Philosophy Hours: Teaching the Stoics

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A WisdomForge Hour book for ages 5 to adult

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Welcome

If you're holding this book, there's probably a small person at your table, or a teenager who argues beautifully at dinner, or a hard week of your own, and you'd like something sturdy to think with. Maybe you've heard that the ancient Stoics have something to offer. Maybe you've seen their names on a coffee mug and wondered what's underneath. Maybe you just want one kind, short hour in the week that isn't about homework or screens.

Whichever it is, welcome. This is a book for a parent who wants to teach the Stoics at home, in short, regular hours, and for the learners beside them. It is also a book for an adult who wants to practice alone. You'll find all of those people in it.

Why this book

The Stoics were a school of philosophers who taught in Athens and then in Rome for hundreds of years. They asked a plain question: *how should a person live?* And they gave plain, practical answers, in lectures, in letters, and in notes a Roman emperor wrote to himself at night.

Three of their ideas travel well to a kitchen table. Some things are up to us and some aren't, and it helps to know which. Between what happens and what we do about it, there's a small gap where we can think. And we're made for life among other people, so being good to the people beside us isn't an extra; it's the work.

That's a useful set of ideas for a child of eight, a teenager of fifteen and a grown-up of forty-five. This book gives each of them a way in.

A hard day is ordinary. I'll say that once and then let it be. You will have days when the Hour doesn't happen, or happens badly, or ends in tears, yours or theirs. Nothing is broken. You start again, smaller.

"Stoic" doesn't mean "no feelings"

Today the word "stoic" means someone who doesn't show a thing: silent, tough, stone-faced. That isn't what the school taught. The Stoics wanted a good emotional life, with names for steady, good feelings such as joy, caution and a clear-headed kind of wishing, and they allowed the first jolt of fear or grief that comes before we've thought at all.[1,2] What they distrusted were the feelings

that run away with us. They never asked anyone to feel nothing. The first chapter tells that story properly, and the rest of the book depends on it.

So when your child says, “That’s stupid, I’m not a robot,” you’re allowed to laugh and say, “Neither were they.”

The focus line

One sentence sits under the whole book:

> **Notice what is yours; do it well; be good to the people beside you; look back honestly.**

Here’s what each clause means, in a few words.

Notice what is yours. Some things are ours to do: what we say, what we try, how we think about what happens, what we choose. Other things aren’t: the weather, other people’s moods, how it all turns out. “Yours” doesn’t mean you can control it. It means it belongs to you to look after. And it never says your body, your pain, or your circumstances don’t matter. They do.

Do it well. The Stoics thought a good life is made of doing ordinary things with care and good character: honesty, courage, fairness, self-command. Not perfectly. Well.

Be good to the people beside you. The school said human beings are made for each other. Kindness and justice aren’t side dishes. They’re how a person finishes the job.

Look back honestly. Each evening, you ask what happened, kindly and truthfully. Not a trial. A look.

What this book won’t do

It won’t promise calm or happiness, to you or to anyone in your house. It won’t promise better grades, test scores or a cure for anything. It isn’t therapy, and it won’t call the Stoics an ancient version of any modern treatment. It won’t tell you Stoicism is the best philosophy for children; the Hour works for any short text and any good question, so you can borrow its shape for other things. It won’t rank apps, courses or AI tools. It won’t tell a child that their pain is a lesson, or ask anyone to be strong. And it won’t pretend the old writers were saints. Seneca was very rich while he wrote that wealth isn’t a good. Marcus fought wars. The Stoics lived in a world where slavery was normal, and none of them led a movement to end it. We’ll say so plainly where it matters.

A school of thought, not a faith

Stoicism is a school of thought about how to live. It’s not a religion, and this book never asks a child, or you, to give up your family’s beliefs. People of many faiths and of none have found something useful in the old writers, and you’re free to take what helps and leave what doesn’t. If a line sits badly with your tradition, say so aloud at the table. That’s a good Hour, too.

The four tracks, in a paragraph

This is one book with four tracks in it, not four books. **Ages 5–10** is read aloud, in short sentences, with stories and drawing and a small thing to do. **Ages 11–14** is short paragraphs, real questions and a private "story I'm telling myself" log. **Ages 15–18** uses short passages from the old writers, with the translator named, and debate. **Adult learner (and the parent beside you)** is full prose, notebook practice and the honest critiques. Each chapter has all four, so a household with an eight-year-old and a fourteen-year-old can think about the same idea together, and the parent has a track of their own. If you're reading alone, use only the adult track, and skip the rest.

The parent beside you

If you're a parent, the adult track isn't an extra. It's how you stay a learner and not just a teacher, and children can tell the difference. You'll ask your child to look back honestly. You can do it aloud first. You'll ask what's theirs and what isn't. Your own answer will teach more than any question.

You don't need to know the Stoics. You don't need to be calm, wise or well-read. You need a table, a notebook, a few minutes and a willingness to say "I'm not sure."

How the book is built

Four pieces come first. This welcome, a short guide to using the book this week, a one-page list of five things worth remembering, and **the Philosophy Hour**, the five-step ritual you'll run every time.

Ten chapters follow. Chapter 1 meets the school and its five voices. Chapter 2 asks what is yours and what isn't. Chapter 3 is about the pause between what happens and the story we tell about it. Chapter 4 is about doing it well, in four kinds of goodness. Chapter 5 is about the people beside you. Chapter 6 gives morning and evening practices. Chapter 7 is about hard feelings and carries the book's safety material, so read it when you can. Chapter 8 is about thinking together, including AI tools. Chapter 9 is about keeping an honest record. Chapter 10 is about resources.

The notes live at the back of the book, chapter by chapter, so the teaching can stay in plain words. Quotes from the old writers are short, come from public-domain translations named in the text, and appear only in the pages for teenagers and adults and in the grown-up's own reading. For younger children, the book says "in my words."

Before you start

Pick up a pen and an index card. You'll want them in the first chapter. And remember that you aren't behind. Wherever you are, that's where you begin.

That's enough to begin.

— Michael Gannotti

How to Use This Book This Week

You don't have to read this book in order, or all at once. You have to do a little of it this week. Here's how.

This week, in five steps

1. **Read this page and the Philosophy Hour.** About twenty minutes. The Hour is the five-step routine you'll run for the rest of the book, and everything else hangs on it.
2. **Read Chapter 7 once, quickly, before you need it.** It's the chapter on hard feelings and it carries the book's safety material. You won't teach it this week, but you'll be glad you know where it is.
3. **Do Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 over the next week or two.** Chapter 1 meets the school and clears away the myths. Chapter 2 is the first real practice: noticing what is yours.
4. **Run the Hour at the size your day allows.** A short Hour of about 30 minutes for the youngest, 40 for the middle, 50 for teenagers, and 15, 40 or 60 for an adult. Two or three Hours a week is a good target.
5. **Ask the evening three most nights.** Five minutes. It's the thread that holds the week together.

By Sunday night you should have run the Hour at least once, asked the evening three on a few nights, and found out which parts of the book suit your household. If you managed one Hour, that's a good week.

Placing each learner: by interest and reading, not by age alone

The four tracks are named by age because that's the easiest way to find your place. But a child's age is only a rough guide. Place each person by three things: **what they're interested in, how they read, and what they can carry that week.**

A seven-year-old who reads chapter books and loves hard questions might join the older children's Think It Through, but still do the Ages 5–10 try-its. A twelve-year-old who is tired, anxious, or just not in the mood might do better with the Ages 5–10 track for a week, and nobody should read that as a step down. A sixteen-year-old who finds the old translations hard may use the Ages 11–14 readings and bring the Ages 15–18 questions.

One caution. The Ages 15–18 and adult tracks quote the old writers directly, and some of those passages touch on death and hard choices. **Read ahead before you hand any of it to a younger reader.** The 5–10 and 11–14 pages are written to be safe for those ages, and they leave the hardest material out on purpose.

The banks are menus, not calendars

Each chapter has a handful of named try-its. Think of them as a menu. You don't do all of them. You pick one or two that fit this week's mood, time and learners, and leave the rest for another week or never. A card marked *on-the-go* fits a pocket and a short break. A *standard* card fits a regular Hour. A *deeper* card takes 30 to 45 minutes and is for a weekend. Every chapter has at least one on-the-go card and one deeper one, so you can always find something that fits.

There are 100 practice cards in this book, in the Hour and in each chapter. All but two are screen-free, on purpose, and the two that use a screen say so on their name line. At least one Hour a week should be paper and talk.

Mixed ages at one table

You don't have to run separate Hours for each child. In fact, the book is built so that you don't. A nine-year-old and a fourteen-year-old can share the **Think It Through** step: the same question, each answering at their own level, with the grown-up listening to both. Then they split for **Read a Little** and **Try It on Real Life**, each using their own track. That keeps the household on the same idea at the same time.

When the ages are far apart, let the older child be a co-thinker for the younger one. A fourteen-year-old who explains "mine and not mine" to a seven-year-old learns it twice as well. Just make sure the older child isn't made responsible for the younger child's feelings.

And the parent gets a track too. Do the adult subsection yourself, even in short bursts, because your own practice is the best lesson on offer.

A planning estimate, as arithmetic

Everyone wants to know how much time it will take. Here's the honest answer in arithmetic, not a promise.

Hector, a parent with a nine-year-old and a fourteen-year-old, plans a typical week. This is an illustration, not a real household.

- **Three shared Hours,** each about 35 minutes: 4 minutes to Settle the Mind, 6 to Read a Little, 12 to Think It Through, 8 to Try It on Real Life, and 5 to Look Back. That's $3 \times 35 =$ **105 minutes**.
- **The evening three,** on five nights at 5 minutes: $5 \times 5 =$ **25 minutes**.
- **Two micro Hours of his own,** at 15 minutes: $2 \times 15 =$ **30 minutes**.

Add them up: 105 + 25 + 30 = **160 minutes, or 2 hours and 40 minutes** in a week. If he does one chapter a week for the ten chapters, that comes to 10 × 160 = 1,600 minutes: a little under 27 hours across about ten weeks.

That's a plan, not a target. A thinner week still counts. If Hector manages one shared Hour, five evening threes and a single micro, that's 35 + 25 + 15 = 75 minutes, and it still keeps the thread. Do your own sum on an index card, and make it smaller than you think you can manage. A plan that survives your worst week is better than one that only survives your best.

If you miss a week

You will. Everyone does. Pick up where you left off, do the evening three that night, and don't try to make up the missed Hours. The book will still be here.

Where to start tonight

Read the Hour tonight, then say the one question out loud to whoever is near: **"What is mine here?"** You've begun.

If You Only Remember Five Things

Keep this page where you teach. The chapters add moves, materials and questions. They don't replace these. The whole book is one line, **notice what is yours; do it well; be good to the people beside you; look back honestly**, and here it is in five locks. The first four are the four clauses. The fifth is the one that matters on the worst days.

1. Notice what is yours

Some things are yours: what you say, what you try, what you tell yourself about what happened, what you choose next. Some are not: the weather, other people's moods, how it all turns out. When you're stuck, ask one question, "What part of this is mine?", and do that part. "Yours" never means your body, your pain or your circumstances don't matter. They do, and you're allowed to ask for help with them.

