

Appendix A — A practical family field guide

The tools below are ways to use the book's ideas in ordinary life. They are not validated assessments, developmental tests, or promises of change within a particular period. Choose the tool that fits the actual problem. A child does not need to understand the military analogy to participate; use ordinary family language.

The one-page family plan

Write the answers together when the child's age and circumstances make that useful. Keep the result short enough to revisit without turning the review into another demanding task.

1. **Our shared objective.** What are we trying to make possible? State something observable, such as getting to school with the required materials, using the shared device fairly, or communicating a changed destination.
2. **The current obstacle.** What do we know is happening? Separate the observation from a conclusion about personality. Include physical, practical, communication, and skill barriers worth checking.
3. **The boundary.** What is required, and why? Distinguish the part the adult must decide from the part the child can help choose.
4. **The adult's contribution.** What will the adult explain, provide, model, change, or follow through on? Do not leave this blank while filling the child's section.
5. **The child's contribution.** What action is currently reasonable? What help can be requested, and how will that help be available?
6. **The way back.** What happens after an error? Specify the next opportunity to practice or repair, rather than an indefinite loss of standing in the family.
7. **Our review.** When will we ask whether the plan helped, and what information would lead us to change it?

Here is a completed example for a shared device. The objective is that both children can use it without daily disputes. The obstacle is an unclear stopping point and no visible record of turns. The boundary is that each person receives the agreed time and returns the device in usable condition. The adult helps choose a workable session length and teaches the timer. The children help select the order and stop before beginning an activity that cannot fit. A missed turn is rearranged fairly; deliberate interference is addressed directly, without confiscating unrelated belongings. The family reviews whether the arrangement actually works for both children.

The example does not require children to like waiting. It requires a fair structure in which waiting has an understandable endpoint. If one child needs a different form of support, adapt it and explain the difference without exposing private information.

OBJECTIVE

What small change are we trying to make?

OBSTACLE

What appears to be getting in the way?

BOUNDARY

What reasonable limit must remain clear?

ADULT ACTION

What will I change or do?

CHILD ACTION

What can the child reasonably practice?

WAY BACK

How can we recover from a missed attempt?

REVIEW

When will we hear what worked and revise the plan?

Keep the plan small enough to use on an ordinary day.

Figure 21. The family plan — Write a small plan that includes a way back and a time to review.

A conversation for a young child

Use a brief explanation, a concrete action, and help that fits the task. Too many questions can overwhelm a child who needs to know what happens next. Keep a safety limit clear even while accepting disappointment.

“You wanted another turn. It’s time for Maya to use it. You can put it in her hand or put it on the table. I’ll help if you need me.”

If the child is too upset to choose, do not keep repeating the options as a test. Help manage the immediate situation safely. Later, practice handing the object over during a calm moment. The lesson does not have to be completed at the height of the upset.

A conversation for a school-age child

Invite an account of the problem while keeping the expectation visible. Ask a question that can reveal a missing step rather than only solicit a defense.

“The homework hasn’t started, and the evening is getting short. Show me what the assignment asks. Which part can you begin, and which part needs help? Let’s agree on the first step and when I’ll check back.”

If the child understands the task and simply does not want to begin, acknowledge that without making willingness the requirement: “You don't feel like doing it. We still need a plan for getting it done.” If the demand is unreasonable or misunderstood, change the demand. Distinguish support from completing the work on the child's behalf.

A conversation for a teenager

Explain the concern and let the young person propose a responsible arrangement. Treat the proposal as something you might actually accept if it meets the legitimate need.

“I want you to have more independence. I also need enough information to respond if the plan changes. What is the destination, how are you getting there and back, and what will you do if that changes? Let's agree on what you can decide yourself and what needs a call.”

When an agreement is broken, begin with the verified facts. Ask for the young person's account, assess the actual risk, and choose a proportionate response with a clear review point. Do not require identical preferences as proof of maturity. Responsible independence includes choices the parent would not personally select.

Four weeks of deliberate practice

This is a suggested schedule for organizing attention, not a promise that a family difficulty can be resolved in four weeks. Move more slowly or seek help when needed. Keep ordinary warmth and shared life larger than the exercise.

Week one: understand one pattern. Choose one recurring difficulty. Describe what happens before, during, and afterward. Ask the child's account when possible. Look for one obstacle in the environment or adult response. Leave unrelated imperfections out of this inquiry.

Week two: teach and prepare. Clarify the objective and demonstrate the relevant skill. Make the necessary materials or information accessible. Establish a real choice where appropriate. Practice in a calm setting so the first attempt does not occur under maximum pressure.

Week three: follow through and observe. Use the agreed arrangement consistently enough to assess it. Notice whether it helps the child perform the task, not merely whether it reduces complaints. Record significant exceptions and explanations. Repair adult mistakes promptly.

Week four: keep, change, or stop. Review the result with the child. Retain what helps, change what does not, and remove a tool whose burden exceeds its benefit. Identify what the child can now own with less prompting. If there is no useful progress, reconsider the explanation and whether additional support is needed.

The repair conversation

A repair has different parts depending on what happened. Do not force a child to repeat an apology whose meaning they do not understand. Help identify the action, its effect, and an appropriate next step. Adults should follow the same basic standard when they are responsible.

“What happened?” establishes the action without a character label. “Who or what was affected?” makes the impact visible. “What can be repaired?” identifies restitution or correction. “What will we practice or change?”

addresses the next occurrence. “When is this matter finished?” protects the child from carrying an indefinite debt after a reasonable repair.

