

ROADWORTHY · FREE SELF GUIDED PROGRAM · MODULE 6 OF 7

Keeping kids off the battlefield.

Five weeks of working on your own engine. Tonight we turn outward — to the people this has all been for. And we start with the single most hopeful research finding in this program.

The hope finding

The research on separated families is clear on something most dads have never been told: much of the damage conflict does to kids travels through what the adults do around them and to them while the fight is on — through parenting behaviour, not the existence of the dispute itself. And more specifically: the presence of harmful parenting behaviours does more damage than any shortfall in positive ones.

Read that again, because it changes the job. You don't have to be a perfect dad in impossible circumstances — nobody can be, and the research doesn't ask it. You have to reliably not do a short list of harmful things, and be warm and steady in the time you have. That's the whole job. It's completely learnable, and it's entirely inside your control, no matter what happens at the other house or in the courtroom.

The view from the child's seat

Two ideas from earlier weeks, now from your kid's side of the glass. First, the loyalty bind: a child caught between two households is managing two adult relationships with a nervous system built for exactly none of that. If warmth toward you carries a cost in the other house, pulling back from you is your child solving an impossible problem — adaptation, not rejection. Second, co regulation: kids don't learn calm from what adults say; their nervous systems borrow it from the adults around them, and they are expert at detecting which adult is genuinely steady. Your regulation isn't just your evidence. It's their inheritance.

Kids read a parent's state like a dashboard — the tension in the car, the heaviness, the sigh. Which means Module 4 wasn't just for you. Every changeover you arrive at regulated is a changeover your kids don't have to manage.

PART ONE

The six don'ts.

Each of these puts a child on the battlefield. Most dads have done at least one under pressure — that makes you human, not a failure. The skill is knowing them cold, catching them early, and repairing fast.

#	THE DON'T	WHY IT HARMS, AND WHAT TO DO INSTEAD
01	The messenger	“Tell your mum the payment's late.” Every message carried forces a child to hold both ends of an adult conflict. Anything that needs saying goes parent to parent, in writing, or not at all.
02	The interrogator	“Who was at the house? What did she say about me?” Questioning kids about the other household teaches them information is dangerous — and that time with you comes with a debrief. Curiosity about their life, never surveillance of hers.
03	The badmouth	Direct insults, and the subtle versions — the eye roll, “well, that's your mother for you.” Kids experience attacks on a parent as attacks on half of themselves. Every time, no exceptions, including when it's deserved.
04	The court talk	Hearings, lawyers, money — none of it belongs in a child's ears, even the reassuring versions. The whole script: “the adults are sorting the grown up stuff, and you never have to worry about it.”
05	The guilt	“I miss you so much I can't stand it. It's so quiet here without you.” Feels like love; hands a child responsibility for your emotional state. They should leave feeling loved, not worried about you.
06	The sigh	The heaviness, the tension they read off you like a dashboard. Regulating yourself around them isn't fake — it's the realest protection you can offer, and it's why Module 4 came first.

The standard isn't perfection — it's repair. When you slip (you will), name it simply and fix it fast: “Mate, I shouldn't have asked you that. That's adult stuff and it's not your job. My mistake.” A child who watches a parent own a wobble and repair it is learning the single most valuable relationship skill there is.

WORKSHOP EXERCISES

The silent check, the repair, the plan.

Exercise 6.1 – the silent self check

Private page — nobody's marking this. Run yourself against the six honestly. Which one have you done under pressure? Which one is your most likely slip? Every dad in the room has ticked at least one — the point is knowing yours by name.

MY MOST LIKELY SLIP, AND WHEN IT SHOWS UP

Exercise 6.2 – rehearse the repair

Write your one sentence repair for that slip — your words, said the way you'd actually say it. Then say it out loud. Rehearsed in calm is available under heat; that rule hasn't changed since Module 3.

MY ONE SENTENCE REPAIR

Quality beats quantity

If your hours are limited, this is the reframe the evidence supports: what kids absorb runs on quality of presence far more than quantity of hours. Two calm, warm, undistracted hours where a child never has to manage your emotions can do more than a tense week. Arrive regulated, phones away, follow their agenda, and hold one steady message underneath everything — you never have to pick sides; I'm your dad no matter what. Plant it, don't push it. Then let the ordinary stuff — the footy, the dumb jokes, the servo snacks — do what ordinary stuff does: prove you're a safe, predictable, enjoyable place to be.

Exercise 6.3 – plan one contact

Your next time with the kids, planned for presence: when it is, what you'll do to arrive regulated (your Module 4 service check), and the one ordinary thing you'll let carry the visit.

When the other house doesn't play by these rules: hold your standard anyway. Not because it's fair — it isn't — but because kids eventually compare, and the comparison compounds in your favour every single visit. You can't make the other house a battlefield free zone. You can make yours one.

THIS WEEK'S TOOL

The after visit reflection card.

Five minutes after every visit or call, on your own. Not a scorecard — a service log. It keeps you honest on the six, catches wobbles while repair is easy, and builds your own record of the pattern you're living: steady, visit after visit.

THE SIX — QUICK CHECK

Anything carried through the kids (messages, money talk)?	YES	NO
Did I ask about the other household beyond friendly interest in their life?	YES	NO
Any badmouthing — including tone, eye rolls, sighs?	YES	NO
Did court, lawyers or the matter come up in front of them?	YES	NO
Did they leave carrying my feelings (guilt, worry about me)?	YES	NO
Could they read tension off me for much of the visit?	YES	NO

One moment that went well: _____

If I ticked YES — my repair, next contact: _____

My state going in: REGULATED / MOSTLY / RAN HOT · Date: _____ · TIME TOGETHER / CALL / VIDEO /
CHANGEOVER

Knowledge check — Module 6

T / F Much of the harm conflict does to kids travels through what the adults do around them.

T / F Doing the six don'ts occasionally under pressure makes a man an unfit father.

T / F Asking kids questions about the other household is harmless curiosity.

T / F Kids can read a parent's tension even when nothing is said.

T / F Two calm, warm, undistracted hours can do more than a tense week.

BEFORE MODULE 7

One planned contact run for presence, one reflection card completed, Still Standing check on your usual day. Final module: your maintenance plan, your relapse signature, and your Roadworthy Report explained.

Psychoeducation, not clinical treatment or legal advice. Any hour: MensLine 1300 78 99 78 · Lifeline 13 11 14 · Dads in Distress 1300 853 437 · Emergency 000. This card is for your own reflection — it is not a legal document.