2. Do it well

Take the ordinary task in front of you, a dish, a letter, a hard conversation, and do it with care and good character: honesty, courage, fairness and self-command. Not perfectly. Well. A good day is made of small things done well, not large things done heroically. And when it goes badly, you've still got the next small thing.

3. Be good to the people beside you

You're made for life with others, and so is everyone else at your table. At least once a week, do something kind for a real person, or say something true and kind to one. If someone is being hurt, "that's not up to you" is never the right answer; you tell someone who can help, and you stay beside them.

4. Look back honestly

Each evening, ask three plain questions, kindly: *What was mine to do today? How did I do it? What will I look at tomorrow?* It isn't a trial. It's a look. If the day went badly, the only question is the third one.

5. When it is heavy, bring in a person

Some days and some weeks are heavier than a short Hour can carry: a death, a long illness, a frightening event, weeks of worry or sadness, trouble sleeping or eating, being bullied. This book is not therapy and it isn't meant to be a substitute for a person. Tell someone you trust: a parent, a friend, a doctor, a counselor. If you're the parent, tell someone too. If anyone talks about wanting to die or to hurt themselves, stay with them and get help right away; in the US, you can call, text or chat 988, free, confidential, any hour.[1] Elsewhere, use your local emergency and crisis services. Bringing in a person isn't a failure of the practice. It's the practice: being good to the people beside you includes letting them be good to you. The Hour will still be here when you're ready, and Chapter 7 has more on what to do and whom to ask.

That's it. Five things. Now put the card on the table.

The Philosophy Hour



Every session in this book has the same five steps: **Settle the Mind** · **Read a Little** · **Think It Through** · **Try It on Real Life** · **Look Back.** Learn them once, here. When a chapter says “run the Hour,” this is what it means. What changes from day to day is the question on the table, the short reading, and how much time you have.

A parent runs the Hour with the children. An adult learner runs it alone, or beside the parent, with the same five steps and a longer pace. Nobody needs a teacher’s degree, and nobody has to know the Stoics already. The Hour works because it’s small, it’s the same every time, and it ends with a real thing done on a real day.

The whole book rests on one line, and the Hour is how you live it: **Notice what is yours; do it well; be good to the people beside you; look back honestly.**

It's called an Hour because that's the shape at full size for an adult. For a child it's about half that. Most days it will be smaller still, and that's not a compromise. A fifteen-minute Hour that happens beats a ninety-minute Hour that stays on the calendar.

The five steps, in a sentence each

Settle the Mind is how you arrive. You put the phones away, sit down, and say the day's one question aloud. It isn't meant to make anyone calm, and nobody has to feel a certain way to begin. It just marks the line between "doing everything" and "doing this."

Read a Little is a short reading that gives the day something to think about: a few sentences in my words for the youngest children, a page or a line for older ones, a short passage from one of the old writers for teenagers and adults. The chapters supply the reading. It's always short, because the thinking is the point.

Think It Through is the heart of the Hour and gets the biggest share of the time. You ask a question, you listen to each other, and you work it out in the open. The grown-up is a co-thinker, not an answer key.

Try It on Real Life is the step that makes this philosophy and not just conversation. You take the idea and try it on something real: a small task, a plan for tomorrow, a hard conversation you're about to have. On a short day it may be one sentence. It's still real.

Look Back is where you ask, honestly and kindly, what happened. It's the last clause of the focus line, and it's how you leave a hook for tomorrow.

The Hour at four sizes

The Hour scales by track. These are the times to aim for, not rules.

Step	Ages 5–10	Ages 11–14	Ages 15–18	Adult learner
Settle the Mind	3 min	3–5 min	5 min	5 min
Read a Little	5 min	5–8 min	8–10 min	10–15 min
Think It Through	8–10 min	12–15 min	15–20 min	15–25 min
Try It on Real Life	5–8 min	8–10 min	10–12 min	10–15 min
Look Back	3 min	5 min	5–8 min	5–10 min
Total	**about 30 min**	**about 40 min**	**about 50 min**	**30–60 min**

For the adult learner, the three sizes have names. A **micro** Hour is about 15 minutes: a bench at lunch, a parked car, the kitchen table before anyone is up. A **standard** Hour is about 40 minutes. A **deep** Hour is about 60 minutes: a weekend morning, a long table, a pot of tea.

What each step looks like, track by track

Settle the Mind

Ages 5–10 (3 minutes). Sit close, with hands on the table. Take three slow breaths if you like. Then say the day's question out loud, very short: "What is mine to do?" Younger children may draw it instead of saying it.

Ages 11–14 (3–5 minutes). Phones face down, in another room if you can. One slow breath, then the question, and a moment of quiet for each person to think of one real example from their own day.

Ages 15–18 (5 minutes). The same, with the question written at the top of a page. The quiet minute is for jotting a few words. Nobody has to share what they wrote.

Adult learner (5 minutes). Put the question on a card, say it aloud once, and sit with it for a minute without trying to answer. It's enough to notice what comes up.

Read a Little

Ages 5–10 (5 minutes). The grown-up reads or tells a few sentences in my words: a short story, an idea, one small saying. Plain words. No old-fashioned quotes. The book says "in my words" whenever it's paraphrasing, so you'll never wonder.

Ages 11–14 (5–8 minutes). A short paragraph or a one-line saying, read aloud. For this age the book gives its own modern wording, labeled, and the reading stays short so there's room to talk.

Ages 15–18 (8–10 minutes). A page or less from one of the old writers, with the translator named. These are translations from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, so the English can be stiff. Read it twice, the second time slower.

Adult learner (10–15 minutes). The same old texts at more length, or an encyclopedia entry read slowly with a pencil. You'll find your own pace, and nobody's checking.

Think It Through

Ages 5–10 (8–10 minutes). One open question, asked kindly, with plenty of waiting. A good answer might be a drawing, a "because," or "I'm not sure." The grown-up joins in and says "I'm not sure, let's keep thinking" when that's true.

Ages 11–14 (12–15 minutes). A pair of questions, one concrete and one bigger. Each person gets a turn without interruption. "What makes you say that?" is the most useful sentence in the Hour.

Ages 15–18 (15–20 minutes). A real discussion, with disagreement allowed and expected. Teenagers can run it themselves with the parent as one voice among others.

Adult learner (15–25 minutes). You think it through on paper, or aloud with a partner, or on a walk. Argue the other side. Write down the best objection you can find.

Try It on Real Life

Ages 5–10 (5–8 minutes). Do one small thing right now, or plan it for later today: a kind word, a clean-up, a first try at something hard. Make it small enough to finish.

Ages 11–14 (8–10 minutes). Pick one real situation coming up this week and decide, in one sentence, what part of it is theirs. The parent doesn't get to pick it for them.

Ages 15–18 (10–12 minutes). A written plan for one real situation, kept short, with one thing to look at tomorrow.

Adult learner (10–15 minutes). Apply the idea to something in your own week: a meeting, a family conversation, a decision you've been putting off. Write down the first step.

Look Back

Ages 5–10 (3 minutes). Ask the first of the three evening questions, aloud: "What was mine to do today?" Keep it light. One answer is plenty.

Ages 11–14 (5 minutes). All three questions, spoken or written, and a note about tomorrow.

Ages 15–18 (5–8 minutes). The three questions in a notebook, plus one line about how the Hour itself went and what to change.

Adult learner (5–10 minutes). The same, in your notebook, with a line about what you'd do differently. This is where you decide what tomorrow will look like.

How the grown-up sits

In every Hour with children, the parent sits beside, not above. You're a co-thinker. You get to say "I don't know, let's keep thinking," and you'll say it often, and it will do more good than a right answer would. A few sentences carry most of the weight: "What makes you say that?" "What would someone who disagrees say?" "Is that always true, or sometimes?" "What would change your mind?"

Model one honest look-back aloud each week. "I snapped at the dog this morning. That was mine to do better, and tomorrow I'll take a breath first." Children learn what looking back sounds like by hearing it, and by hearing that it can be calm.

The old writers are not the answer key. Their sayings are things to try and talk about, and a child is free to disagree with Epictetus. If you're not sure what a line means, say so, and look at it together.

A short Hour, as an illustration

Ines, a parent of two, runs a short Hour on a Tuesday evening with Theo, who is eight, and Tessa, who is thirteen. This is an illustration, not a real family.

They sit at the kitchen table and say the question together: “What is mine here?” That’s Settle the Mind, three minutes. Ines tells them, in her own words, that a teacher named Epictetus liked to say some things are ours to do and some are not. That’s Read a Little, five minutes. Theo draws a rainy day with an umbrella. Tessa says the weather isn’t hers, but the umbrella is, and so is whether she complains about it. That’s Think It Through, and they take ten minutes because Theo has a good question about whether a sibling’s mood counts. Ines says she isn’t sure and she’d like to keep thinking about it.

For Try It on Real Life, Theo chooses to pick up his boots before dinner, and Tessa says she’ll tell her friend she can’t make a plan for Friday, instead of leaving it unanswered. Five minutes. Then Look Back: Ines asks, “What was mine to do today?” and Theo says “my boots,” and everyone laughs. They tick all five boxes on the card and go eat. The whole thing took about half an hour, and the card on the fridge shows it happened.

The evening three: the daily thread

The evening three — all four tracks (5 minutes · none; a notebook for ages 11 and up · no screen · Look Back)

On most days there isn’t time for a whole Hour, and that’s fine. What keeps the week connected is the **evening three**, about five minutes at the end of the day. It’s the one practice in this book that every track can do, every day.

It’s three plain questions, asked in a kind voice:

1. **What was mine to do today?**
2. **How did I do it?**
3. **What will I look at tomorrow?**

Children answer aloud, at bedtime, with the grown-up beside them. Teenagers and adults may write. The questions come from an old habit. The Roman writer Seneca tells of a philosopher named Sextius, who asked himself each night what bad habit he had cured that day, what fault he had checked, and in what way he was better. Seneca adds that sleep after such an examination is sweet.[1] You can hear that it’s meant to be kind as well as honest, and that’s the spirit here. It isn’t a trial or a report card. If the day went badly, the question is only “what will I look at tomorrow?”

On your busiest days, the evening three **is** the Hour. That’s not a consolation prize. It’s the Hour with the dials turned down, and it keeps the thread from breaking.

One more rule goes with it. At least once a week, the Hour includes real contact with a person: a talk with someone, a kind act, an apology, a conversation with a neighbor. Philosophy that never touches a person isn’t doing its job.

The five-box card

The five-box card — all four tracks (2 minutes · a card taped near the table · no screen · Look Back)

Draw five boxes in a row on an index card, one for each step. Tape it where you do the Hour. Tick each box as you finish its step. A short day may tick only three, and that's a full day. At the end of the week the card shows you, at a glance, which step you keep skipping. The card is the day's record, not a grade.

The one-question start

The one-question start — all four tracks (3 minutes · an index card · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Each chapter gives you one question for the day. Say it aloud once before you begin. For chapters that don't come with one, the question that works everywhere is this: **"What is mine here?"**

The three box shapes, once

The Talk box

Every teaching chapter has a **Talk box**. It's the question you ask yourself, or ask aloud as a family, to close the week's work. The shape never changes. The first line is the chapter's own question. Then come three to five follow-ups, one line on what to do with the answer, and two short child-friendly versions, one for ages 5–10 and one for ages 11–14. When the grown-up asks it of a child, it's a real question, not a quiz. Wait for the answer. If it doesn't come, count a slow three, then shorten the question.