For example, if a child deliberately damages a sibling's project, the response may involve stopping the behavior, acknowledging the sibling's loss, helping restore what can be restored, and changing supervision or access while safer behavior is practiced. The injured child does not have to forgive immediately or accept an unwanted hug. Repair must respect the person harmed as well as the person learning to repair.

A brief check for adults who share care

Before giving conflicting answers, compare what each adult knows. Identify the legitimate purpose of the decision, the promises already made, and any immediate safety concern. Decide who will communicate the answer and how the child can ask questions. Keep adult grievances out of the child's instructions.

If the adults cannot agree, name what remains undecided and give a time for a response when possible. Do not make the child lobby one adult against another. If there is intimidation, abuse, or a serious safety concern, ordinary cooperative planning may be insufficient or unsafe; seek appropriate help and prioritize protection.

When the book is not enough

Seek additional support when a difficulty persists despite reasonable adaptation, creates substantial distress, interferes with daily functioning, or involves danger. A pediatrician, qualified mental-health professional, school support professional, or other appropriate service can help assess the actual situation. Asking for help is not an admission that you have lost a contest with your child.

For immediate danger, use the relevant emergency or crisis service where you are. A philosophical analogy is never a reason to postpone protection, evaluation, or needed care. Once safety is addressed, you can decide which ordinary family tools remain useful.

Worked case 1: the school morning that keeps starting late

The following cases are fictional illustrations, not reports of measured outcomes. Each shows a possible sequence of decisions, including an imperfect first attempt. Use the questions that fit your household and revise the arrangements for the actual children, resources, and responsibilities involved.

The situation. Every school morning, nine-year-old Robin is still looking for something when the family needs to leave. Her father, Luis, responds by beginning reminders earlier. Eventually he is narrating the entire morning. Robin complains that he never stops talking, and Luis says she would not need reminders if she were responsible. They both leave feeling that the other person caused the problem.

The first question. Luis chooses a smaller objective than becoming responsible: leave with the required belongings at the necessary time. He asks Robin to walk him through the previous morning. They discover that three things were missing from their plan. A school notice had changed what she needed to bring, her shoes were drying in a different place, and Luis had asked her to help with another task just before departure. Robin also admits that she began drawing after breakfast and lost track of time.

The account does not supply a single culprit. It identifies information, storage, adult scheduling, and Robin's choice of activity. Luis can address these separately. He does not need to decide whether the morning was entirely her fault before improving it.

The arrangement. They choose a place for the bag and a brief evening check for changed requirements. Robin gathers her belongings; Luis remains responsible for notices that come through adult channels and for communicating changes. They agree on what ready to leave means. Luis will give one reminder at an agreed point, with additional help if a genuine problem appears. Robin will choose a morning activity that can stop when that reminder comes.

The plan includes a fallback. If a necessary item is missing, Robin tells Luis directly rather than continuing a private search until departure. They decide what can reasonably be handled then and what consequence follows from leaving without a nonessential item. They do not use withholding necessary care or school access as a lesson.

The first attempt. The bag is ready, but Robin continues drawing after the reminder. Luis is tempted to deliver his old speech. Instead, he names the immediate action: put the drawing in its folder and come to the door. Later they review the activity choice. Robin says she thought she could finish one more part. That is relevant information, but the agreed departure still matters.

The revision. They move drawing to a different part of the day for the moment and choose an easier stopping activity in the morning. Luis also notices that he gave several extra reminders before the agreed one. He acknowledges that he did not really test the new arrangement. On the next attempt, he keeps his part more accurately.

What to assess. The useful measures are whether required belongings are prepared, whether changes reach the right person, and whether departure requires less avoidable conflict. Robin does not have to become cheerful about leaving. Luis does not need a perfectly silent morning. If the difficulty continues, they examine the remaining obstacle rather than merely increasing the reminders again.

The transfer. Once Robin manages the arrangement more reliably, she can own more of the evening check. Luis does not quietly keep doing it and then complain that she depends on him. Nor does he remove all support without notice. The next step is a clear handoff, with an understandable way to ask for help. Chapters 1, 4, 7, and 9 provide the main questions used in this case.

Worked case 2: the shared device and the invisible turn

The situation. Twelve-year-old Sora and eight-year-old Miles share a device. Their mother, Talia, tells them to take turns. Sora says Miles uses it longer. Miles says Sora always gets to finish something while he has to stop immediately. Talia responds by threatening to put the device away for everyone. That would stop the immediate dispute, but it would not clarify what taking turns means.

The first question. Talia asks each child to describe the most recent disagreement. Sora began an activity near the end of her time and said stopping would lose progress. Miles's turn then started late, but the household's next activity began at the original time. His turn was shorter in practice even though the stated rule sounded equal. On another occasion, Miles had not returned the device in usable condition. Both complaints contain something specific to address.

The arrangement. The family chooses a visible sequence of turns and a stopping rule that takes account of the activities involved. Nobody begins a new activity that cannot reasonably fit the remaining time. A delayed handoff does not automatically consume the next child's turn; Talia decides a fair adjustment based on the circumstances. Each child returns the device ready for the next person.

Sora can help explain the structure of her activity without becoming the rule-maker for Miles. Miles receives help using the timer if he needs it. Different support does not alter the basic allocation. Talia keeps responsibility for decisions that require adult judgment instead of asking the older child to enforce the arrangement.

The first attempt. Miles stops at the signal but leaves the device in another room. Sora spends several minutes looking for it and objects. Talia first says that Miles tried, then realizes this answer ignores Sora's lost time. Effort matters, and the handoff is still incomplete. She helps Miles finish returning the device and makes the next turn fair.

