

ROADWORTHY · THE STEADY DAD SERIES · No. 07

The paper trail.

In a long process, memory and emotion are unreliable witnesses — even yours. A properly kept record is calmer, fairer and far more useful than either. This guide covers why contemporaneous records matter, how to keep them properly, and the lines never to cross. Read the disclaimer at the bottom before anything else: this is general information about good record keeping habits, not legal advice, and how records may be used in your matter is a question for your lawyer alone.

Why contemporaneous beats remembered

A note made within minutes of an event — dated, factual, unedited — carries a weight that recollection never will, for a simple reason: it was written before you knew which details would matter, so it can't have been shaped by what came later. It's also good for the engine: writing the facts down parks them (Guide 03), which means fewer 2am replays and fewer heated retellings. The steady dad's record is boring, regular and precise — exactly the qualities that make it valuable.

How to keep records properly

At the time, or as close as possible. Minutes, not days. Note the time you wrote the entry as well as the time of the event. Facts, not feelings. What happened, who was present, exact words where you can recall them — in quote marks only if genuinely verbatim. Feelings go in your own journal; the record is for events. Dated and unedited. A bound notebook (no torn pages), or a same day email to yourself — both create a natural date stamp. Never go back and improve old entries; a corrected record reads worse than an imperfect one. Complete, including the boring. The calls that rang out. The changeovers that went fine. A record that only captures grievances looks like a grievance list; a record that captures everything looks like the truth.

The lines never to cross

Never record your children — not their words about the other house, not covertly, not “just in case.” It puts them on the battlefield (Guide 05) and it reflects on you, not the other parent. Be very careful with recording anyone. Laws on recording conversations differ between Australian states and are strict; what's lawful in one place is an offence in another. Do not record calls or conversations without advice from your lawyer first — full stop. Never document to build a case against your kids' other parent in front of your kids, and never let record keeping become surveillance. The record is your account of your own experience, kept properly. The moment it becomes an operation, it stops helping you.

The paper trail's real job isn't ammunition. It's steadiness: a place for facts to live so they stop living in your head, and a quiet, month by month portrait of a man who kept showing up. Let it be boring. Boring is what credible looks like.

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). Laws about records and recordings vary by state and change over time — always take advice from your legal representative about your own matter.

ROADWORTHY · THE STEADY DAD SERIES · TOOL

The log pack.

Two logs. The contact log for every call, message and changeover attempt; the event log for anything significant outside contact. Fill in within minutes, facts only, print as many as you need.

CONTACT LOG

DATE	TIME	TYPE (CALL/TEXT/VIDEO/CHANGEOVER)	OUTCOME	WHAT HAPPENED — FACTS AND EXACT WORDS

EVENT LOG

DATE + TIME OF EVENT	TIME WRITTEN	WHO WAS PRESENT	WHAT HAPPENED — FACTS ONLY, EXACT WORDS IN QUOTES ONLY IF VERBATIM

Include the ordinary: the fine changeovers, the calls that connected. Note witnesses where relevant. Never record the children, and never record anyone without legal advice first. These logs are your account, kept properly — how any record may be used in proceedings is a question only your lawyer can answer.



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.