A family-friendly line that fits every box is the Hour's own question: *"What was mine to do, how did I do it, who did it touch, and what will I look at tomorrow?"* You may use it any day instead of the chapter's question.

The on-the-go try-it

Every named try-it in this book lists the same things in parentheses: **a name, the minutes, the materials, whether it's screen or no screen, and which step of the Hour it belongs to.** Then, if there's a safety line, it comes next in italics. Then the move, in a few sentences. On-the-go try-its fit a pocket and a short break. Here's the shape, and the first one you can do today.

The one-question start (3 minutes · an index card · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Pick today's one question from the chapter, say "What is mine here?" aloud once before you begin, and set the card where you can see it. Younger children may draw it instead of saying it. That's the whole try-it.

The deeper try-it

Every chapter also has at least one **deeper try-it**: a longer card, 30 to 45 minutes, for a weekend or a day with room. It's named and labeled in the same way, and it ends with something you can

keep: a page, a list, a plan. A deeper try-it is never required. If your week has room for only the short ones, the book still works.

One paragraph on safety

A few rules go everywhere, and Chapter 7 gives every one of them in full. We say “died” plainly, in simple words, with a simple cause, so a child doesn’t think it was their fault. Nothing in this book asks anyone to imagine the death of someone they love. Anger is allowed; hitting and hurting are not. Tears are allowed, and a child’s pain is never called a lesson. Nobody is told to “be strong.” If someone is being bullied, you believe them and you act, because “that’s not up to you” is never the right answer to being hurt. Journals are private; a parent reads one only when invited. If worry, sadness or loss of sleep, appetite or interest lasts for weeks, or anything frightening has happened, a doctor or counselor is the right door, and this book is not therapy. And if anyone talks about wanting to die or to hurt themselves, stay with them and get help right away. In the US, you can call, text or chat 988, any hour, free and confidential; elsewhere, use your local emergency and crisis services.[2] Chapter 7 has the full box, and Chapter 10 lists where to turn.

One paragraph on AI tools

Some of you will use an AI tool, and the rule is the same for children and adults: **try first, ask after.** Give your own answer before you ask a tool for one. Use it as a sparring partner, to argue the other side or ask a hard question, never as the source of a quote and never as proof that you’ve learned something. Check every “Epictetus said” against the page of the translation, because tools can invent or garble quotes, and many popular sayings aren’t in the old texts at all. Keep family and children’s private details out of any tool. Chapter 8 has the full rules.

Which size today?

Choose by the day you have, not the day you wish you had. If you can see a clear half hour and your head is clear, run a standard Hour. If you’re on your feet, short of time or short of sleep, run a micro. If Saturday morning has room, run a deep one. If the day falls apart before you start, ask the evening three and call it done. All of them are the Hour.

Chapter 1 — Meet the School: Five Voices and an Honest Word About “Stoic”



Why this matters

Dara has a six-year-old who plays soccer. After a game she heard a coach say to a boy who’d scraped his knee, “Be stoic, buddy.” The boy went quiet and wiped his face. Dara, who’d picked up a book about the Stoics that week, wasn’t sure whether the coach had done something kind or something unkind. This is an illustration, not a real family.

You've probably heard the word used the same way. Be stoic. Take it like a stoic. Stoic face. In everyday English it means someone who doesn't show a thing, who bears it and says nothing. That's the picture most of us, and most of our children, carry into this book.

It's also not what the school taught. The Stoics were a group of teachers and writers who gave advice on how to live well, and what they wanted was a good inner life, not a blank one. They wanted people to think clearly, act fairly and care for others. They allowed the first jolt of fear or grief that comes before we've had time to think. They didn't ask anyone to feel nothing. We'll come back to that in a moment.

So why spend a whole chapter on who they were? Three reasons. **First, the popular picture is in the way.** If your child thinks "Stoic" means "don't cry," then everything else in this book will land crooked. A few minutes spent clearing away the myth saves a lot of confusion later. **Second, real people are easier to teach than ideas.** A man who spent part of his life enslaved and became a teacher, a very rich adviser to a ruler, an emperor writing notes to himself at night: each one is a person a child can picture, and each one shows a different side of the same school. **Third, knowing where a line came from keeps us honest.** Some of the most-quoted sayings online were never said by the people they're credited to. A grown-up who knows the difference can pass that on.

This chapter owns the "who." It's a gentle one. There's a porch to walk on, five voices to meet, a strip of paper to unroll, and a plain word about what "stoic" means now and what it meant then. By the end of the week, your household will have a picture of the school that is truer than the one on the mug, and a small first taste of what these writers sound like.

Understand it yourself

Zeno's porch

The school began in Athens, around 300 BCE, with a man named Zeno who came from Citium, a town on the island of Cyprus.[1] He taught in a public place, a public colonnade called the *Stoa Poikile*, the "painted porch." People came to hear him there, walked and talked, and before long they were known as the people of the Stoa. The name "Stoic" comes from the place, which is a nice fact to hold onto: the school was named for a porch where people met to think out loud, not for a quality of character.[2]

There's also a famous story about how Zeno came to philosophy. A late biographer, Diogenes Laertius, who wrote centuries after Zeno died, says that Zeno was a merchant sailing with a cargo of purple when his ship was wrecked. He went up into Athens, sat down in a bookseller's shop, picked up a book about Socrates, and was so taken with it that he asked where men like Socrates might be found. Just then, the story goes, the Cynic philosopher Crates walked past, and the bookseller said, in R. D. Hicks's translation, "Follow yonder man."[2] That's a good story. Treat it as a story. We don't know that it happened, and the writer who tells it wasn't there. In this book, anything that comes from a late storyteller gets labeled that way.

The school over time

The Stoa lasted a very long time. Zeno was followed by Cleanthes of Assos, and Cleanthes by Chrysippus of Soli, who headed the school from around 230 to 206 BCE and is remembered as its foremost theorist and systematizer.[1] Here is a fact that surprises most people: we don't possess a single complete work by Zeno, Cleanthes or Chrysippus. Chrysippus is reported to have written over 150 works, and only fragments remain.[1] What we know of the early school comes from reports and scraps. So in this book, those three get a line each, and none of their words are quoted, because none have been verified.

The school taught in three parts: logic (how to reason), physics (what the world is like) and ethics (how to live). We'll be teaching the third, with the other two as background.[3]

Roughly 480 years pass between Zeno's porch (around 300 BCE, a round number) and the death of the last of our three main voices, Marcus Aurelius, in 180 CE: 300 plus 180. The voices most of us meet today are the later, Roman ones, because their writing survived.

Three voices from Rome

Epictetus was born in the 50s CE in a Greek city of Asia Minor, and for part of his life he was the slave of a man who worked in the Roman emperor's court.[4] He studied for a time with a Stoic teacher named Musonius Rufus. Eventually he received his freedom, began lecturing, and later opened his own school in Nicopolis, in northwestern Greece, where he taught until his death, around the year 135.[4] He didn't write anything down himself. A student, Arrian, wrote down his lectures, and the *Discourses* and the little handbook called the *Enchiridion* come from those notes.[4] Epictetus is the sharpest teacher of the three, and the one most concerned with a simple question: what is up to us and what isn't?

Seneca, who was born around the turn of the era (the encyclopedias differ by a few years) and died in 65 CE, lived in Rome, and he was many things at once: a writer of essays and letters, and a tutor, then an adviser, to the young emperor Nero.[5] His *Letters to Lucilius* are written in a warm, chatty voice, like a friend advising a friend, and they're the easiest of the three for most readers to love. He was also one of the wealthiest men in the world while he wrote that poverty is not an evil, and critics have noticed that ever since.[6] We'll be fair to both facts. Seneca admitted he fell short of his own goals. That makes him more useful, not less.

Marcus Aurelius was born in 121 CE, became emperor of Rome in 161 and ruled until his death in 180. His reign was troubled by attacks from Germany, rebellions in northern Italy and Egypt, and an outburst of plague, and at least some of his notes were written during his last campaigns.[7] He never meant them to be read. They're private notes to himself, and the title *Meditations* was added by later editors.[7] That's worth knowing, because it changes how we read them. Marcus isn't lecturing us. He's talking to himself.

Those are our five voices, counting Zeno, "Cleanthes and Chrysippus" as one, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus. Notice that they come from very different places in life: a merchant-turned-philosopher, two organizers whose books are lost, a freed slave, a rich adviser, an emperor. That range is one of the best things about the school.

A school for living

It's worth saying what kind of school this was, because it isn't quite what we picture. There were no grades and no diplomas. People came to the Stoa and, later, to lecture rooms and reading circles, to learn how to live. Ethics, the study of how to live, was the center of the effort, and the study of reasoning and of the world was there to support it.[3] The old texts read like what they are: advice, exercises and reminders, written to be used on a Tuesday. That's the spirit of the Hour in this book. We aren't studying the Stoics the way you'd study a battle. We're borrowing a few of their practices and trying them on our own days.

Sources are different kinds of things

The three Roman voices come to us in three different ways, and a good teacher keeps them straight.

- **Epictetus taught aloud,** and a student wrote it down. We hear him through Arrian.
- **Seneca wrote letters and essays** to friends and readers. He meant them to be read.
- **Marcus wrote private notes** to himself. He did not mean them for readers.

It makes a difference. When you read Epictetus, you're hearing a teacher in a classroom, brisk and a little stern. When you read Seneca, you're getting a friend's long letter. When you read Marcus, you're looking over a tired man's shoulder. The same idea can sound quite different in each voice, and a child who can tell which kind of source they're hearing is already thinking like a historian.

What "stoic" means now and what it meant

Today "stoic" means someone who shows no feeling. The ancient school meant something else. The Stoics sorted feelings into unhealthy ones that run away with us, such as fear and craving, and healthy ones, and they hoped to be free of the first kind. It would be wrong to say they aimed at a life without feelings or at hiding them.[3] They had names for good feelings, and they allowed the quick, involuntary reactions that come before any thinking.[1] They didn't tell anyone to feel nothing. Chapter 7 goes into this properly.

A caution about quotations

Lots of sayings floating around online are credited to Marcus, Epictetus or Seneca. Many aren't in their writings at all. "The obstacle is the way" is the title of a modern book, not a line from the *Meditations*. A widely shared line beginning "You have power over your mind" isn't in the Long translation of the *Meditations*, which is the one we use here.[8] When you read a Stoic quote, the habit to build is: *where is it from, and can I find it on the page?* The Resources chapter lists open texts where you can check.

Who is missing

All five voices in this chapter belong to men, and the writing that survives was made by people who had the time and means to write, or to have their words written down. The school surely had other students whose names we don't have, and the record we're working from is narrow. When

we read the Stoics, we're hearing some of them, and the picture is partial. We'll say so again in Chapter 5, where we talk about the school and slavery.

How to try it this week

Start the week by asking each learner one question, before you say anything about the school: **"What do you picture when you hear the word 'stoic'?"** Write the answers down without comment. You'll look at them again on Sunday.