The revision. They add a clear location to the end of a turn. The device is placed there in usable condition before the turn is considered finished. This is a practical definition, not a new moral test. Miles practices the sequence during a calm moment. Sora is asked to use the same location rather than assuming the rule applies only to her brother.

A harder event. Later, Sora deliberately continues after the agreed stopping point because she dislikes the rule. Talia does not need another investigation into whether the signal was audible when Sora confirms that she heard it. She follows through with a specific response connected to the shared access arrangement and provides a clear route back. She does not cancel Miles's unrelated turn to make the punishment feel stronger.

What to assess. Are turns understandable in actual use? Is the handoff complete? Does one child repeatedly absorb the cost of the other's delay? Is the parent administering more machinery than the arrangement is worth? If the system becomes too complicated, simplify it. Fairness should become easier to see, not require a hearing before every use.

The transfer. As both children become able to manage the arrangement, Talia reduces her involvement. They can bring a specific unresolved question to her without narrating every minor irritation. The objective is usable shared access and reasonable care for another person's time. Chapters 2, 4, 5, and 10 supply the central principles.

Worked case 3: homework help that becomes the parent's assignment

The situation. Eleven-year-old Imani waits for her mother, Celeste, to begin homework with her. Celeste sits down intending to help with one question and ends up directing every step. She rewrites sentences, checks each answer, and stays until the work is finished. Later she complains that Imani will not do anything independently. Imani says her mother changes everything anyway, so there is little reason to begin alone.

The first question. Celeste asks what Imani can do without help and what happens when she gets stuck. Imani can read most instructions and complete some parts independently. She hesitates when an instruction has several parts, and she dislikes having a finished answer corrected for style after it already meets the task. Celeste recognizes that two different issues have become mixed: a genuine need for clarification and an adult preference for a particular result.

The arrangement. They choose a first step Imani can own: read the task and mark the part that needs explanation. Celeste will help clarify that part, then leave Imani to make an attempt. They agree on a later check-in rather than constant inspection. Celeste distinguishes required corrections from preferences and seeks clarification from the school if the assignment's expectations are unclear.

The plan includes a way to ask for help before the check-in if Imani is genuinely unable to continue. Independence does not mean sitting helplessly to prove determination. It means attempting the appropriate part, identifying the obstacle, and using support responsibly.

The first attempt. Imani completes several answers, but Celeste immediately notices a sentence she would have written differently. She begins suggesting a revision. Imani pushes the paper away. Celeste stops and compares the sentence with the actual requirement. It is adequate. She acknowledges that she was about to replace Imani's work with her own preference.

The revision. Celeste asks before giving optional editorial advice. Imani may choose whether to hear it when the task permits that choice. Required accuracy and school rules remain relevant, but the parent's taste no longer silently governs every sentence. Celeste also finds a practical way to occupy herself away from the table so she is less tempted to supervise continuously.

A harder event. On another evening, Imani understands the task and chooses to delay it. Celeste acknowledges the preference and returns to the real constraint: the work still needs an appropriate plan. She does not treat the delay as proof that the earlier support was unnecessary. A child can need help on one occasion and avoid effort on another. The response should follow the current information.

What to assess. Is Imani doing a larger appropriate share of the work? Can she identify a question more clearly? Is Celeste respecting adequate work that differs from her preferred version? Are the demands themselves reasonable and understood? If the difficulty remains substantial, school guidance or other relevant support may be needed. A household experiment does not diagnose why learning is hard.

The transfer. The check-in becomes shorter when it no longer serves a useful purpose at its original length. Celeste remains available for help, but the assignment belongs to Imani. Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 9 help separate teaching, ownership, individual support, and observation.

Worked case 4: a teenager asks for a later return

The situation. Sixteen-year-old Devon wants a later return time for an event. His father, Neal, says no before hearing the details. Devon argues that his friends are allowed to stay. Neal responds that other families do not make their rules. Both statements are familiar, and neither has addressed the event's actual arrangement.

The first question. Neal asks what the request requires. He learns when the event ends, who is involved in transport, and what supervision or responsible contacts are available. He also identifies his own constraints: he has an early obligation the next morning and cannot provide an uncertain late pickup. Devon's request may still be possible, but the family's practical limits need an answer.

The arrangement. Devon proposes a plan that addresses the relevant concerns. Neal distinguishes the nonnegotiable conditions from his initial discomfort about a later time. They agree on the particular event, the return arrangement, communication if something changes, and a backup that does not depend on an unavailable adult. The agreement is a limited trial with a review, not a promise that every future event will receive the same answer.

Neal also states what success means. Devon needs to follow the arrangement and communicate responsibly about a change. He does not need to guarantee that no outside delay occurs. A trial should test judgment within ordinary uncertainty rather than demand control over every circumstance.

The first attempt. The event ends later than advertised. Devon contacts Neal before the agreed return time, explains the changed information, and uses the approved backup arrangement. Neal is irritated by the disruption and nearly treats the delay as failure. Then he compares Devon's conduct with the actual agreement. The young person reported the problem and used the planned response.

The review. They identify that the advertised end time was less dependable than expected and adjust how future arrangements will account for that uncertainty. Neal acknowledges that Devon handled the change responsibly. He does not add a new condition after the event that would make the trial impossible to pass.

A harder event. If Devon had ignored the communication agreement, the review would be different. Neal would establish what happened, assess the actual concern, and choose a response connected to it. A specific breach might justify a temporary adjustment and a new trial. It would not automatically justify indefinite restriction of every unrelated part of Devon's life.

