



A METTLE WORKSHEET

The Repair Board

You are likely looking at this workbook because you recognise that your actions have caused harm - to yourself, to another person, or to several - and you want to do the necessary work to repair the relationship safely. You want to take responsibility, and stop repeating the same destructive patterns.

Saying you want to communicate better is easy. Actually doing it is hard.

At a basic level, every human being is driven by the same short list of fundamental needs. Those core needs are universal and they are not up for negotiation. What is up for negotiation is the specific way you go about getting them, with respect for your own needs and for everybody else's.

Some of the strategies you use to get your needs met work. They connect you to the exact thing you were looking for without causing damage. Others are simply survival reflexes you fall back on when your needs get blocked and you start feeling the heat. When you rely on those defensive reflexes - withdrawing into your "cave", numbing the experience, lashing out in anger - you end up hurting the people around you.

This workbook is designed to help you own your actions. It puts your needs and your reflexes out in the open where you can look at them honestly, which is far easier to do over a die and a bit of card than in the middle of a heavy conversation. It uses snakes and ladders as a way to repair harm through restorative practice.

To do that, we have to address why this might feel uncomfortable. Most men were handed one strict rule growing up, and it was *never look weak*. Because of that rule, sitting down to examine your own behaviour, or to play anything billed as a communication game, will naturally feel like a threat.

You do not have to be good at this

Nobody has to perform, and nobody has to lead the conversation. The die decides the pace and it decides the subject. Because the die does all the heavy lifting, there is no expectation that you come out with something profound, and no way to steer the conversation away from uncomfortable truths. You roll, and you answer what you land on. That is the whole job.

The three rules.

These are not house style, and they are not there to be polite. Each one is load-bearing. Take any of them out and the game turns into the argument it was meant to replace.

1 **Everything you write and say is about your own behaviour.**

You never write theirs down and you never bring theirs up. This is the rule that keeps the whole thing usable, because the moment a sheet or a turn becomes a list of somebody else's failings, you have stopped playing and started prosecuting.

2 **A need is not a demand.**

Needs are universal and there is no arguing with them. The strategies you use to meet them are neither universal nor fixed, and that is where all the room to move is. It follows that a request somebody is not free to refuse was never a request, it was a demand.

3 **Anyone can stop at any point, without a reason.**

You do not owe anyone an explanation, and nothing is lost by it. Walking away when the room gets too hot is not failing at this - it is one of the more effective things anyone can do with a feeling that has got too big to hold. You can pick it up another day, or not at all.

Separate the man from the behaviour

You are here to understand your own actions, identify your unmet needs, and find healthier ways to move forward. That means taking absolute responsibility for the fact that your actions were wrong and caused harm, while recognising that a destructive reflex does not define who you are. You are still worth caring about.

This is a self-help tool rather than therapy, and it is not a substitute for it. If it stops being useful, stop and come back to it another day. If you need to talk to someone tonight, call 999, Samaritans on 116 123, or CALM on 0800 58 58 58.

The four survival reflexes.

When a need gets cut off, nobody sits still. You move, and you almost always move in one of four directions that Donald Nathanson mapped as the Compass of Shame. This is biology rather than character, and everybody has all four. None of them ever looks at what the feeling was actually about, which is why they are reflexes rather than answers. You will tag each of your own with one of these on page 6.

Withdrawal - go quiet and disappear

Pull back, isolate, hide. Take yourself out of the situation so nobody sees the part you can't stand.

Often looks like - cancelling plans, leaving messages on read, going silent, disappearing into work, the phone or the shed.

Attack Self - agree with the worst verdict

Turn it inward. Get your punishment in first by running yourself down before anyone else can.

Often looks like - "I'm pathetic," "typical me," the running commentary that sides with whoever thinks least of you.

Avoidance - numb it and stay busy

Distract, dampen, or drown it out so the feeling never quite catches up with you.

Often looks like - drink, overwork, porn, scrolling, gambling, risk, bravado, joking it off, filling every hour.

Attack Other - push it outward

Get rid of the heat by aiming it at someone else. Blame, contempt and anger all move the feeling off you.

Often looks like - snapping at the people closest to you, blame, sarcasm, contempt, "what's your problem?"

These four were not stupid. For a lot of people they were the smartest move available at the time. The problem is not that you learned them. It is that they are still running long after the danger has passed, usually wearing a positive spin. *I'm just logical. I stay calm under pressure. I don't do drama.* Worth asking which of those is a strength, and which is a survival strategy in a better suit.

A reflex is still yours.

Naming it is not the same as excusing it. Understanding why you reach for one, and owning what it costs somebody, are two different jobs, and this board asks for both. A reason is not a defence.

The fuller version of this - where the feeling comes from and what to do with it - is in **Reframe the Shame**, at mettletherapy.co.uk/resources/reframe-the-shame

Your three needs.

Pick a dilemma, a relationship, or just the week you have had. Run down the list and tick anything that lands, going with your gut rather than working it out. Then narrow it to the **three** that are most alive in it, rather than the three you think you ought to pick. This is the one point in the game where you choose rather than roll.