Ages 5–10

Tell your child, in your own voice, that you're going to meet some people who lived a very long time ago, and that you're starting by walking to the place where one school began. Keep it light: this is a story hour, not a lesson, and a wandering question is a good answer.

The porch walk (20 minutes · a porch, a doorway, or a shady spot · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Walk slowly with your child to a porch, a doorway or a shady spot, and stop there. Tell the true story in your own words. Here's the shape, in my words: "A very long time ago, in a city called Athens, there was a long porch with tall columns and paintings on the wall. A teacher named Zeno liked to walk and talk there, and people came to walk and talk with him. They asked big questions, like how to be kind and what to do when things go wrong. After a while people called them the porch people. In their language, the word for porch was *stoa*. So when you hear the word *Stoic*, you can remember it started with a porch."[2] Then ask one question, "What would you want to talk about on a porch?", and wait for the answer. Walk and talk about whatever comes. Leave the shipwreck story for another day, or for older children.

Meet one teacher, one idea (15 minutes · nothing · no screen · Read a Little)

Tell this one in your own words, too. Here's the shape, in my words: "Another teacher, named Epictetus, lived many years later. Earlier in his life, he was a slave. That means somebody else owned him, and he wasn't free. That was wrong. Later he was set free, and he became a teacher. He had one big idea that he said again and again: some things are mine to do, and some things are not. My kindness is mine. The rain is not."[4] Keep it that short. Then ask, "What's one thing that's yours?" and "What's one thing that isn't?"

If your child asks about slavery, answer plainly and briefly. Something like, "In that time some people were treated like property. It was wrong, and he was freed." That's enough for a child of this age. If they ask more, you can say, "Good question. Let's find out together," and mean it. Don't make it a lecture, and don't tell it as a tragedy. The story is about a person who got free and then taught.

Dara tried the porch walk on a Saturday with her six-year-old. They stopped at the front steps, and she asked what they'd want to talk about on a porch. After a long pause her daughter said, "Dogs." They talked about dogs for ten minutes, including whether a dog is yours, and Dara counted it a full Hour. This is an illustration, not a real family.

Keep your own voice kind and unhurried, and let the child interrupt. If your child asks what "Stoic" means in the playground sense, say, "Some people use it to mean 'doesn't show feelings.' The porch people didn't mean that. They had feelings, and they thought it was good to be honest about them."

Listen for: a child who says the word "porch" when you ask where "Stoic" comes from, or "the rain isn't mine, but my umbrella is," or any question at all. A question counts as a good answer.

Ages 11–14

Before you say anything, ask what picture they have of the word "Stoic," and write it down. Then tell them that the school's people were real, they were very different from each other, and you're going to put them on a line.

A strip of time (30 minutes · a long strip of paper, markers · no screen · Think It Through)

Unroll a long strip of paper. Receipt tape works well, or tape sheets end to end. Choose a scale: one inch for every 20 years. The whole span is 480 years, and 480 divided by 20 is 24, so it fits in 24 inches, two feet. Mark three points. The school's founding, around 300 BCE, goes at one end. Epictetus, born in the 50s CE, goes about a foot and a half along. Marcus Aurelius, who lived from 121 to 180 CE, goes near the other end.[1,4,7] Then do the arithmetic aloud: from the porch to the end of Marcus's life is about 480 years. Ask, "How does that compare with something you know?" For example, the United States declared independence in 1776, and 2026 minus 1776 is 250 years: about a foot on this strip.

Now put each of the voices on sticky notes and place them: Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus, Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus. Say, for each, in my words, what we know: Epictetus was once enslaved and later free; Seneca was an adviser to a ruler and very rich; Marcus was an emperor who wrote notes to himself. **Label anything that's only a story from a later writer.** If you tell the shipwreck story of how Zeno found philosophy, put it on a sticky note marked "story, told centuries later," and stick it beside Zeno rather than on the line.[2] This is the most important move in the card. A child who learns to label a story as a story has learned a useful habit for life.

Leila, who is twelve, made her strip on the hallway floor with a roll of paper towels. She put Marcus at the far end, then stopped. "He's older than my whole country," she said, and she was right. That's an illustration, but it's the kind of moment this card is built to make.

Then ask the question that does the real work: **"What did each writer need?"** Epictetus had been unfree, so a lesson about what's yours had a sharp edge for him. Seneca was tutor and then adviser to a young emperor, and had to live with that. Marcus was responsible for an empire and wrote private notes to steady himself. You're not asking for the "right" answer; you're asking them to imagine three different lives.

If your child enjoyed the porch walk when they were younger, the same card, taller, is to walk to a real porch or doorway and let your eleven-year-old tell the porch story to a younger sibling, or to you. Some eleven-year-olds still love that, and it's a fine opener.

A word on slavery, since Epictetus's story will raise it. At this age, say it straight: he was enslaved for part of his life, and slavery was and is wrong. He was later freed and became a teacher. Many ancient writers, including the Stoics, lived in a world where slavery was ordinary, and Chapter 5

takes up what the school did and didn't say about it. If your child wants to know more now, look it up together, and say you'll come back to it.

You are a co-thinker in this card, not the answer key. When your child places a sticky note somewhere you'd have put it differently, ask, "What made you put it there?" before you say a word. If you don't know where something goes, say so. A strip with a question mark on it is a fine strip.

Listen for: "It's a lot longer than I thought." Or "Marcus died almost five hundred years after Zeno started the school." Or a good question about who isn't on the strip. Any of those is a good answer.

Ages 15–18

Tell your teenager at the start that you're not going to defend the Stoics or sell them, and that you want to know what they make of three short pieces by three very different writers. And say that the question isn't "is it true?", but "who was this written for, and does that change how I read it?"

Three desks (30 minutes · the three short readings below · no screen · Read a Little)

Read these three short passages aloud, one after another, and then read them again silently. The translators are named so you can find the pages: Elizabeth Carter for Epictetus, Richard Gummere for Seneca, George Long for Marcus.

Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 1 (Carter): "Some things are in our control and others not."[9]

Seneca, Letter 13.4 (Gummere): "…we suffer more often in imagination than in reality."[10]

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* Book 5 (Long): "In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present—I am rising to the work of a human being."[8]

Then ask three questions: **Who was each writing for? How was it made? How does that change how I read it?** Epictetus taught in a classroom, and his student Arrian wrote down what he said, so this is a teacher's brisk line to students.[4] Seneca wrote letters to a friend, so this is one person talking to another, with a bit of reassurance in it.[5] Marcus wrote private notes to himself, so the tone is a person getting himself out of bed. He wasn't trying to convince us of anything.[7]

Priya, who is sixteen, read the three aloud with her father. After a minute she said, "Marcus is the only one who isn't trying to convince me of anything." That's an illustration, not a real conversation, but it's a good observation, and it's one many readers make.

Then ask a harder question: **"Which of these three would I trust if I knew his life?"** Seneca was one of the wealthiest men in the world while he wrote about poverty, and a wise teenager will notice that.[6] Epictetus had been enslaved, and Marcus ruled an empire. Does that change how much weight each carries? There's no single right answer. The point is to read with your eyes open.

The same card, taller, is the strip of time: draw it on a long page and put your own century at the end, so you can see how far these voices have traveled.

A note on the language. These translations are old. Carter's *Enchiridion* is from the eighteenth century, and the MIT page we use is a modernized version of it; Long's *Meditations* is from the nineteenth and says "thou" and "risest." Gummere's letters are from the twentieth. Read each

passage twice, the second time slower, and don't be discouraged if a phrase sounds stiff. A teenager is free to say, in their own words, what a line means, and that's the better test of whether they've read it.

If you want a written piece, ask for one paragraph on a single question: **"Which of the three would I want beside me on a hard day, and why?"** Ten sentences is plenty. It doesn't need to be graded, and it goes in the portfolio only if the teenager says so.

Listen for: someone noticing that the sources are different kinds of things, or that the writer's life colors the advice. A good answer might also be "I'd rather argue with Epictetus than agree with Seneca." That's a start.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

This track is for you, the learner. You may be a parent trying out the ideas before you teach them, or an adult reading alone, and either way you set the pace. Begin by writing down your own answer to the opening question, *What do I picture when I hear "Stoic"?*, and keep it. You'll compare it to what you think on Sunday.

The slow read (45 minutes · a printed encyclopedia entry and a pencil · no screen · Read a Little)

Print the overview of the school from one of the free encyclopedias listed in the Notes, and read it slowly with a pencil.[1,3] Don't try to finish it. Aim for the opening sections on history, the three parts of philosophy and the main ideas. Mark one thing that surprised you and one thing you want to test in your own week. Then write half a page: **What did I think "Stoic" meant, and what do I think now?** Keep what you write. In a month you can read it again.

Walt, a retired bus mechanic, did this on a Sunday. He wrote, "I thought it meant keeping your mouth shut. Turns out the porch people were the talkers." He put a star next to the part about feelings. This is an illustration.

If you want more, the same card, taller, is the three-desks reading above: read the three short passages and ask who each was written for, and what the writer's life does to the advice. Adults often get the most from the second question.

A short note for you, not for the children's pages. Two of these men died in ways that are hard to read about. Diogenes Laertius tells a story of Zeno's death after a fall, and he gives two different ages for it, so treat it as a report from a late biographer, not as settled fact.[2] The Stanford Encyclopedia says that Seneca, charged with complicity in a plot against Nero, was compelled to take his own life in 65 CE.[5] This book leaves those scenes to your own reading and doesn't use them to teach, and they stay off the child tracks.

And a note on a quieter matter: you're allowed to feel unsure about the school. Some adults arrive wary of anything that sounds like self-help. Some arrive devoted. Both are fine places to begin. What the book asks is that you look at the sources before you decide.

Listen for: the moment you catch yourself saying "I always thought that meant…" Write it down. That's the practice.

Talk box

"*What did I think 'Stoic' meant — and what did I find out it didn't?"*

- **Picture:** What did I see in my head when I heard the word before this week?
- **Surprise:** What was the one thing I learned that I didn't expect?
- **Story or fact:** Which parts of what I now know are real and which are stories told long after?
- **Voice:** Which of the five voices would I like to hear more from, and why?
- **Next:** What's one thing I'll say differently the next time someone says "be stoic"?

What to do with the answer: write the answer on an index card, and stick it where you'll see it next week. Compare it with the picture you wrote down on Monday.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What did you think the word *Stoic* meant? What did you find out? What was your favorite part of the porch story?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What did you think *Stoic* meant before this week? What changed? Which writer would you most like to hear more from?"

Practice that actually builds it

The first-week cards get you started. These two are for keeping the picture honest, and for coming back to it.

What do you picture when you say "stoic"? — all four tracks (8 minutes · paper, crayons · no screen · Think It Through)

Draw or describe a "stoic" person. A child may draw a face, a teen may write three words, an adult may sketch a quick portrait or a list. Then compare it with what the school wanted: steady, good feelings and doing your part, not having no feelings. Ask, "What would I change in my picture?" and change it. Do this once at the start of the week and again a month from now, on a fresh sheet, and put the two side by side. You'll see the picture move. That's a small, honest record of your own thinking changing.

On Sunday, look again at the Monday answers you wrote down, one at a time, and ask each person, "Is that still what you picture?" Don't push. Some will say yes, and that's fine. Some will say, "No, it's more like…" and then you'll have a good Hour.