What to assess. Did the proposal address real responsibilities? Did the parent genuinely consider it? Did the young person communicate a change? Did the adult honor the terms of review? Both people's conduct affects whether the arrangement is useful. A parent who offers a trial but never recognizes success makes responsible planning less meaningful.

The transfer. Future permission can become less elaborate where Devon has demonstrated the relevant judgment and circumstances permit. Neal still holds appropriate boundaries, but he allows experience to change the amount of direction required. Chapters 1, 7, 8, and 13 guide this case.

Worked case 5: one sibling damages another's work

The situation. Seven-year-old Ellis deliberately knocks apart a construction made by his ten-year-old sister, Jo. Their caregiver, Farah, stops the action. Ellis begins crying when Jo shouts at him. Farah feels an impulse to ask Jo to be understanding because Ellis is upset. But Jo's work has been damaged, and the person who caused the harm is not the only person who needs care.

The first question. Farah establishes the immediate facts and separates the children enough to prevent further damage. She checks what Jo needs and keeps Ellis safely supported. There will be time to understand what preceded the action. That inquiry should not delay protecting Jo's remaining materials or acknowledging the loss.

Farah learns that Ellis wanted to join the activity and Jo had declined. He says he thought she was being mean. The explanation identifies a difficulty with disappointment and access to another person's project. It does not give him a right to destroy it. Jo may choose whether someone joins her personal work within the household's reasonable arrangements.

The response. Farah states the boundary simply: disappointment does not permit damaging someone else's work. Ellis needs help identifying an appropriate way to ask, accept a refusal, or choose another activity. Jo needs her materials protected and a say in what repair would be useful. She does not have to let Ellis rebuild with her if she does not want that involvement.

The repair. Once Ellis can participate, Farah helps him understand what was affected and what he can reasonably do. He may return scattered pieces, help sort materials if Jo agrees, or make another appropriate contribution. An apology can be offered without requiring Jo to accept a hug or forgive immediately. Repair serves the injured person as well as the person learning responsibility.

The adult correction. Farah acknowledges that she nearly made Jo responsible for soothing Ellis before attending to the damage. She does not tell Jo that her brother is a bad child. She says that Jo's loss matters and that the adults will help protect her work. This keeps the boundary attached to conduct and keeps adult responsibility visible.

The next opportunity. Farah practices with Ellis during a calm moment how to ask to join and what to do after a no. She also helps identify a reasonable storage or work area for Jo's ongoing projects. The environmental change does not mean Jo caused the damage by leaving her work accessible. It is a practical protection while the household works on the behavior.

What to assess. Does Jo have a usable way to seek help? Does Ellis understand the next action available when disappointed? Are adults responding to the harm rather than only to whoever is most visibly upset? If damaging behavior repeats or the family cannot maintain safety, seek appropriate support rather than relying on increasingly elaborate apology rituals.

The transfer. The matter should eventually have an endpoint after reasonable repair and support. Ellis should not carry a permanent family identity as the destructive one. Jo should not be asked to pretend the event never happened. Chapters 2, 6, 10, and 12 provide the questions about cost, fairness, setting, and repair.

Worked case 6: reluctance to attend an activity reveals a different problem

The situation. Thirteen-year-old Amara begins asking to miss a regular group activity. Her mother, Ruth, assumes that enthusiasm has faded and reminds her about commitment. Amara gives little explanation. Ruth is tempted to require attendance until she produces a convincing reason. Instead, she asks for a private conversation about a recent session.

The first account. Amara describes repeated intimidation by several participants and says she worries that speaking up will make the situation worse. Ruth does not know every detail. She does know that the concern requires more than a reminder to persevere. She thanks Amara for telling her, asks what she needs immediately, and identifies the responsible adults and appropriate channels for addressing the setting.

Ruth avoids promising secrecy she cannot keep. She explains that she may need to involve adults who can help and will keep Amara informed as appropriately as possible. She also avoids making Amara prove the account by attending another session without a protective plan or provoking a new incident to obtain evidence.

The change in objective. The original objective was thoughtful commitment to an activity. The immediate objective now includes protection and a clearer account of the concern. Ruth revises the attendance arrangement while the matter is assessed. She explains that the revision follows new information, not a general rule that every disliked activity can be abandoned without thought.

The adult action. Ruth communicates through an appropriate channel using the specific information available. She asks what steps will be taken, who will be responsible, and how they will follow up. She keeps her claims within what is known. She does not recruit Amara's friends as investigators or turn the matter into a public campaign while basic facts and protection are being addressed.

The first response is inadequate. Suppose the organization offers only a general instruction that everyone should be nicer. Ruth assesses whether that response addresses the reported pattern and the practical safety concern. If it does not, she follows up and considers other appropriate options. An initial adult response is not automatically a resolution merely because a meeting occurred.

Amara's role. Amara can describe her experience, express concerns about proposed steps, and participate in decisions suited to her age and the situation. She should not bear responsibility for persuading every adult or negotiating with those intimidating her. Ruth carries the adult part while preserving as much of Amara's agency and privacy as circumstances allow.

What to assess. Has the reported conduct been addressed in practice? Does Amara have a usable route to help? Are the responsible adults following through? Is participation now appropriate, or is a different setting needed? These questions are more useful than whether Amara has demonstrated enough toughness. Where further professional or other support is needed, obtain it.

The continuing lesson. Later, Ruth and Amara can return to the broader commitment principle: consider obligations carefully, raise difficulties, distinguish ordinary frustration from harm, and handle an appropriate exit responsibly. This case applies Chapters 8, 9, 11, and 13, together with the contemporary bullying guidance cited in Chapter 8. It does not treat unequal intimidation as a symmetrical disagreement children must settle alone.