CONNECTION

- ☐ Closeness
- ☐ Belonging
- ☐ Affection
- ☐ Companionship
- ☐ To matter

SAFETY

- ☐ Physical safety
- ☐ Emotional safety
- ☐ Predictability
- ☐ Stability
- ☐ Protection

HONESTY

- ☐ Truth
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Integrity
- ☐ Being able to trust what you're told

RESPECT

- ☐ Being taken seriously
- ☐ Consideration
- ☐ Being seen
- ☐ Dignity

AUTONOMY

- ☐ Choice
- ☐ Space
- ☐ Freedom to say no
- ☐ Privacy

UNDERSTANDING

- ☐ Being heard
- ☐ Being believed
- ☐ Empathy
- ☐ Clarity

CONTRIBUTION & MEANING

- ☐ To be useful
- ☐ Purpose
- ☐ To do right by someone
- ☐ Growth

PEACE

- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Order
- ☐ Closure

REST & EASE

- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Play
- ☐ Lightness

Need 1 Which need, and what is going on with it right now?

Write here...

Need 2 Which need, and what is going on with it right now?

Write here...

Need 3 Which need, and what is going on with it right now?

Write here...

If you catch yourself writing "*I need them to stop...*", that is a strategy rather than a need. Ask what it would give you if they did, and write *that* down instead. It is usually something like trust, or space, or being taken seriously.

Your ladders.

A ladder on this board is a thing you actually do that lifts you: it meets one of the needs you picked, and it is worth doing in its own right rather than being another chore you have set yourself. Write four of them. Each one starts with **“I will...”** and each one is about your own behaviour. Being specific and doable beats being admirable and vague, so *“I will text when I am going to be late, before anyone has to ask”* is worth more than *“I will communicate better.”*

The size is fixed by the board, so deciding which statement gets the large one is you saying which of them matters most. The squares are printed on each row so you can find them when you play.

L1 **Small** square 2 to 11

I will...

L2 **Medium** square 3 to 15

I will...

L3 **Medium** square 13 to 25

I will...

L4 **Large** square 14 to 35

I will...

Your survival reflexes.

There are four more of these, and the rules are the same, except that a reflex is where you go when the need is blocked. Size them by what they cost you rather than by how they look from the outside. Then tag each one with the route it belongs to from page 3, ticking more than one box if it genuinely is more than one.

R1 **Small** square 8 to 5

I will...

☐ Withdrawal ☐ Attack Self ☐ Avoidance ☐ Attack Other

R2 **Medium** square 21 to 9

I will...

☐ Withdrawal ☐ Attack Self ☐ Avoidance ☐ Attack Other

R3 **Medium** square 29 to 17

I will...

☐ Withdrawal ☐ Attack Self ☐ Avoidance ☐ Attack Other

R4 **Large** square 31 to 7

I will...

☐ Withdrawal ☐ Attack Self ☐ Avoidance ☐ Attack Other

How to play.

You will need this pack printed out, a die, and something to use as a counter for each person playing - a coin works fine. If there is no die in the house, number six scraps of paper from one to six, fold them up, and draw one out of a mug each turn, putting it back afterwards. Pages 5 and 6 are filled in on your own beforehand, so print one copy of those for each person who is playing. Set aside about an hour.

On your own

Put your counter on square 1, then roll and move. If you land on a **ladder**, climb it: read it out and say when you will next actually do it. If you land on a **reflex**, slide down it: read it out, name its route, and say what it costs you. If you land on a **card square**, draw the top card and answer its prompt out loud. If you land on anything else, nothing happens, so take the breath.

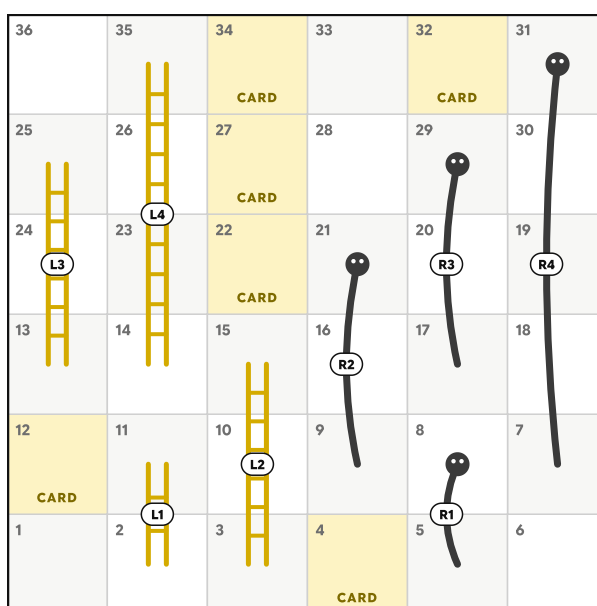
Reach 36 and you are done. The die is there so you cannot steer yourself onto the ground you find comfortable. That is the whole reason this is a game.

With one or two others

The board is the same, but everyone plays off their own sheet. If you land on R2 you read *your* R2, and when somebody else lands on it later they read theirs. It is the same ground with two or three different accounts of it, and nobody has to be told what they got wrong.