A word for the grown-up: don't correct the first drawing. If the child draws a stone-faced figure with arms crossed, say, "Tell me about him." The picture is the starting point, and the whole chapter's work is to let it change by itself.

Five voices gallery — Ages 11–14, Ages 15–18 and adult learner (40 minutes · five index cards, tape · no screen · Read a Little)

This is the deeper card. Write one name on each index card: Zeno; Cleanthes and Chrysippus (together); Epictetus; Seneca; Marcus. Under each name, write one fact from this chapter. For Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus, add one line the person wrote. Ages 11–14 write it in their own

words, and the two older tracks copy it from the three-desks readings. For Zeno and for Cleanthes and Chrysippus, write what's true: we have almost nothing in their own words.[1]

Tape the five cards to a wall, in order, at eye level. Then walk past them each day for a week. On each walk, read one card aloud and ask one question: "What would this person say to someone who was having a hard Monday?" Don't answer for them. Say, "I don't know, but I can guess." You're practicing the habit of treating a source as a person, and of being honest when you don't know what they'd have said.

At the end of the week, add a sixth card for you. Write one fact about your own life, and one line you'd want written down. It's a good way for older children to see that these were people with ordinary days.

One voice a week. Once the gallery is up, you can let it carry you through the first weeks of the book. Pick one voice a week and learn one thing more about that person: read a page of an entry, hear a short passage read aloud, or ask the library. No one has to master any of the five. The point is to let the cards stay familiar, so that when Chapter 2 quotes Epictetus, your household already thinks of him as a person with a past.

A source habit, any age. Whenever a quote comes up (at dinner, in a video, from a friend), ask the three-part question: *Who wrote it? Who was it for? How do I know?* Say it lightly, as a game. In a few weeks your household will be asking it by themselves, and that habit will serve you well in every other chapter.

If it isn't clicking

"This is boring. They're dead guys." It may be. Go back to the porch, the strip of paper or the sticky notes, anything that gets hands moving. For a child under ten, the whole chapter can be one walk and one story. Come back to it in a month.

"So Stoic means being tough." That's the most common thing anyone says, and it's the thing the chapter is built to turn over. Don't argue. Ask, "What does a tough person do when they're sad?" and listen. Then say, in your own words, that the school wanted people to be honest about feelings and to care about others, and that the quick jolt of feeling was never the problem. Chapter 7 goes further.

A child who is worried about stories versus facts. Some children are bothered by "we don't know whether that happened." Say it's fine to like a story and still know it's a story. That's a grown-up skill, and they're ahead of the game.

"Why should I care what dead Romans think?" A fair question, especially from a teenager. Don't defend them. Say, "You don't have to care. Try the card, and tell me if it was useless." Respect the answer. People have found uses for these writers for two thousand years, and that's no reason to pretend it will work for everyone.

A grown-up who doesn't know any of this. You don't need to. You have an entry to read, a strip to draw and a question to ask. Say "I'm learning this too," and you'll be a better teacher than someone who pretends.

A family whose tradition sits uneasily with the school. Stoicism is a school of thought, not a faith, and nobody is asked to give anything up. If a line bothers anyone, say so at the table and talk about it. That's a good Hour.

Someone remembers a quote and says it's from Marcus. Don't correct it in front of the table. Say, "Let's find it." Then look together, in the translation, and if it isn't there, say so kindly. That's a small, good lesson in how to read, and the family member isn't embarrassed.

A hard question about slavery. Answer plainly and briefly. It was wrong. Epictetus began life enslaved and was later freed. The school lived inside a world where slavery was normal, and Chapter 5 says more about that honestly.

Tools, including AI

The best tools for this chapter are on paper: a long strip, sticky notes, index cards, and a printed encyclopedia entry. The library is the next best. Ask what translations and audiobooks it holds; Chapter 10 lists open texts you can read for free.

If you use an AI tool, try first, ask after. Make your strip, write your cards, and give your own answer to "what did I think Stoic meant?" before you ask a tool anything. Then use it as a sparring partner, for instance to ask what a teenager might say against the idea that Stoics weren't unfeeling. **Never take a quote from a tool on trust.** Tools make up quotations and attach famous names to them, and many popular sayings aren't in the old texts at all.[8] Check any line against a translation named in the Notes. And keep names, family details and anything private out of any tool. Chapter 8 has the full rules.

What "done enough" looks like

You're done with Chapter 1 when each person in your household can say, in their own words, where the word "Stoic" comes from, and has told one thing about the school that is a story and not a fact. It's enough. It's not an exam. Nobody needs to remember the dates.

- **Ages 5–10:** Your child can tell the porch story in a sentence or two, say one thing that's theirs and one that isn't, and has asked at least one question.
- **Ages 11–14:** Your child has made a strip of time, can name three of the five voices, and has labeled one thing as a story.
- **Ages 15–18:** Your teenager has read the three desks, can say who each was written for, and can name one way a writer's life changes how we read him.
- **Adult learner:** You have written your half page, kept your first picture and your new one side by side, and know where to look when someone offers you a famous quote.

Next is the first real idea the school taught, and the one that gets quoted most: what is yours, and what isn't. That's Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 — What Is Yours, and What Isn’t



Why this matters

Ines is a parent of two. On a Thursday that she describes as “a lot,” she carries the following: the picnic on Saturday, which the forecast says will be rained out; her son’s math grade; her mother’s knee, which isn’t healing as fast as the doctor said; the tone of her boss’s last email; and the way her daughter went quiet at dinner. She doesn’t put any of it down. She goes to bed holding all five. This is an illustration, not a real family.

Most of us do something like this. We pick up everything that touches us, whether or not it's ours to carry, and then we wonder why we're tired. Children do it too. A seven-year-old is furious that the rain canceled the park. A fourteen-year-old is crushed that a friend didn't text back. Each of them is gripping something that isn't theirs to hold, and has let go of the one thing that is: what to do next.

This is the first real practice in the book, and the oldest. Epictetus, the teacher you met in Chapter 1, put one sorting question at the center of his teaching: *what is up to me here, and what isn't?* Answer it, and a good part of the weight shifts. Not all of it, and not every time. But enough that people have kept turning to it for nearly two thousand years.

Two words of care before we start. First, "yours" in this book is broader than "in your control." Yours means your judgments, your effort, your words and your choices: the things that belong to you to look after. It doesn't say your body, your pain or your circumstances don't matter. They do, and we'll say so again. Second, this isn't "just accept it." The point of sorting is to put your effort where it will do some good, which often means doing *more*, not less.

By the end of the week, each person in your house will have sorted at least one real situation into mine, partly mine and not mine, will have done one thing from the "mine" column, and will have said aloud the sentence "I need help with this." Those are the three skills of the chapter, and the third matters most.

A word about your part as the grown-up. You will be tempted to hand out the sorting, saying "that one's not yours" to a child who's upset. Don't. The practice works when each person does their own sort, and when you do yours where they can hear it. Say your own out loud, in a sentence or two, and ask them to say theirs. If you have to correct something, correct it with a question. This chapter gets easier the second time through, and it gets better when you go first.

Understand it yourself

What Epictetus said

Here are the opening lines of the *Enchiridion*, the handbook compiled from his lectures, in Elizabeth Carter's translation as modernized on the MIT Internet Classics Archive. You met the first sentence in Chapter 1: "Some things are in our control and others not." The next one lists what he means: "Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions."[1]

That's his list of what's ours: how we see things, what we go after, what we want, what we avoid, and what we do. On the other side he puts the body, property, reputation and "command," meaning positions of power, which are all affected by other people and by chance.[1] Then he makes a big claim. If you treat the things that aren't yours as though they were, he says, you'll be frustrated and disturbed and you'll blame everyone. If you keep to what's yours, no one will hurt you and you'll have no enemies.[1]

We won't repeat that last promise. People get hurt, and some people have enemies, whatever they do with their own minds. Epictetus was a teacher stating his ideal at full strength. What we take

from him is the sorting question, not the guarantee.

The one faculty that looks at itself

In another lecture, the first one in the *Discourses*, Epictetus makes the point from the other end. He asks what it is that decides whether you should write a letter to your friend. Grammar can tell you what words to use, he says, but not whether to write. Music can tell you about notes, but not whether to sing. What can tell you? "The rational faculty; for this is the only faculty that we have received which examines itself, what it is, and what power it has, and what is the value of this gift."[2]

That's George Long's translation. The idea is plain once you have it. Every other skill you have works on something else. Reason can also work on itself: it can step back and ask whether it's using its power well. That's the part he says is ours, and the part he thinks is worth looking after. For a household, the practical version is this: **you can always ask whether you're thinking about this the right way, and you can always choose your next move.** Chapter 3 is about the pause where that happens.

Mine, partly mine, not mine

The ancient line is sharp, and real life is blurrier. So this book uses three columns, not two.

- **Mine:** your effort, your words, your choices, your judgments, how you treat people.
- **Partly mine:** results that depend on you and on others, such as a grade, a friendship, a job interview, your health.
- **Not mine:** what other people think, say and do; the weather; the past; how it all turns out.

Take a math test. Studying is mine. The grade is partly mine (I can influence it, but the test, the teacher and my sleep are in there too). What the teacher thinks of me is not mine. Take illness. Looking after your body and asking for help are mine. Whether you catch a cold is not. Recovery is partly mine. Take reputation. How I act is mine. What people say about me is not. Whether I apologize is mine.

Many people draw this as a circle: a small inner circle you control, and a larger one outside it. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy notes that the modern writer William Irvine proposes a three-way split instead: some things are up to us, some are not, and on a number of others we have partial control.[3] Our "partly mine" is the same idea in plain words. The old two-way line is a teaching device. It's useful, and it isn't the whole truth.

A worked example: Ines's Thursday, sorted

Go back to Ines and her five worries, and sort them the way the cards in this chapter will ask you to.

- **The picnic.** The rain is *not mine*. How the Saturday goes is *partly mine*: she can choose a plan B. Her part: pick the living-room picnic tonight, and tell the kids at breakfast.

- **Her son's math grade.** The grade is *partly mine* for him and *not mine* for her. What *is* hers is whether she sits with him for twenty minutes on Sunday, if he'd like that, and whether she asks him what would help.
- **Her mother's knee.** The healing is *not mine*. Calling the doctor's office, driving her mother to the appointment and asking what to do at home are *mine*.
- **The email from her boss.** What her boss meant is *not mine*. Whether to ask, plainly, "Did you want this by Friday?" is *mine*.
- **Her daughter's quiet dinner.** What her daughter is feeling is *not mine* to decide. Saying, "I noticed you were quiet. I'm here if you want to talk," and then leaving it, is *mine*.

Notice what happened. Nothing was dropped. Every worry came with something Ines could actually do, and each of those things was small. She has five small things, instead of one big weight. That's the sorting at its best. And notice what *didn't* happen: she didn't decide that her mother's knee doesn't matter. It matters a great deal. It simply isn't hers to heal.

What the line doesn't say

It doesn't say your body doesn't matter. Epictetus put the body on the "not yours" side so he could talk about where to put your effort and your sense of worth. He didn't mean that illness, pain or hunger are trivial. If you or your child is sick or hurt, caring for the body and asking for help are **yours** to do, and doing them is exactly what the sorting asks. **Never use "that's not up to you" to tell someone their pain doesn't matter.** We'll call this the sick-day rule, and Chapter 7 returns to it.