Worked case 7: the parent's accusation was wrong

The situation. A valued household item is missing. Nineteen-year-old sibling Avery is away, and fourteen-year-old Leo used the room most recently. Their father, Grant, assumes Leo moved it and accuses him in front of the family. Leo denies it. Grant interprets the denial as dishonesty and announces a restriction. Later, Grant finds the item where he himself placed it.

The first responsibility. Grant needs to correct the facts promptly. He does not begin by explaining how understandable his suspicion was or by listing occasions when Leo had misplaced something else. The present accusation was wrong. "I found the item where I put it. You did not move it, and I was wrong to accuse you" establishes that clearly.

The audience. Because other family members heard the accusation, they need the correction. Grant tells them enough to repair the false account without making Leo participate in a public scene. He withdraws the restriction and addresses any practical loss it has already caused where possible. A private apology alone would leave the public record unfinished.

The child's response. Leo says that Grant never believes him. Grant may think never is inaccurate, but immediately debating the word would evade the current responsibility. He can acknowledge why this incident damages trust and ask about the broader concern later. Leo does not have to reassure him or accept the apology immediately.

The review. Grant examines his decision process. He treated recent presence in the room as proof, asked questions as accusations, and escalated when Leo disagreed. The useful change is specific: state what is known, ask about what remains uncertain, and avoid imposing a nonurgent consequence before the facts justify it. He can write that reminder for himself without making Leo supervise compliance.

A harder part. Grant remains embarrassed. At dinner he is tempted to joke that everyone should help him keep track of things so this does not happen again. The joke would shift responsibility back onto the children. He lets the embarrassment remain his to handle and continues ordinary care without asking the family to make the incident comfortable for him.

The next uncertainty. Weeks later, another object is missing. Grant notices the old assumption and asks an open practical question instead: has anyone seen it, and where was it last used? He includes the possibility

that he moved it. This time the family finds the object without an accusation. The changed process matters more than a dramatic promise that he will never make another mistake.

What to assess. Did the correction reach the people who heard the accusation? Was the consequence withdrawn? Was any practical loss addressed? Has the adult changed the process that produced the error? Has the child been allowed a response without being pressed into forgiveness? These questions keep repair concrete.

The continuing lesson. Grant's authority does not depend on being factually infallible. It depends partly on being responsible when he is wrong. Leo can remain accountable for his actual conduct in other situations without carrying this false accusation forward. Chapters 9, 10, 12, and 13 guide the distinction between observation, judgment, repair, and trustworthy information.

Worked case 8: a new work schedule changes the whole household

The situation. A caregiver, Morgan, begins a work schedule that changes several evenings each week. Ten-year-old Kit and fifteen-year-old Sasha will spend those afternoons with a trusted relative. The practical arrangement is safe and workable, but the children react differently. Kit asks repeated questions. Sasha says the change is fine and then misses several household responsibilities. Morgan hears ingratitude after considerable effort to organize care.

The first question. Morgan separates the adult's effort from the children's experience. The arrangement may be necessary and still difficult. Kit needs a clearer picture of the week. Sasha is losing a familiar period for seeing friends and has assumed that new responsibilities will simply fit somewhere else. Neither concern removes the need for the schedule; both belong in planning it.

The information. Morgan explains what is settled, what may vary, who will communicate changes, and which responsibilities stay with adults. The relative receives relevant practical information directly. The children are not asked to carry scheduling messages between adults or to reassure Morgan that the new job arrangement is a good decision.

The arrangement. The household identifies a few dependable points: a clear plan for each day, a reliable way to contact the responsible adult, and a manageable time for ordinary connection with Morgan. Existing tasks are reviewed against the new schedule. Sasha's responsibilities remain real, but their timing is revised where the old arrangement no longer fits. Kit receives a simple version of the plan that can be checked without repeatedly asking from memory.

The first attempt. An adult communication error causes confusion about collection. The children are cared for safely, but the experience is unsettling. Morgan owns the adult error and improves direct communication with the relative. The children do not receive a new responsibility to prevent adults from forgetting information that adults should exchange themselves.

The emotional part. Kit continues asking when the old evenings will return. Morgan answers honestly rather than promising an end date that is not known. Sasha eventually says she misses talking casually in the kitchen. Morgan had offered formal check-ins but had not noticed the loss of ordinary company. They look for a small, realistic way to preserve some of that contact without making every conversation about the transition.

What to assess. Are logistics dependable? Have old expectations been reconsidered against the new conditions? Does each child have appropriate access to adult support? Is one sibling being treated as a reserve

caregiver because they appear more capable? Are adults acknowledging real losses without suggesting the children must solve the adults' work problem?

The review. After the first period, Morgan asks what has become easier and what remains difficult. The question permits a mixed answer. The family may keep some arrangements, change others, and seek practical help if resources allow. Settling in is not defined as the children ceasing to mention what they miss.

The continuing lesson. A sustained change creates continuing adult responsibilities. Preparation is the beginning of that work, not proof that the children should already be comfortable. Chapters 1, 5, 7, and 11 guide the planning, distribution of work, transitions, and continued support in this case.

Choosing your next small experiment

After reading these cases, choose an ordinary difficulty whose next step lies within your control. Write a sentence about the desired practical outcome, a sentence about the obstacle you actually know, and a sentence about what you will change. Include the child where appropriate. Then choose a reasonable point to ask whether the change helped.

