

ROADWORTHY · THE STEADY DAD SERIES · No. 04

The changeover service check.

Changeovers are the grand final of regulation — highest stakes, biggest audience (your kids), most provocation potential. Grand finals get a game plan. This is yours: five phases, plus the two fastest tools in the kit and what to say when it counts.

Why a plan beats willpower

Willpower lives in the thinking part of the brain — precisely the system that loses resources when the stress alarm fires. A regulation strategy that depends on willpower is a fire plan stored inside the burning room: fine in the drill, gone in the fire. So we go body first, and we go written: a plan built in a calm state is a plan you can actually reach in a hot one.

The two fast tools

The physiological sigh. Two breaths in through the nose — one big, one short top up — then one long, slow breath out through the mouth. Three rounds. The long exhale directly activates the body's calming system; it's one of the fastest evidence supported ways to bring a spike down, which is why versions of it get trained into elite athletes and tactical teams. Not yoga. Machinery. Grounding. Feet flat and pushed into the floor, five things you can see, the wheel under your hands. Attention is a spotlight — pointed at the body and the carpark, it can't floodlight the story.

The five phases

PHASE	THE MOVES
Night before	Protect sleep like it's evidence — because in a real sense your regulation is. No case files in bed, phone out of reach, same wake time.
One hour out	Eat something real. Ten minutes of movement. An engine serviced before the drive handles provocation better than one running on fumes and coffee.
Ten minutes out	Sigh × 3. Shoulders down, jaw loose. Arrive in your body, not your head — your kids can tell the difference from the back seat.
During	One job only: safe and warm for your kids. Every comment, every look, every provocation — it can all wait, and waiting is winning.
After	Debrief on paper or with a mate, never in a reply text. The 24 hour rule on anything written: if it still needs sending tomorrow, send it tomorrow.

If it goes sideways anyway — the provocation lands, the fuse goes — the plan hasn't failed and neither have you. Mine it afterwards: which warning light was already on before you arrived? That's your earliest tell, found the hard way. Reps, not verdicts.

Roadworthy provides psychoeducation, mentoring and community grounded in positive behaviour support and psychology research on Australian men. This resource is general information, not clinical treatment or legal advice. If things are heavy right now: MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78 or Lifeline 13 11 14, any hour. Dads in Distress 1300 853 437. If anyone is in immediate danger, call 000. Family violence support: 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732).

ROADWORTHY · THE STEADY DAD SERIES · TOOL

The wallet card.

Fill in your version of each phase — your words, specific enough to run on a bad day — then photograph it or cut it out. If changeovers aren't your highest stakes moment, build it for whatever is: the hearing, the phone call, opening the inbox.

MY SERVICE CHECK	
PHASE	MY MOVES
Night before	
One hour out	
Ten minutes out	
During	
After	

What to say when it counts

VOICEMAIL AFTER A HANG UP

“Hey mate, sounds like now wasn't a good time. No worries at all. I love you, I'll try again Thursday like always.”

TEXT AFTER A MISSED CHANGEOVER

“No stress about today. I'll be there next Saturday, usual spot. Thinking of you both. Love, Dad.”

Notice what's missing: nothing about the other parent, nothing about court, no questions demanding answers. Every word safe for a child to receive — and safe for anyone to read.

Part of the free Roadworthy self guided program — the full seven module Under the Hood series is at roadworthydads.com.au, along with the rest of the Steady Dad guides.