It doesn't say "just accept it." The Stoics were not passive. The best-known Stoics of Rome were either teachers, like Musonius Rufus and Epictetus, or politically active, like Seneca, who was tutor and then adviser to the emperor Nero, and Marcus, who was an emperor himself.[4,5] Justice, being fair to others and acting for the common good, was one of the school's four virtues, and Chapter 4 takes it up.[3] The sorting question is about where to put your worth and effort, not about whether to act. If something isn't in your control, there's often still something you can do: help, vote, ask, learn, speak up. Those are *yours*.

And it doesn't say that every hard thing is a lesson, or that it's your fault. A child who is bullied did not choose it. A parent who loses a job did not choose it. What is theirs is what they do next, and who they ask for help, and that's a different thing from blame.

Where the idea is weakest

The dichotomy has limits, and a good teacher says so. It's hardest to apply to the body, to illness and to being treated unfairly because of who you are, and it can sound hollow to someone in the middle of one of those. It can also be misused by grown-ups: "That's not up to you, so stop complaining" is not the Stoic idea. It's a way of ending a conversation. In Chapter 3 you'll meet the next piece, the pause between what happens and what you tell yourself, and in Chapter 7 you'll find what to do with feelings that don't fit in a tidy column.

How to try it this week

Start the week with a plain question for everyone: **"What's something on your mind today that you can't do anything about, and something you can?"** Don't fix either answer. Just listen, and write down one line from each person. You'll come back to it at the end of the week.

Ages 5–10

Keep this track light and physical. A young child learns "mine and not mine" with their hands and their body long before they can say it in a sentence. You are not teaching a philosophy. You are giving them a way to say, "I can do this part."

Mine / not mine hands (10 minutes · paper, crayons · no screen · Think It Through)

Have your child trace both hands on a sheet of paper. On the left hand, write or draw what is *mine*: what I say, what I try, what I share. On the right, draw what is *not*: the rain, what someone else does, whether the other kid wants to play. Always start with the left hand. It's the one that gets to be full.

Otis, who is ten, drew a puppy on his left hand and wrote "ask nicely." On his right he drew a grumpy cloud and wrote "my sister." His mother asked what the cloud was. "That's what she does," he said. "I can't make her." Then he looked at the left hand again and added "go first." This is an illustration, not a real child.

Here's one way to open it, in my words: "Put your hand on the paper and I'll trace it. This hand is for the things that are yours. Those are things *you* get to do, like saying something kind or trying again. This other hand is for the things that belong to somebody else, or to the weather. Which hand do you want to fill first?" Then start with the left, and let the drawing be as messy as it likes.

Keep your questions small: "What goes on this hand?" "Is that one yours?" If your child puts something in the wrong place, ask where else it might go, and then let them decide. Don't say, "No, that's wrong."

Listen for: a child who says, on their own, "That's not mine," about something they were upset about. Or "I can do the left hand." Either is a good sign.

The rained-out picnic (20 minutes · a blanket, snacks · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Plan a picnic with your child: where to go, what to bring, who sits where. When it rains (or when you say, "Pretend it's raining"), stop and ask: **"The rain is not mine. So what is mine?"** Let the child come up with the answer. The most common answer is "We could have it inside," and that's exactly right. Spread the blanket on the living room floor, bring out the snacks, and have the picnic.

If it truly rained, you've got a real case. If it didn't, a pretend one works nearly as well. In either case, say it aloud afterward: "The rain wasn't ours. The picnic was." Don't turn it into a speech.

If your child is sensitive about getting things wrong, add *Count tries, not scores* from *Practice that actually builds it*, below. It's made for this age.

A short Hour for this track is one hands card and the picnic, on two different days. That's a full week. Don't add a worksheet.

Ages 11–14

At this age the sorting has to be honest, and kids are quick to spot a sorting that isn't. So give them real material: their own days. The two cards below are the core, and a third turns up in the next section.

Sort the day (20 minutes · sticky notes · no screen · Think It Through)

Each learner lists ten things from their school day, one per sticky note: a test, a lunch table, a text that didn't come, a homework assignment, a coach's comment, a joke someone made. Then sort them into three columns: mine, partly mine and not mine. The rule is to be honest about the *partly* ones. Most things are partly. When you're done, have them circle one thing in "mine" to do tomorrow, and write it on a card.

Leila, who is twelve, put "the group project" in "partly mine," then looked at it for a while and wrote "my part: send my slides by Wednesday" on a fresh note. "That's the only thing I can do anyway," she said. This is an illustration.

If a note goes in the wrong column, don't fix it. Ask: "What would have to be true for it to go there?" A thoughtful kid will often move it themselves.

The partly-mine column (25 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Pick one situation that is still open: an upcoming audition, a fight with a friend, a team tryout. Split a page in two. On the left, "my part": effort, words, choices. On the right, "the rest": results and other people. Then write the smallest next step in "my part," something that could be done in five minutes.

The smallest step is the whole point. A page with a big plan on it makes a worried child more worried. A page with "text her: 'Can we talk at lunch?' " gives them somewhere to go.

Listen for: "I can't do anything about the other column, but I can do this." Also listen for the opposite: a kid who puts *everything* in "mine." That's a sign they may be carrying too much, and Chapter 3 and "If it isn't clicking," below, speak to it.

You'll also find **The two-minute reset**, **Count tries, not scores** and **Not mine is not "don't care"** under *Practice that actually builds it.* Choose one for the week, not all.

Ages 15–18

Teenagers will test this idea against their own lives, and they should. A teen who says "that's easy to say" is already doing philosophy. Your job is to take the objection seriously, not to win.

Test the line (45 minutes · a printed page of *Enchiridion* 1 and *Discourses* 1.1 · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Print the first section of the *Enchiridion* (Carter, MIT) and the first chapter of the *Discourses* (Long, MIT).[1,2] Read them together, once, out loud, taking turns by paragraph. The language is old, so pause for anything unclear. Then test the line on three hard cases:

1. a long illness,
2. being treated unfairly because of who you are,
3. a family fight you didn't start.

For each one, ask: **Where does "not up to you" help? Where does it fail? Who else should be helping?** That third question matters most. A teenager who finishes with "a doctor, a teacher, a parent, a friend" has learned what the idea can't do alone, and that's worth more than a neat answer.

Emeka, who is seventeen, argued that the line fails completely for the second case. "It's not my fault, and it's not only up to me to fix," he said. His father agreed. They spent the rest of the Hour on what, in that case, was Emeka's to do, and what was a school's, a law's and a friend's. This is an illustration.

If your teenager wants to write, a page is plenty: "One place the idea helped me this week, and one place it didn't." Keep it in a folder, or throw it away if they'd rather. The writing belongs to them, and so does the choice.

Don't rush to resolve it. The honest end of the card might be "it helps here, it doesn't help there, and that's what I think."

Also for this track: *The partly-mine column* (above, under Ages 11–14, written the same way, with a bigger situation), *The two-minute reset*, *Not mine is not "don't care"*, and, as a second deeper card, *Read the critique*, all under *Practice that actually builds it.* For an Hour of 40 minutes, pick *Test the line* or one of these. Not both.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

This chapter will probably feel, for adults, both familiar and slightly off. Familiar because you've probably heard some version of "focus on what you can control." Off because real adult life isn't tidy: the job, the parent, the illness and the kids are all partly yours and partly not, and the old two-column sort gets in the way as often as it helps.

The partly-mine column, taller. Use the same 25-minute paper card as the 11–14 track, but choose a situation that actually costs you sleep. Write it at the top of the page. Split the page. On the left, **my part**: effort, words, choices, the exact thing you'd say or do. On the right, **the rest**: results, other people's decisions, the pace of the organization, the economy. Then write, under "my part," the smallest next step. Smallest means smaller than you want it to be.

June works nights as a nursing aide. Her manager keeps changing her schedule with a day's notice. She put "the schedule" on the right, where it belonged. She put "ask in writing for two weeks' notice" on the left and "find out who else on the unit has asked" under it. She also wrote, in a third spot, "decide whether this job is for me." That was the most honest line on the page. This is an illustration.

Notice what June did that isn't in the old two-column line: she found that her "my part" included

asking others for help and information, and weighing whether to stay. That's where the sorting becomes action.

Test the line, with your own cases. This is the same deeper card as in the 15–18 track, and if you're sharing an Hour with a teenager, do it together. Add an adult twist: take the three hard cases from your own life. Not "a long illness" in general, but yours or someone's you love. Not "unfair treatment" in general, but a time you or someone near you had it. Read what Epictetus says, once, and then ask where it holds and where it doesn't.

If you're reading alone, try writing a paragraph you could say aloud to a friend: "This is where I think the idea helps me, and this is where I think it doesn't." If you can say both, you've understood it.

Read the critique and **Not mine is not "don't care"** (see *Practice that actually builds it*) suit an adult's week well. The first is for the person who wants the objections; the second is for the person worried that "let go" means "stop trying."

A word to the parent beside you: say your sorting out loud, once a day. "I can't make the train come. I can leave five minutes earlier tomorrow." Children learn the habit from hearing it, far more than from being told.

Talk box

"*What was mine to do this week — and what did I try to carry that wasn't?*"

- **Mine:** What was the one thing this week that was clearly mine, and did I do it?
- **Partly:** What did I find that was partly mine, and what did I do with the part that was?
- **Carried:** What did I try to carry that wasn't mine, and how did I know?
- **Help:** Where did I need someone else's help, and did I ask?
- **Next:** What's one thing from my "mine" column I'll do next week?

What to do with the answer: write the answer on an index card, and stick it where you'll see it next week. Compare it with the line you wrote on Monday about what's on your mind.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What was one thing this week that was yours to do? Did you do it? What was something you couldn't do anything about?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What did you sort this week? What was one thing in 'mine' that you did? Was anything partly yours?"

Practice that actually builds it

These five cards are for the middle of the week, once the first sorting is done. Each carries a track tag, so you can see who it's for. Use one or two, not all five. A week with one card done well is better than five done in a hurry.

Count tries, not scores — Ages 5–10 and 11–14 (15 minutes · a ball and a bucket, or a spelling list · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Pick something with a score: tossing a ball into a bucket, or spelling ten words. Take ten tries. Then, instead of counting the ones that went in, count the tries you took *with care*, the ones where you slowed down, looked and did your best. Say aloud what was yours ("I took my time," "I tried the new way") and what wasn't ("the ball bounced").

Many children care a great deal about scores. This card moves the point from the score, which is partly theirs, to the try, which is entirely theirs. If your child keeps count of how many went in, let them. Then ask for the other count too. For a child who hates losing, this one card can change the feel of a whole game.

The two-minute reset — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (3 minutes · nothing · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

When something annoys you, stop and ask one question: **"Which part of this is mine?"** Do that part. Leave the rest for later. That's all. It takes about two minutes, and it goes anywhere: a bad text, a long line, a sibling who borrowed your sweatshirt.

The trick is to *do* the part, not just name it. "The part that's mine is how I answer" is only a start. Then answer, or choose not to, or walk away, and notice that you chose. Try it three times in a week, and say aloud afterward what the part was. Teenagers often find this easier than their parents do, because they've had more practice at being annoyed.