Keep the experiment small enough to stop or revise without making that revision feel like failure. You are learning about a particular arrangement with particular people. A method can be useful for a time and later become unnecessary. Another can fail despite a thoughtful attempt. Neither result establishes a permanent truth about your child or your competence as a parent.

If the difficulty involves serious harm, substantial distress, or a need beyond ordinary parenting guidance, begin with appropriate support instead. The willingness to recognize that distinction is itself a form of judgment. The book's purpose is to make responsible action clearer, including the action of asking for help.

Appendix B — The complete source-to-parenting map

This map accounts for all thirteen source chapters and all 385 numbered units in the Giles basic text. The source prints I.5–6 and II.13–14 as combined passages, so it contains 383 passage blocks representing 385 numbers. Numbering belongs to this edition; it is not a claim that Sun Tzu himself supplied a canonical list of 385 separate principles.

Ranges below group related passages. “Adapt” means that a strategic idea is recast for a family purpose. “Qualify” means that only part of the comparison is useful and its limits matter. “Reject literal transfer” means that the original method is acknowledged but is not recommended for parenting. All family applications are modern interpretations. Ancient military quantities, cosmology, and categorical guarantees are not modern evidence about children.

I. Laying Plans — Chapter 1

- **1–2: take the undertaking seriously. Adapt.** Give deliberate attention to family leadership because decisions have consequences beyond an immediate argument.
- **3–14: five factors and comparative assessment. Adapt and qualify.** Examine shared purpose, timing, surroundings, adult qualities, organization, resources, practice, and consistency. The seven comparisons inform an audit of conditions; they do not rank a child against a parent or guarantee an outcome.
- **15–17: counsel and adjustment. Adapt.** Evaluate whether advice fits, accept useful information, and modify a plan when circumstances change.
- **18–25: deception, bait, provocation, disruption, surprise, and secrecy. Reject literal transfer.** Do not engineer a child's anger, divide supportive relationships, conceal a punitive ambush, or misrepresent real choices. Prepare honestly and protect appropriate adult privacy.
- **26: preparation before action. Adapt and qualify.** Think through the situation before responding; careful planning improves the basis for judgment without making a child's response certain.

II. Waging War — Chapter 2

- **1–7: cost, fatigue, and prolonged conflict. Adapt and qualify.** Count the time, attention, and relational costs of repeated disputes. The original army sizes and expenditures remain historical illustrations, not family measurements.
- **8–15: provisioning and resource depletion. Qualify.** Design a sustainable household approach. Reject taking a child's necessities or exploiting dependence as an analogue of foraging from an enemy.
- **16–18: anger, rewards, captured equipment, and humane treatment. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Do not cultivate hostility or treat children as captives. Use recognition thoughtfully and allow a resolved matter to end without a victory performance.
- **19–20: an effective endpoint and the leader's responsibility. Adapt.** Complete the actual task and preserve the household's ability to function afterward.

III. Attack by Stratagem — Chapter 3

- **1–7: preserve what matters, avoid sieges, and restrain irritation. Adapt and qualify.** Remove avoidable obstacles and protect the relationship. Do not reinterpret breaking resistance as a parenting objective or divide a child's supportive alliances.
- **8–10: relative strength and avoiding futile contests. Qualify.** Match demands to capacity and avoid escalation; military force ratios have no prescriptive meaning for a family.
- **11–16: leadership and interference from uninformed authority. Adapt.** Caregivers coordinate, attend to the facts on the scene, and avoid impossible or contradictory instructions.
- **17: five essentials for victory. Adapt and qualify.** Choose which issues need action, match resources to demands, establish shared purpose, prepare, and give responsible caregivers room to use judgment. Do not exploit a child's unreadiness.
- **18: knowledge of self and other. Adapt and qualify.** Understand the child's perspective and your own triggers; no knowledge guarantees success in every encounter.

IV. Tactical Dispositions — Chapter 4

- **1–7: security, opportunity, and limits of control. Adapt and qualify.** Prepare the environment and your response while acknowledging that another person's choice cannot be guaranteed.
- **8–15: quiet success and preparation before confrontation. Adapt and qualify.** Value ordinary prevention over dramatic enforcement; reject the promise of error-free or invulnerable parenting.
- **16–18: values, organization, measurement, and comparison. Adapt.** Use clear expectations and modest observations to assess whether an arrangement helps.
- **19–20: overwhelming weight and released water. Qualify.** Let supportive conditions make action easier; do not overwhelm a child with superior power.

V. Energy — Chapter 5

- **1–4: organization, signals, and coordinated methods. Adapt and qualify.** Distribute clear responsibilities and make the next action understandable. Reject destructive force as a parenting model.
- **5–11: direct and indirect methods; combinations of notes, colors, and tastes. Adapt and qualify.** Combine explicit teaching with supportive surroundings. The ancient lists illustrate variety; they are not scientific inventories to teach as modern fact.
- **12–15: momentum and decisive timing. Qualify.** Help a manageable next step begin; discard the violent imagery as an instruction.
- **16–20: apparent disorder, hidden strength, false appearances, and bait. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** A household can remain orderly without rigid uniformity. Do not feign helplessness, manipulate emotion, or disguise an ambush as an invitation.
- **21–23: combined effort and the rolling-stone analogy. Adapt.** Improve the arrangement instead of demanding that isolated individuals supply all the effort.

