you want in five years. Don't edit it for realism yet.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

trade lists. Pick one — ideally one that overlapped, or one you both lit up at — and take it 10% toward real tonight: look up one price, pick a rough month, send one link, say one date out loud. Not to commit — to prove you're still two people who want something, not just two people who manage one.

A Conversation About Nothing Useful

Run a quick audit of the last week of talking. How much of it had a purpose — who's collecting whom, what's for dinner, did you pay the thing — and how much was just two minds enjoying each other? For most long-married couples the useful talk has slowly eaten all the rest. You used to argue happily about a film for an hour, or trade what-ifs that went nowhere. That "useless" talk wasn't useless at all — it was how you stayed interested in how the other one thinks. Tonight you have a conversation with no logistical point whatsoever.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down one thing to bring to the table that has nothing to do with running your life — a real opinion ("I think we're wrong about ____"), a what-if ("would you ever ____"), something you read or watched that stuck, a question you're genuinely curious how they'd answer.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

have that conversation tonight — phones down — and follow it wherever it goes. The one rule: you don't have to agree, and nobody's allowed to win. The point isn't a conclusion; it's the half-forgotten feeling of finding out what's going on in there.

Heads up for him. To be clear, this is not a Talk — no feelings agenda, nothing's wrong. It's the opposite: the fun kind of talking you used to do for no reason at all. Bring something you'd actually argue about for fun. Lowest-stakes one this week.

Before It Evaporates

This week you added a few things back — an old pleasure, something new, a real conversation. The trap now is that all of it evaporates by next month, because nothing this good survives on good intentions; it survives by becoming a fixed thing. So before the week closes, you pick exactly one and make it permanent. Not five new rituals — one, small enough that it'll actually outlast a busy fortnight. One thing that stays is worth more than a brilliant week you never repeat.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

look back over the last ten days: which one would you defend a spot on the calendar for — the Friday episode, the Sunday walk, the no-phones dinner, the someday-list check-in? Not the most impressive one; the one you'd actually protect.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

agree on that single weekly ritual out loud, give it a name ("the Friday thing"), and put it somewhere real this minute — a recurring calendar entry, a standing time. Defended like a small appointment, not left to "when we get a chance."

Heads up for him. Two things. One — help pick something you'll genuinely keep, not the one that sounds most impressive. Two — a heads-up about next week: it shifts. The last two weeks were warmth and play on purpose — that wasn't avoiding the harder stuff, it was building the floor to stand on first. Next week you start really talking again, in the same small, structured, no-excavating way. Nothing's wrong. You've just done the part most couples skip, and it makes the rest land softer.

Really Talking Again

For the last two weeks you barely touched anything heavy on purpose — you were rebuilding the warmth first. This week you put talking back, but probably not the kind you're bracing for. Most couples don't lose the ability to argue; they lose everything in between — being properly heard, raising something without it turning into a fight, finding their way back after a sharp word. That's the week. Small skills, not big confrontations: how to listen past the first sentence, how to open a hard subject so it lands as relief instead of an ambush, how to reset after a snap. Same as before — short, structured, nobody's excavating anything.

(Mike: this is the skills week, not the dredging week. You still get scripts, timers, and a clear stop. Nothing here is a trap.)

The Reply You're Already Building

Notice what your mind does the next time your partner is mid-sentence about something that's bothering them. Most of us stop listening somewhere around the first sentence and spend the rest of their turn building our reply — the correction, the defence, the "well, actually." You're in the room, but you're really just waiting for your go. They can feel it, too; nothing makes a person talk louder than the sense they haven't been heard. The fix isn't a personality transplant. It's one move: before you answer, say back what you actually heard.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down the last time your partner was telling you something and you caught yourself loading your answer instead of listening — or jumping straight to fixing it. What were they actually trying to say, underneath?

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

have one real conversation tonight with a single rule. Before you reply to anything that matters, say it back in one sentence first — "So what you're saying is ____ — have I got that right?" — and let them correct you until it's right. Only then answer. It feels slow for about two minutes, and then it feels like being understood.

Heads up for him. this is the one Day 20 flagged for you — and it's not therapy or a personality change, it's one move. Before you answer anything that matters, say back what you heard in a sentence: "So you're saying ____ — right?" Let her correct you till it's right, then reply. That's the whole move.