Not mine is not "don't care" — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (30 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Pick something you can't control: the news, a decision someone else made, a family situation, a bad piece of weather in a place you love. Write it at the top of the page. Then write **three things you can do that are yours.** Help someone, vote, ask, learn, speak up, send money, write the letter. The Stoics were not telling people to do nothing.[3,6]

This is the card for anyone who hears "not up to you" and feels a flicker of "so I should stop caring." You shouldn't. The idea is about where your effort goes, and one honest answer is "toward the few things I can actually do." For a 12-year-old worried about a news story, this card turns a heavy feeling into a small action. For an adult, it's often the first time the idea feels like more than a way to feel better.

The sick-day rule — all four tracks (10 minutes · nothing · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: Never use "not up to you" to tell someone their pain does not matter.

When you are sick or hurt, caring for your body and asking for help is **yours** to do. Practice one sentence: **"I need help with this."** Say it aloud, and say who you'd say it to: a parent, a nurse, a teacher, a friend, a doctor. Children can practice it with a stuffed animal, "I fell and my knee hurts, and I need help." Teenagers and adults can write down the three people they'd say it to, and one thing that makes it hard.

This card is short on purpose. Practice it on a well day, when saying it costs nothing, so the sentence is ready on a bad one. If a person tells you something is hurting them, in body or mind, don't answer

with the sorting. Answer with care and help first. Chapter 7 covers what to do when it's heavy.

Read the critique — Ages 15–18 and adult learner (45 minutes · printed encyclopedia sections on the dichotomy · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card.

Find what modern writers say about the limits of the "circle of control." The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Stoicism, which you've already met, is a good place to begin: it discusses the dichotomy of control, and describes a proposal to replace it with a three-way split.[3] Print the relevant sections, read them with a pencil in hand, and then write two short pieces: one place the idea helps you, and one place it fails you.

The second one is harder and more useful. A teenager who writes "it fails when what's wrong isn't about me, it's about how I'm treated" has made a real philosophical point. An adult who writes "it fails when someone I love is ill" has, too. The answer needn't be tidy.

If it isn't clicking

"Everything feels like mine." Some people, children and adults both, put every problem in the "mine" column. A child blames himself for his parents' fight. A teen holds herself responsible for her friend's mood. If you see this, **don't argue the sorting.** Ask, "Who else is in this?" and "Who could help?" The sorting isn't meant to add guilt. If a worry stays or grows, talk with a trusted adult, a doctor or a counselor; Chapter 7 says more.

"Nothing feels like mine." The opposite: a person who puts everything in "not mine" and shrugs. Go back to *Not mine is not 'don't care'* and ask for three things that are theirs. Start tiny. "I can say hello." A shrug is sometimes a sign of being tired or sad, and Chapter 7 can help with that.

"That's not fair. It shouldn't be like that." It may not be. Say so. Then say, "And what's yours?" Don't skip the first step. A child who is told "it's not up to you" without hearing "you're right, it's unfair" will stop listening.

"So I should just give up on the grade?" No. The grade is partly yours, which means the part you can reach is worth doing. Studying is mine. The grade is partly mine. What the teacher thinks isn't. Do the part, and let the rest be what it is.

"This sounds like something people say to make you stop complaining." It can be used that way, and it's wrong when it is. Say so out loud. If the idea has only been used on you as a way to be quiet, set it down for a while and come back with a different card, or skip the chapter. Nothing here depends on it.

"It's easy to say." It is. Agree with it. Epictetus's list is simple and the practice isn't, which is why this book asks for small steps and one card at a time. If someone says it's easy to say, ask what they would change in the card to make it hold up. That's a better conversation than defending it.

Two learners at different places. In a house with a seven-year-old and a fifteen-year-old, the sorting will go at different speeds, and that's all right. Let the younger one draw hands while the

older one tests the line, and bring them together at the Talk box. Each can hear the other's answer without needing it to match.

A person who is genuinely suffering. If a child or adult is in pain, grief, fear or illness, the sorting isn't the right tool today. Sit with them. Ask what they need. If the heaviness lasts or deepens, bring in a person: a doctor, counselor, or other helper. Chapter 7 and Chapter 10 tell you where to start.

Adults who like it too much. It's easy to turn the sorting into a filing system for other people's problems: "That's not mine," said to a partner who needs help. Check it against *Not mine is not 'don't care.'* Being beside someone is often the most "mine" thing there is.

Tools, including AI

Paper is the best tool here: sticky notes for the sorting, a page folded in half for the partly-mine column, index cards for the talk box. A printed copy of the *Enchiridion* and the first chapter of the *Discourses* is the next best.[1,2] Your library can help you find a print edition or an audiobook.

If you use an AI tool, **try first, ask after.** Do your own sort before you ask anything. Then you might ask a tool to find a case where the line fails, or to argue the other side: "What would a teenager say against 'what other people think is not up to you'?" That's a good sparring partner. Keep names, family details, health information and anything private out of any tool, and don't ask it to sort a real family problem for you. **Never take a quote from a tool on trust.** If a tool gives you a line from Epictetus, check it against the translations in the Notes. Chapter 8 has the full rules.

What "done enough" looks like

You're done with Chapter 2 when each person has sorted at least one real situation into *mine*, *partly mine* and *not mine*, has done one thing from the "mine" column, and has said "I need help with this" aloud at least once, to someone who could help. That's it. It isn't an exam, and nobody needs to remember Epictetus's list.

- **Ages 5–10:** Your child has drawn the two hands, can say one thing that's theirs and one that isn't, and has said "I need help with this" to a grown-up.
- **Ages 11–14:** Your child has sorted a day, found a partly-mine item and written one small next step, and has done it.
- **Ages 15–18:** Your teenager has tested the line on three hard cases and can say where it helps, where it fails and who else should be helping.
- **Adult learner:** You have sorted one real situation, taken the smallest next step in your own column, and said aloud to one person that you need help with something.

Next is the pause between what happens and what we tell ourselves about it, which is where much of the work gets done. That's Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 — Between What Happens and What You Tell Yourself



Why this matters

Watch any household for an hour and you will see the same small drama a dozen times. Something happens. A cup tips. A text goes unanswered. A teacher hands back a paper with a red mark on it. And before anyone has decided anything, a story is already running. *She did that on purpose. They don't like me. I'm just bad at this.* The story comes so fast that it feels like part of the event.

It isn't. It's a second thing, laid on top of the first, and that second thing is where this chapter lives.

The Stoics noticed that gap and built a good part of their teaching around it. Between what happens and how we answer, there is a small space. They called what arrives in that space an impression, and what we do with it a judgment. You don't have to remember the words. You only have to learn to feel the gap, and to stand in it for one breath longer than you used to. That's the whole skill. It's small, it's learnable at almost any age, and it is the doorway to everything else in this book, because you can't do what is yours (Chapter 2) until you've noticed what you're being asked to respond to.

It matters for the grown-up beside the child just as much as for the child. Most of us reach for our own stories at the worst moment, tired, at the end of the day, with someone small crying. If you practice one pause a day for yourself, your children will pick it up from watching you far faster than from anything you explain to them.

Here's what this chapter will not do. It won't tell anyone that feelings are "just thoughts," or that a frightened child should talk herself out of being frightened. The first jump of the heart, the hot face, the tears that come before any thought at all, are allowed. The Stoics said so themselves, and we'll look at how. What the pause gives you is the next step, not a way of switching the first step off. And it doesn't claim to be a treatment for anything. If worries loop for weeks, or a child's sadness doesn't lift, that's a job for a doctor or a counselor, and Chapter 7 says how to find one.

So this chapter has one aim: that each person in your house, including you, gets a little better at asking, in the moment or just afterward, *What happened? What story am I telling about it? Is that the whole truth?* You'll have a game for the youngest, a three-column page for the middle years, a five-line page for teens and adults, and one breath that works at every age.

Understand it yourself

Two things, not one

Start with the plain picture. Something happens: a door slams, a friend walks past without saying hello. Epictetus, the teacher whose lectures became the *Enchiridion*, put the heart of it in a sentence that has been quoted for nearly two thousand years: "Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things."[1] That's the Elizabeth Carter translation, which is old and a bit stiff, and it's the only wording we'll quote for this idea so the pieces fit together. In today's plain English: *it is often our view of the thing, not the thing alone, that upsets us.*

Notice the "often" and the "alone." Epictetus isn't saying that nothing bad ever happens, or that a stubbed toe is imaginary. He's saying there are two layers, and the second one is the one we have a hand in. A friend walks past without a word. That's layer one. *She's angry with me* is layer two. Maybe it's true. Maybe she was thinking about her dentist appointment. Until you've looked, you don't know.

Marcus Aurelius, writing notes to himself centuries later, said nearly the same thing with an extra turn: "If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs thee, but thy own judgement about it. And it is in thy power to wipe out this judgement now."[2] Read that second sentence slowly. It's not "your pain is nothing." It's "the part of the pain that comes from your

judgment can be looked at, and you can look at it today." Marcus wrote those lines for himself. They were private notes, not a lecture to the world, which is part of why they sound so much like a person talking quietly.

Impression, judgment, and the word "assent"

The Stoics had a tidy way of describing the steps. First comes an *impression*: a thing appears to you, in a sight, a sound, a thought. Then comes a judgment, which they sometimes called *assent*, a kind of inner "yes, that's how it is." *That noise is a threat. That look was a snub. That mistake proves I'm hopeless.* The Stoic claim, as the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy lays it out, is that our emotions are bound up with those judgments, which is why working on the judgment can change the feeling.[3]

You can already see how this plays out at home. A child hears a loud bang from the kitchen. The impression is a sound. The assent is *someone is hurt* or *Dad is mad*. Same sound; very different afternoons. If you can slow the middle step, even a little, you get to ask a question before you decide.

The first jump is allowed

Here's the part that keeps this teaching kind. The Stoics did not expect anyone to feel nothing at the first moment. They described first movements, which the encyclopedia entries call *propatheiai*, or "pre-emotions": the start, the flush, the pounding heart, the tears that rise before you've thought a word.[3,4] These happen before assent. They aren't failures. They're what a body does. The Stoic work begins *after* them, in what you do next.

If you teach only one thing from this chapter to a child, make it this: *your body got there first, and that's allowed.* A child who believes that a fast heartbeat is a mistake will hide it and feel worse. A child who knows it's ordinary has room to ask the next question. The cards in this chapter keep coming back to that.

One more caution, from a modern philosopher who knows the Stoics well. Martha Nussbaum says the Stoic account of emotions, that they involve judgments of value, has been "amply supported by psychological research." She also says the old Stoic claim that small children don't have emotions is "not correct," and she rejects the Stoic demand that we get rid of the attachments that make us grieve.[5] We'll take the first part and leave the other two. Children feel. The pause is a skill for living with feelings, not a way of not having them.

The pause, and why it helps

What does the pause actually do? It makes room for a second thought. *What did I really see or hear, as a camera would record it? What did I add?* Often the addition is the part that stings. Sometimes, when you look, the addition is right: she *was* angry; the paper *did* have a lot of red. Looking didn't make the problem go away. It did tell you what the problem is, and that's a better place to act from.