VI. Weak Points and Strong — Chapter 6

- **1–4: readiness, initiative, inducement, and deprivation. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Prepare and take responsibility for the setting; never use hunger, exhaustion, harassment, or harm to gain compliance.
- **5–12: unguarded points, secrecy, and forced engagement. Reject literal transfer.** Learn where support is needed rather than where a child is vulnerable to pressure. Do not corner, expose, or bait the child.
- **13–21: concentration, divided effort, timing, and distance. Adapt and qualify.** Focus on a meaningful priority and coordinate adult support. Do not scatter a child's defenses or translate military numbers into parenting formulas.
- **22–27: inquiry, provocation, comparison, and concealed strategy. Qualify.** Ask and observe without deliberately provoking or secretly testing the child. Let information guide a transparent plan.
- **28–34: adaptation, water, and changing conditions. Adapt and qualify.** Preserve the purpose while varying the method for the person and moment. Ancient elements and celestial cycles illustrate change, not a developmental mechanism.

VII. Maneuvering — Chapter 7

- **1–5: bringing people together and indirect routes. Adapt.** Prepare transitions and coordinate people before requiring movement.
- **6–11: the costs of forced marches and inadequate supplies. Adapt and qualify.** Include preparation, pauses, and capacity in a schedule. Do not treat the historical distances or fractions as child limits.
- **12–14: allies, local knowledge, and guides. Adapt.** Learn the setting and use appropriate help from people familiar with it.
- **15–22: concealment, concentration, speed, plunder, and deliberation. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Choose timing deliberately, share work fairly, and acknowledge contribution. Discard deception, plunder, and intimidating surprise.
- **23–26: drums, banners, and coordinated signals. Adapt.** Use a clear and accessible way to communicate the next step.
- **27–32: morale, composure, strength, and circumstance. Adapt and qualify.** Notice readiness and preserve adult composure without exploiting fatigue or assuming a universal daily mood pattern.
- **33–37: unfavorable approaches, bait, retreat, and an open exit. Adapt and qualify.** Avoid unnecessary provocation and preserve a dignified route back to cooperation and safety.

VIII. Variation of Tactics — Chapter 8

- **1–6: conditions, exceptions, and orders that should be declined. Adapt.** Reconsider a method or rule when it defeats its purpose or requires harm.

- **7–9: advantage and disadvantage together. Adapt.** Examine tradeoffs rather than counting only a method's hoped-for benefit.
- **10: damage, disruption, and false attractions. Reject literal transfer.** Flexible leadership does not authorize inventive coercion.
- **11: readiness over wishful thinking. Adapt.** Prepare for ordinary risks and changed plans without presuming misconduct.
- **12–14: five dangerous faults. Adapt and qualify.** Examine escalation, avoidance, temper, concern for appearances, and excessive rescue. They are reflection questions, not diagnoses or an exhaustive explanation of family difficulty.

IX. The Army on the March — Chapter 9

- **1–10: four physical settings and practical positioning. Qualify.** Examine surroundings and obstacles. Military crossing and ambush tactics are not behavioral instructions.
- **11–17: conditions, weather, dangerous places, and vigilance. Adapt and qualify.** Improve the setting and respond to actual hazards. Reject guarantees about disease prevention and schemes to expose others to danger.
- **18–28: signs of movement, intention, bait, and deception. Qualify.** Observe carefully but do not turn ambiguous behavior or bodily cues into proof of motive or dishonesty.
- **29–35: needs, exhaustion, disturbance, and morale. Adapt and qualify.** Consider context and capacity as possibilities requiring inquiry, not certainty from a single sign.
- **36–41: excessive incentives or punishment, bluster, caution, and support. Adapt.** Review an escalating response system, attend to evidence, and obtain appropriate help.
- **42–45: attachment, humane treatment, discipline, and consistency. Adapt and qualify.** Combine care with clear, reliable expectations; submission and usefulness are not measures of a child's worth.

X. Terrain — Chapter 10

- **1–13: six kinds of ground. Adapt and qualify.** Use the six explicitly modern family settings to select a fitting response; they are not a psychological classification inherited from Sun Tzu.
- **14–20: six leadership failures. Adapt and qualify.** Examine demands, boundaries, excessive control, adult conflict, organization, and misjudgment without assuming all child difficulties are caused by parents.
- **21–24: judgment, responsibility, and freedom from vanity. Adapt.** Assess circumstances and act for the child's welfare rather than an audience's approval.
- **25–26: affection alongside authority. Adapt and qualify.** Preserve unconditional care and real responsibilities; reject descriptions of children as useless.
- **27–31: integrated knowledge of self, others, and conditions. Adapt and qualify.** Combine information before acting and remain open to uncertainty; discard absolute guarantees.

XI. The Nine Situations — Chapter 11

- **1–14: nine situations and responses. Adapt and qualify.** The chapter presents a modern family counterpart for each situation. Reject plunder and manufactured desperation.
- **15–19: disrupting cooperation, taking what is valued, and surprise. Reject literal transfer.** Do not isolate a child, hold cherished relationships hostage, or exploit vulnerability. Identify the actual problem and act proportionately.
- **20–22: cohesion, resources, well-being, and conserved effort. Adapt and qualify.** Sustain support through significant change; reject predatory provisioning and deliberate mystification.
- **23–28: inescapable danger, fear, omens, sacrifice, and courage. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Do not engineer danger or demand proof of love through suffering. Make room for distress and use reliable information rather than guarantees based on superstition.
- **29–34: coordinated mutual aid and varied abilities. Adapt and qualify.** Support shared work with roles that fit capacity. Do not force identical performance or equate unity with compelled submission.
- **35–40: just conduct, secrecy, deception, destroyed exits, and peril. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Retain adult integrity and calm; reject withholding relevant truth, removing safe exits, or deliberately endangering children.
- **41–51: revisiting situations, connections, supplies, and pressure. Adapt and qualify.** Reassess the stage and provide support; reverse the instruction to remove retreat by making safe options available.
- **52–55: knowledgeable alliances and intimidation. Qualify.** Coordinate with appropriate adults and learn the setting. Reject isolation, coercive alliances, and intimidation as family methods.
- **56–59: arbitrary rewards, hidden bad news, and engineered danger. Reject literal transfer.** Keep expectations comprehensible, tell usable truths, and never create a crisis to secure obedience.
- **60–68: timing, exploitation, secrecy, restricted contact, and decisive action. Qualify and reject literal transfer.** Match leadership to the moment while rejecting assassination analogies, coercive leverage, isolation, and deceptive surprise. Protect safe channels of help.