Is Now a Good Time?

Think about how hard topics usually start in your house. One of you springs it at the worst possible moment — keys in hand, halfway out the door, or just as the other's drifting off to sleep — and the very first thing the other one feels is cornered. Or there's the dreaded "we need to talk," which lands in the stomach before a single fact does. The subject was rarely the real problem; the doorway was. Come in by surprise and you get a defence. Knock first and you get a conversation. Today you change how these things open — not what you raise, just how you come through the door.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

pick one thing you keep needing to bring up. Before you'd raise it, write two short lines — what you actually need out of it (the need, not the complaint: "I need ten minutes to myself when I walk in," not "you never help") and one thing you could honestly bend on. Two minutes of this is the difference between arriving clear and arriving hot.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

agree on one opening line you'll both use from now on, and say it out loud tonight: "I'd like to talk about ____ — is now okay, or is later better?" If the answer's "later," whoever says it has to name a *when*. Then, if there's a small thing actually waiting, use the line on it tonight — not the biggest thing, a small one — just to feel how different it is to be asked first instead of ambushed.

The Thing You Haven't Said

Most partners carry one small resentment quietly — not big enough to fight about, too persistent to ignore. Said badly, it becomes a fight. Said with a structure, it becomes relief.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

finish this sentence on paper — "Something I've been holding back is...". Just for you.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

take turns. One speaks for 3 minutes using the script on this page ("When ____ happens, I feel _____. What I'd love instead is ____"). The other doesn't defend and doesn't fix — just says "Thank you for telling me." Then swap.

Heads up for him. This is the structured kind, not the open-ended kind. You get a script. You get a timer. Three minutes each. No excavating childhood.

Your Ten Percent

Everybody snaps. The sharp tone over the dishwasher, the comment that comes out harder than you meant it, the eye-roll you didn't quite hide. The snap isn't what separates the couples who make it from the ones who quietly come apart — the repair is. Most couples just let the cold air sit there and write off the evening; the ones who last clear it within the hour. And clearing it almost never starts with "you started it." It starts with the smaller, harder thing: owning your ten percent first — because in nearly every snap there's a slice that's yours, even if it's only the tone.

Your 20 minutes today

SOLO (5 MIN)

write down the last small snap between you, and look past the trigger — it usually wasn't really the dishwasher. What was going on underneath for you (tired, unseen, stretched too thin)? Name that.

TOGETHER (15 MIN)

while you're both calm, agree on two things. One — a pause word either of you can say to call a ten-minute cool-off with no guilt, one that clearly means "I need a minute, I'm not walking away from you." Two — the line you come back with: own your slice first ("Sorry, that came out sharp"), then say the under-thing plainly ("I was already wound up about ____"). No scoreboard, no "but you." That's the whole repair.

Heads up for him. This isn't about deciding who started it — that's the argument that never ends. The pause isn't storming off; it's the opposite. And "my ten percent" doesn't mean it was all your fault — it means somebody goes first so the whole night doesn't get binned over a dishwasher. Usually takes about thirty seconds.

The Good Thing You Don't Say

Run the same audit on the warm stuff that you ran on the talking. When did you last say something genuinely appreciative to your partner's face — not "thanks for sorting the bins," the real kind? For most couples it goes quiet the same way everything else did: you still think it ("he was so good with her this morning"), you just stop saying it, because after this many years it feels obvious — *he knows*. He mostly doesn't. The thought stays in your head and never makes the trip across to his. All week you've practised saying the hard thing out loud; today you say the good one, which is somehow harder to do without flinching.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

write down one specific thing you appreciate about your partner that you've thought lately but didn't say. Specific, not a category — not "she's a good mum" but "the way she stayed calm last night when I lost it about the car." The detail is what makes it land as true instead of polite.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

say it to their face tonight — out loud, no occasion, the specific version. Each of you says one. And one rule for receiving it: you're not allowed to bat it away ("oh, it was nothing"). You just take it, and say thank you — the same way you did on Day 23. Letting it land is half the gift.

That's the talking week. You listened past the first sentence, learned to knock before raising something hard, said the thing you'd been holding, and found a way back from a sharp word — and tonight, said the good thing out loud. Next week is the last one, and it's the warmest: turning all of this back into the thing that faded while you weren't looking — being partners again, not two people who run a house well. Including the closeness that's been waiting at the back, gently, and only now that the rest is steady.

