

Reading your warning lights.

Last week you learned the architecture: alarm first, control room second, and a daily dashboard word to start the noticing muscle. This week we upgrade the dashboard itself — from one word to five specific lights, in your own language, with your own earliest tells. By the end of this module you'll have something most men never get: a readout of your own engine.

The five lights

Every man's engine sends warning signals before things go wrong — the trouble is nobody taught us to treat them as signals. There are five, and you'll recognise yourself in at least a couple before we've finished describing them.

LIGHT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Short fuse	Small things landing like provocation. Traffic, the kids' noise, a slow checkout. When minor friction hits like an insult, the system is already running hot.
Running on empty	Flat, not tired. Can't be bothered with things you used to enjoy. The battery light, and the one most men explain away the longest.
Overheating	Body tense all day — jaw, shoulders, chest buzzing. Your body signals stress before your mind admits it. Tension you carry constantly is data, not normal.
Sleep	The 2am wakeups, the racing head on the pillow, the dread mornings. One of the earliest and most reliable lights there is.
Withdrawing	Dodging mates, off the group chat, going through the motions. In men, struggle often looks like disappearing rather than breaking down.

A warning light doesn't mean the car's cactus. It means check it now, while acting is still easy. The men who come through this process strongest aren't the ones who never light up — they're the ones who learned to read their dash early.

PART ONE

Name it to tame it.

Here's the finding this whole module stands on: accurately naming what you're feeling measurably settles the brain's threat response. Not as a nicety — as a mechanism. When you put precise words on an internal state, activity shifts from the alarm toward the control room. The label is not soft. The label is a wrench.

This is why the dashboard word works, and why this week we sharpen it. There's a real difference between “bad” and “humiliated, dreading Thursday, missing the kids” — the same difference as between a check engine light and a diagnostic readout. One tells you something's wrong. The other tells you what to fix.

Anger is the bodyguard

For a lot of us, anger is the only emotion that ever felt allowed. It's decisive, it's powerful, and it doesn't look like weakness. So it steps in front of everything else — fear of losing your kids, grief, humiliation, helplessness — and takes the wheel. That's not a flaw in you; it's a bodyguard doing what bodyguards do: standing in front of the ones who feel vulnerable.

The problem is that you can't fix what the bodyguard is hiding. Rage at a cancelled changeover might really be grief. The explosion over a letter might really be fear. Until the real feeling gets named, the real feeling runs the show from behind the anger — and the anger is what everyone else sees, including your kids, and including anyone reading your file. We're not sacking the bodyguard. We're learning to see who he's protecting.

“That's grief, not rage” is a sentence that does real work. Say the true name and the body starts to settle. Say the bodyguard's name and it doesn't.

Workshop exercise 2.1 – under the anger

Pick one recent flare — a moment the fuse went. Write what the anger looked like on the outside, then have an honest crack at what was underneath: fear, grief, humiliation, helplessness, something else.

WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE

WHAT WAS UNDERNEATH

PART TWO

Build your dashboard.

Now make the five lights yours. For each one: your version (what it actually looks like in your life, your words), your earliest physical tell (where it shows up in the body first), and one early action — small, specific, doable the moment the light flickers. This is the tool you'll photograph and carry.

LIGHT	MY VERSION	EARLIEST TELL	ONE EARLY ACTION
Short fuse			
Running on empty			
Overheating			
Sleep			
Withdrawing			

Filling it in — what good looks like

Specific beats tidy. “Snapping at the dog over nothing” is a better My Version than “irritable.” “Jaw first, then shoulders” is a real tell. Early actions should cost under two minutes: three slow breaths, step outside, text a mate, put the phone in the other room, name it out loud. If an action needs willpower and an hour, it's not an early action — it's a project, and projects don't happen at the moment the light flickers.

Flat counts. If “I don't feel anything” is your honest answer some days, that's not an absence — that's Running on Empty, and it goes on the dashboard like every other light.

THIS WEEK'S TOOL

The dashboard card.

Copy your five lights into the card below, then photograph it — lock screen it if you're game. This week: keep the daily dashboard word going, but now check it against your card. Which light is it? How early did you catch it? Did the early action get a run?

MY DASHBOARD		
LIGHT	MY EARLIEST TELL	MY EARLY ACTION
Short fuse		
Running on empty		
Overheating		
Sleep		
Withdrawing		

Knowledge check – Module 2

T / F Accurately naming a feeling measurably settles the brain's threat response.

T / F Anger is usually the first and only emotion present in conflict.

T / F Feeling flat and unmotivated can itself be a warning light.

T / F Everyone's warning lights look basically the same.

T / F “That's grief, not rage” is an example of naming it to tame it.

BEFORE MODULE 3

Daily dashboard word, now checked against your card. Note the earliest catch of the week in the margin — that's your win to keep. Next week: what sets you off, and why — triggers mapped, and the 2am loop finally explained.

Psychoeducation, not clinical treatment or legal advice. If things get heavy this week: MensLine 1300 78 99 78 · Lifeline 13 11 14 · Dads in Distress 1300 853 437 · Emergency 000.