XII. The Attack by Fire — Chapter 12

- **1–5: destructive methods, readiness, and conditions. Qualify.** Study escalation as something to prevent; do not reproduce attack methods or ancient astronomical timing as practical family advice.
- **6–12: reactions to fire, wind, and timing. Qualify.** Notice conditions that intensify conflict and prepare a safe pause. The original tactical instructions are not emotional manipulation techniques.
- **13–16: fire, water, follow-through, and resources. Qualify.** Choose a proportionate response that serves a real objective, then complete necessary repair.
- **17–19: act for a legitimate purpose, not anger or spite. Adapt.** Delay nonurgent decisions made to discharge the adult's feelings.
- **20–22: changing emotion and irreversible harm. Adapt and qualify.** Protect what anger may damage, while recognizing that repair is possible and sometimes requires sustained help.

XIII. The Use of Spies — Chapter 13

- **1–6: the cost of ignorance and human sources of information. Adapt and qualify.** Seek relevant, reliable information and the child's account. Historical claims about foreknowledge do not imply that evidence-based inference is useless.
- **7–13: five kinds of spies. Reject literal transfer.** Do not recruit siblings or friends, buy confidences, or use people to carry false reports. The original categories are named and distinguished from appropriate adult coordination.
- **14–18: care, judgment, secrecy, and verification. Qualify.** Treat private information responsibly and check what is known. Privacy protection is not a mandate for covert monitoring.
- **19–20: punishment for disclosure and targeting individuals. Reject literal transfer.** Protect safety disclosures and refuse retaliatory, violent, or humiliating methods.
- **21–25: converted spies and coordinated intelligence. Reject literal transfer.** Replace informant networks with direct communication, relevant adult support, and proportionate supervision.
- **26–27: historical examples and the value of informed leadership. Qualify.** The dynastic examples remain claims in the ancient source, not independently verified history in this book. Retain the importance of informed, responsible action.

References and adaptation notes

[1] Sun Tzu. The Art of War. Translated by Lionel Giles, 1910. The reference text is the basic, unannotated text in Project Gutenberg, eBook 17405, available as the complete numbered text. Accessed September 3, 2026. Chapter names and paragraph numbers in this book follow that edition, with “Maneuvering” regularized for readability. The source is traditionally attributed to Sun Tzu; this book does not investigate the history of its composition or claim to settle questions of historical authorship. Giles's translation is used as an identifiable English source, not as the only possible rendering of the Chinese text.

[2] American Academy of Pediatrics. “What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child?” HealthyChildren.org. Page dated November 5, 2018; accessed September 3, 2026. Consulted for its guidance on clear limits, teaching behavior, avoiding physical punishment and shaming, and adults repairing their own mistakes. This guidance is independent of the Sun Tzu analogy. It does not validate the book's original exercises, categories, or suggested schedule.

[3] American Academy of Pediatrics, Council on Communications and Media. “How to Make a Family Media Plan.” HealthyChildren.org. Updated January 20, 2026; accessed September 3, 2026. Consulted for family discussion, household-specific media arrangements, parental participation, and review as circumstances change. The device scenarios and proposed household arrangements in this book are original illustrations, not an AAP-endorsed program.

[4] StopBullying.gov. “Support the Children Involved.” StopBullying.gov. Content reviewed May 19, 2026; accessed September 3, 2026. Consulted for adult support and follow-up, attention to unequal power, and the limits of peer mediation in bullying situations. The fictional activity case illustrates those distinctions without claiming a predictable outcome or replacing situation-specific support.

[5] American Academy of Pediatrics. “How to Support Children after Their Parents Separate or Divorce.” HealthyChildren.org. Page dated September 29, 2020; accessed September 3, 2026. Consulted narrowly for support, routines, and reducing exposure to adult conflict. Caregiver safety and capacity remain relevant. This book does not offer custody recommendations, legal guidance, or a timetable for emotional recovery.

How the sources were used

This is a practical philosophical adaptation, not a scholarly translation or a systematic review of parenting research. The source map makes the extent and limits of the ancient analogy inspectable. Military passages are summarized rather than silently recast as child-development facts. Where the ancient method conflicts with responsible care, the text says so.

No modern quotation collection or recent English translation supplies the prose of this book. The family scenes and scripts were written for illustration. Suggested tools are proposals for thoughtful use and review; they should not be presented as tested treatments or used to explain away a child's need for individual assessment and support.

The essential guidance and complete appendices in this edition can be read without a website, QR code, or external worksheet. The links above identify sources for readers who wish to examine them. The WisdomSpan companion is organized as an edition-matched archive of Appendix A, Appendix B, working sheets, references

and corrections. Substantive updates should identify their date and the edition they affect; original source, contemporary guidance and new interpretation remain distinct.