(Mike: last week ahead, and it's the easy one. Nothing clinical, nothing sprung.)

PHASE 5 • DAYS 26 – 30

Closer Than Roommates

Here's the quiet fear underneath all of this, the one most people never say out loud: that the two of you have become very good roommates. You split the logistics well, you're decent enough to each other in passing, the house runs — and somewhere in there you stopped being a thing and turned into an operation. This last week closes that gap. Not with a grand gesture or a second honeymoon — with the small stuff that actually holds two people together: clearing the last bit of old residue, putting back the little rituals that fell away one by one, and letting the closeness you've kept at arm's length come back in, gently, now that the rest is steady. Same shape as always: short, specific, nobody's being asked to perform.

(Mike: easiest of the five weeks, and the warmest. Nothing here is a test and nothing's sprung on you. The last day touches on getting a bit physically closer again — handled with no pressure, and you'll see the stop signs as clearly as everywhere else.)

The Splinter You Stopped Pulling

Think of the one small thing between you that never gets fixed — not the big stuff, you've done the big stuff this month. The little recurring rub: the same task done the same wrong way, the comment that always lands the same off note, the thing you used to mention and then stopped mentioning because it never went anywhere. So now you just absorb it. The silent re-do, the small sigh, the "it's fine." It *is* tiny. But a tiny thing absorbed every week isn't tiny anymore; it's a low background hum of *we don't quite fit*, running under everything else. A splinter you've decided to live around instead of pull. Said once and closed, it's gone. Left in, it quietly works at you. Today you pull one.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

name one — the small, live, repeating thing, not an old wound (that's tomorrow's kind of work). Write in one sentence what you'd actually want to change about it. Then the harder line, just for you: what's the part of this that's yours? Maybe you never actually asked, or you ask in a way that lands as nagging, or you've trained him to leave it to you.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

raise that one — use the Day 22 door ("is now okay?") if you need it — but the goal here isn't to win it, it's to *retire* it. Land on one tiny change you can both genuinely live with, say it back so it's clear, and then it's closed: off the table, not to be re-litigated next week. One splinter, out.

Heads up for him. This isn't the big talk — you've done those. It's one small annoying thing, picked *because* it's small. Five minutes, one fix you both agree to, and then it's genuinely done and nobody brings it up again. That's the whole point: clearing it so it stops humming, not opening a file.

The Habit You Didn't Notice Leaving

There was a small thing the two of you used to do most days — not an event, a habit. The coffee before the house woke up. The few minutes on the back step. The ten minutes at the end of the night before the lights went out. It didn't end in a row; it just got crowded out, one busy week at a time, until it was gone — and the strange part is neither of you clocked the day it stopped. That's how this kind of thing always goes — no announcement, no decision, just drift. And here's what's easy to miss: those tiny repeated touchpoints are most of what "close" actually is. Not the holidays — the Tuesdays. Today you put one back.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

think back to before things got this busy. What small thing did you two used to do most days that you just... don't anymore? Write down the one you miss most — and be specific about *when* in the day it lived (first thing, after dinner, last thing), because the slot is what makes it restorable.

TOGETHER (15 MIN)

pick that one and put it back this week. Name the exact slot out loud — "coffee, ten minutes, before the kids are up," "last ten minutes before sleep, phones in the other room" — and do it once tonight or tomorrow, just to prove it still fits. One rule that protects it: no logistics in that slot. It's not a stand-up meeting about the house. It's the thing you used to do before either of you was tired.

Still Paying Interest

This one isn't a small live annoyance — you cleared one of those two days ago. This is the older thing. The one that actually hurt, that you've technically "moved past" but still keep on the books. You know the one: it's the example that turns up when an argument heats, the private flinch, the card you'd play if you were pushed. Here's the part almost nobody says out loud — keeping that tab open costs *you* far more than it costs him. He's mostly forgotten it. You're the one still paying the interest on it, years later, in a little tax of resentment you've stopped even noticing. Forgiveness here isn't a speech, and it isn't letting him off the hook or deciding it was fine. It's quieter and more selfish than that: it's deciding to stop charging it — for your own sake, because you're tired of carrying it.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (15 MIN)

write down the one old thing you're still keeping score on. Then the line people skip: what has *holding* it actually cost you — not what he did, what carrying it has done to *you* (the guardedness, the thing you bring up to win, the wall you keep one brick high). Then write one sentence in your own words, something like: *"I'm putting this down — not because it was okay, but because I'm done carrying it."* Read it once, to yourself. That's the step.