On a card square, once the answer is given, everyone else has one job: to say it back in their own words and ask "have I got that right?" Their job is not to agree with it, correct it, or answer it back.

On a reflex, say what it is and what it costs, and then stop. Do not explain it, justify it, or fill in the background.



Everybody finishes. There is no winner, and finishing first means nothing at all. **Anyone can stop at any point, without giving a reason.**

There are thirty-six cards across four sheets. Use card stock if you have it, or ordinary paper if you have not. Cut along the dashed lines, shuffle them, and put the deck face down beside the board.

CONNECTION Closeness Being properly in someone’s life, not just near them. Who are you closest to right now, and when did you last show it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONNECTION Belonging Having somewhere you’re counted as one of the group. Where do you belong? Where do you turn up but don’t? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONNECTION Affection Being shown you matter, not just told. When did someone last show you they cared, and how did you take it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
CONNECTION Companionship Someone alongside you, doing nothing in particular. Who could you call to do nothing with? When did you last? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONNECTION To matter Knowing your absence would be noticed. Who would notice first if you went quiet for a week? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	SAFETY Physical safety Not having to brace. Where do you feel your guard go up? What happens in your body? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
SAFETY Emotional safety Being able to say the real thing without it being used later. Who can you say the real thing to? What makes them safe? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	SAFETY Predictability Knowing roughly what’s coming. What’s uncertain right now, and what is that doing to you? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	SAFETY Stability Ground that stays where you put your foot. What in your life is steady? What’s moving? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

Protection

Who's in your corner? Do they know they're in it?

HONESTY

Integrity

Where do what you say and what you do come apart?

RESPECT

Consideration

Who do you think about before you decide? Who thinks about you?

A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

Truth

Where are you getting a version rather than the truth? Where are you giving one?

HONESTY

Being able to trust what you're told

Whose word do you take without checking? Who checks yours?

RESPECT

Being seen

Which part of you do people not see?

A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

Transparency

What are you holding back, and what is the holding costing you?

RESPECT

Being taken seriously

Where do you get talked over? Where do you do the talking over?

RESPECT

Dignity

When did you last feel made small?
What did you do with it?

A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

AUTONOMY Choice A say in what happens to you. Where have you got no say? Is that true, or does it just feel true? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	AUTONOMY Space Room that's yours, without having to justify it. How much space do you take, and how do you take it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	AUTONOMY Freedom to say no A no that costs you nothing. Where can't you say no? What happens when you do? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
AUTONOMY Privacy Some of it staying yours. What's private? Is that privacy, or is it hiding? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	UNDERSTANDING Being heard Someone taking in what you actually said. When did someone last properly hear you? What did they do differently? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	UNDERSTANDING Being believed Not having to prove it first. Where do you have to make the case before anyone listens? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
UNDERSTANDING Empathy Someone getting why it landed like that. Who gets it without you explaining? What do they do? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	UNDERSTANDING Clarity Knowing where you stand. Where are you guessing? Who could tell you straight? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONTRIBUTION & MEANING To be useful Your effort making an actual difference. Where does your effort land? Where does it disappear? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

CONTRIBUTION & MEANING Purpose A reason the day’s worth getting up for. What’s the point of this week? Answer honestly. A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONTRIBUTION & MEANING To do right by someone Being the person they took you for. Who are you trying to do right by? Are you managing it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	CONTRIBUTION & MEANING Growth Being further on than you were. What are you better at than a year ago? What’s gone backwards? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
PEACE Calm The noise dropping. When is your head quietest? How often do you go there? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	PEACE Order Things in a state you can live with. What’s in a mess, and what is the mess costing you? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	PEACE Closure Something finished rather than left open. What’s still open that you’d like shut? What would shut it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.
REST & EASE Rest Stopping without earning it first. When did you last stop and not feel guilty about it? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	REST & EASE Play Doing something for no reason but the doing. What did you used to do for fun? When did that stop? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.	REST & EASE Lightness Not everything being heavy. When did you last properly laugh, and who with? A need, not a demand. Plenty of different strategies can meet it.

What you actually came for.

The board was the way in. This page is the point of it. Do it while it is still warm, before anyone tidies the counters away.

1 Shared ground. Which needs came up for more than one of you? If you are playing alone, which one kept turning up?

Write here...

2 Where does the thing that helps you set the other person off? One person's hour in the shed genuinely meets their need for peace, and to somebody else in the house it reads as being shut out. Same action, and it lifts one of you and drops the other.

Write here...

3 Your default reflex. Count the tags from page 6. Which of the four owns most of yours?

Withdrawal

Attack Self

Avoidance

Attack Other

4 Make one request each. Keep it specific, keep it doable, and keep it to this week. They are allowed to say no, and if a no is not allowed then it was never a request, it was a demand. If you are playing alone, make the request of yourself and let yourself renegotiate it.

Write here...

5 What do you now know about what somebody else needs that you did not know this morning? If you are playing alone, what do you now know about yourself?

Write here...

You are not trying to end up agreeing. Two people can leave this table clearer that they want different things, and that is a real result - it is the one thing you could not get to while everybody was guessing.

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