TOGETHER / APART (OPTIONAL)

this one genuinely doesn't need him — and that's the whole point, you don't need his participation to stop paying. *If* it would actually help to say one line out loud ("I've been holding the ___ thing, and I'm letting it go"), you can. But the work is done whether you say it or not.

The One You Put on the Calendar

Everything this month worked for one unglamorous reason: it was scheduled. A slot, a prompt, a small action you actually did. So here's the honest risk now that the book's nearly closed — life refills the space, the way water does, and in three months you're quietly back to being roommates wondering what happened to the nice month you had. The fix isn't romantic and it's the entire game: you don't *find* time for each other, you *defend* it. Pick one recurring slot — once a week is plenty — that's just the two of you, and put it somewhere real. And scheduled doesn't mean stiff: the slot is what's protected, not the activity. What happens in it can be nothing — a walk, a show, takeaway with phones in another room. The point was never romance-on-command. The point is that the time exists at all, on purpose, every week, after today.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

decide the realistic slot — not the ideal one, the one that survives a bad week. Day, rough time, and what protects it (after the kids are down, Sunday morning, a sitter once a fortnight). Write it like it's already a fixture, not a wish.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

agree the slot tonight and put it in the actual calendar — both phones, set to repeat, and call it whatever doesn't make either of you wince ("date night" is allowed to be banned). Protect it with one rule you both pick: phones away, or no house-logistics, or no screens. Then book the first one for this week, with an actual day. The calendar entry is the point — a good intention with no slot is the thing that vanished in the first place.

The Touch That Went First

Of everything that quietly slipped away, physical closeness usually went first — and it's the last thing people try to fix, because they aim at the wrong target. They hear "closeness," assume it means sex, find that daunting after this many years, and so do nothing at all. But the thing that actually went first wasn't sex. It was the *incidental* touch — the hand on your back squeezing past in the kitchen, sitting close on the sofa instead of at opposite ends, the hug that's a two-second pat instead of an actual hug. That small stuff is the on-ramp, and it always comes back first; the rest of it follows that, not the other way round. So today is only this: putting back a little of the small physical closeness, with zero pressure on anything past it.

Your 30 minutes today

SOLO (10 MIN)

notice where touch lives in an ordinary day now, and where it used to. Find the one small bit of contact that's gone quiet — not the bedroom, the kitchen and the sofa and the front door. Write the one you miss most.

TOGETHER (20 MIN)

two small things tonight. One — a hug that lasts longer than the automatic two seconds. Actually count to six. Long enough that it stops being a pat and your shoulders come down a notch; it's faintly awkward for a moment and then it isn't. Once, no occasion. Two — pick one bit of incidental closeness to bring back this week (sitting on the same sofa, the hand on the back in passing, holding hands on the walk) and start it tonight. Anything further than that is yours to find in your own time. Tonight is just the six seconds and the sofa.

Heads up for him. Last day, and the honest version: this is not a quiet setup for a conversation about your sex life, and there's no quota hiding in it. It's a six-second hug and sitting a bit closer — that's the literal, entire ask. Closeness comes back from the small stuff first, and nobody's measuring or steering you toward a next step. Six seconds. That's genuinely it.

Closer than roommates

That's the thirty days. Look back at where you started — two people running a house well and feeling a little lonely inside it, bracing for the work to be heavy. It mostly wasn't. You fixed the goodbye, brought the small joys back, learned to say the hard thing and the good thing out loud, cleared the old residue, put the rituals back, and let the closeness in. None of it was a grand gesture. All of it was small, repeated, and yours. That's the thing the roommate years hide: closeness was never built out of big moments — it was built out of Tuesdays. Keep the standing slot. Keep the goodbye. You know how this works now.

(Mike: you're done too. You showed up for the awkward bits and it landed. Nothing more being asked.)

Closer, a little each day.

closen.co — and when you're ready for what comes next, we'll be there.