That's why the cards here use plain, camera-and-caption language. You separate the *what happened* from the *what I told myself about it*, and you ask whether the story is the whole truth. You aren't

asked to believe a nicer story. You're asked to check.

Cousins, not twins: the Stoics and cognitive therapy

You may have heard that the Stoics were "the original cognitive therapists." That's too neat, but there's a real thread behind it, and it's worth knowing so you can talk about it honestly. Two authors who write about Stoic practice, Robertson and Codd, report that Albert Ellis, a founder of rational emotive behavior therapy, said his central ideas had been "originally discovered and stated" by the Stoics. They add that Ellis quoted Epictetus in a 1962 book, and that Aaron Beck, the founder of cognitive therapy, wrote in 1976 that his approach had philosophical roots going back thousands of years, "certainly to the time of the Stoics."[6] In 1979 Beck and his colleagues named Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius.[6]

Two honest notes go with that. First, the people telling this story practice and write about Stoicism themselves, so it's a good account of the *history* and not a neutral test of whether Stoic training works. Second, a lineage isn't a guarantee. The Stoics were after a good character, not fewer symptoms, and cognitive therapy is a clinical treatment with its own research. If you're struggling, a trained clinician is the person to see. Think of these as cousins who share an old idea: that how we read events shapes how we feel about them.

What people have found, and what that can't tell us

People have tried one-week and four-week programs of Stoic practice, and the organizers report the results. In the 2017–18 Stoic Week, about 1,500 people finished the questionnaires, and on average they reported about 14 percent less negative emotion, 10 percent more positive emotion and 13 percent more life satisfaction after a week. In a later four-week online course (the May 2020 round), 5,017 people took part and reported gains of 12 to 15 percent on resilience, flourishing and life satisfaction.[7] Here's the plain sentence that has to travel with those numbers: *people who chose to try it, and who answered the same questions before and after, said they felt better, and there was no comparison group.* About three in four people who started the week did not finish the questionnaires. So the numbers are encouraging, and they can't tell us that the practice caused the change. Treat them as a reason to try it on yourself, with a notebook and an open mind.

One more piece of research is worth knowing because it explains why this chapter never says "stuff it down." A well-known set of studies by Gross and John compared two ways people manage feelings. People who habitually *reappraised*, meaning they looked again at what a situation meant, reported more positive and less negative emotion and did better in relationships and well-being. People who habitually *suppressed*, meaning they kept the feeling from showing, felt less positive emotion, more negative emotion and had worse relationships.[8] Those were patterns in how people usually act, not a test of Stoic training. Even so, they're a good reason for the rule here: we name the feeling, we look at the story, and we never pretend we're not feeling something.

How to try it this week

You don't need a new schedule for this. You need a handful of small moments: a minute in the car, ten minutes at the table, a notebook page after supper. Pick the track that fits each person, not necessarily the one that matches their birthday; a nine-year-old who loves to read may enjoy the Ages 11–14 cards, and an anxious sixteen-year-old may want the gentler Ages 5–10 game for a week. The guidance is the same either way. Start with the pause, keep it light, and let the stories be the fun part.

If you're short of time, do just two things this week: the one-breath pause every day (it's in the practice section) and one card from your own track.

Ages 5–10

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the child: You are going to play with a simple idea, that the first feeling comes by itself and the story comes after. Keep it silly and short, and never turn it into a lecture.

First feeling, then a thought (10 minutes · paper plates, crayons · no screen · Think It Through)

Make a loud noise on purpose, like clapping once, hard. Ask, "Did you jump? That jump was your body, and that's fine." Then give each child two paper plates. On the first plate, draw the face you made when you jumped. On the second, draw the face for what you told yourself next: *Was that scary? Was that funny? Was it just Dad dropping a pan?* Say it plainly: "The first one just happens. The second one, we can look at." Put the plates side by side on the fridge for the week. *Noor, age 7, drew a wide-eyed face for the first plate and, for the second, a face with one eyebrow up that she called "wait, what was that?" This is an illustration.* That's the whole game in a drawing.

The bath rehearsal (15 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Epictetus had a small, friendly example about going to the public baths, where people splash, push and make noise. In my words: *before you go somewhere, think about what usually happens there, and decide how you want to be in it.* You can do the same at a swim lesson, on the school bus, or at bath time at home. Before you leave, ask, "What usually happens at the pool? Splashing? A line? Cold water at first?" Let your child say it all. Then ask, "How do you want to be there?" Maybe the answer is "I'll wait for my turn and not mind the splashes." Practice saying it once together, then go. When you get home, ask one question: "What was it like?" and listen. Nothing is graded.

A word to the grown-up: If a child starts to worry about the thing they're rehearsing, stop the game and talk about it plainly. The rehearsal is for ordinary, solvable places like a pool or a bus, and never for frightening things. The same card, taller, is in the Ages 11–14 section.

Listen for: your child telling you what happened *and* a second thing they thought about it, even if the second one is wobbly. "I jumped, and then I thought it was a monster" is exactly right. Don't correct the thought. Ask, "Could it have been something else?"

Ages 11–14

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the teen: Tell them you're trying this yourself, and that you'll go first. Promise that what they write on their pages stays theirs unless they choose to share it.

What story am I telling? (15 minutes · paper, three columns · no screen · Think It Through)

Fold a sheet of paper into three columns. Label them *What happened (as a camera would see it)*, *The story I told myself*, and *Another story that fits the facts*. Choose something small and recent, like a friend who didn't text back, a coach who passed you over, a joke that landed badly. In column one, write only what a camera would catch: *Maya sat at a different table at lunch.* No feelings, no guesses. In column two, write what you told yourself: *She's sick of me.* In column three, write a different story that fits the same facts: *She had to finish a worksheet.* Don't decide which is true. Look at all three and notice how your mood moved as you read them. *Dev, age 12, found that column two took him four seconds to write and column three took him ten minutes, and that was the discovery. This is an illustration.* Keep the page private. If you want to share one, you choose which.

Camera and caption (20 minutes · a news photo or comic panel · no screen · Think It Through)

Pick a photo from a magazine or a panel from a comic with people in it. First describe it like a camera: who, where, what hands are doing. Then write three captions, each with a different feeling in it: one worried, one proud, one funny. Read them aloud and notice how the same picture changes. This card carries Ages 15–18 too, so in a mixed household it's a good one to do together.

The bath rehearsal, taller. Choose a real place that week, like a crowded hallway, a team practice or a family gathering, and name three things that usually happen there. Then write one sentence, "I'd like to be the kind of person who…" and finish it. Keep the place ordinary. Rehearsing is for solvable things, not for dread.

Listen for: a column three that is a *real* possibility, not a cheerful fib. "She might have been tired" is good. "She obviously loves me" is the story moving, not the facts. If the third story is hard to find, that's the skill growing, so keep going.

Ages 15–18

Say this first, to the teen: You're practicing noticing, not fixing yourself, and there's a long record of people doing this on purpose. You can read the old text yourself and decide what you think of it.

Read Enchiridion 5 together (25 minutes · printed page of Enchiridion 5 (Carter) · no screen · Read a Little)

Safety: the passage goes on to use death as its example. Read it through yourself first, and if it would land hard in your house right now, stop after the first sentence.

Print the short passage from the Carter translation of the *Enchiridion*, number 5. Take turns reading it aloud. Its opening line is the one from earlier in this chapter: "Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things."[1] Then each person says what they would change about it. A teen might say "that makes it sound like being upset is your own

fault," and that is a serious objection worth working through. Epictetus is talking about where to look for your *own* part, not about excusing anyone who hurts you. Notice together the difference between being disturbed and being hurt: a cruel remark can hurt whatever story you tell, and the story you tell afterward still has a say in how long it hurts.

Plain thought record (30 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: this is a practice, not treatment. If upsetting thoughts loop for weeks, talk to a doctor or counselor.

Take a page and write five lines: *What happened. What I felt. What I told myself. Whether that's the whole truth. What I'll do.* The format resembles an exercise used in cognitive therapy, and it is not therapy. It's a way to see the story in daylight. Use something real and medium-sized: an argument over a group project, a message you read three times. Then do the last line, "what I'll do," and make it small and physical: *answer the message tomorrow, say hi to her first, ask the teacher one question. Lena, age 16, noticed that line four ("whether that's the whole truth") was usually "partly," and that "partly" was a much easier thing to act on than "yes" or "no." This is an illustration.*

The camera-and-caption card from Ages 11–14 works well here too, with harder photographs. Use the same pause breath every day from the practice section.

Listen for: an answer to "is that the whole truth?" that includes the words "partly" or "I don't know yet." Teens who reach for certainty in either direction, "totally my fault" or "totally theirs," may be telling you the pause hasn't happened yet. Say, kindly, "Is there a part you can't see from here?"

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

This one is for you. You're the learner here, and the same ideas apply with fewer games and more notebook. If you're also teaching someone, they will learn the most from watching you do this, so let them see the notebook come out.

Plain thought record, taller. *Safety:* this is a practice, not treatment. If upsetting thoughts loop for weeks, talk to a doctor or counselor.

Pick something from this week that still has a grip on you: a tense meeting, an email that stung, a flat remark from a relative. Write the five lines. Be stricter with line one than you'd be in the heat of the moment, and ask what a recording would have shown: names, words, tone, nothing more. Your second line, what you *felt*, can stand exactly as it is, because a feeling isn't an error. Line three is where the Stoic work happens. If you find *I'm always the one who…* or *they never…*, circle the "always" and the "never." Those are claims, and claims can be checked. *Gus, a man of 41 who ran a small shop, circled four "always" words on his first page and then wrote, for line five, "ask Nadia what she meant," which turned out to be a ten-second conversation. This is an illustration.* Then do the last line, small and physical, before the day is over.

Read Enchiridion 5, taller. *Safety:* the passage names death as an example. If you've lost someone recently, read only the first sentence, or leave this card for another week.

Read the whole passage in the Carter translation, slowly, twice. The second time, underline the one phrase you disagree with most and write two sentences about why. Epictetus speaks sharply in that passage about blame, and you're allowed to push back on it. If you've been hurt by someone, notice that "disturbed" and "hurt" aren't the same word, and that the Stoics never said a wrong done to you is made right by the way you think about it. A good reader of an old text is a good arguer with it.

Use the pause breath and the body-first card every day. They're in the next section, in the repeatable practice, and they're what makes the page work in real life, because the page is for afterward and the breath is for the moment. Pair them with one thought record each week and you have a rhythm you can keep on a busy schedule.

If you'd like to understand where this teaching sits in the history of modern therapy, the deeper reading card in the practice section is for you.

Listen for: a change in how you talk to yourself. You may notice that the second sentence after bad news has started to begin with "What do I actually know?" in place of "Of course." That's the gap opening a little, and it's the whole point.

Talk box

"*What happened, what story did I tell myself about it — and was that the whole truth?*"

- **Camera:** What would the camera have recorded? Say it with no adjectives.
- **Body:** What did my body do first? Name it, and let it be allowed.
- **Added:** What did I add? Which part of the story is a guess?
- **Others:** Who might tell it differently? What would they say?
- **Next:** What is the next small thing that's mine? One action, today.

What to do with the answer: Write one line in your notebook, or say it out loud, and stop. You aren't looking for a verdict. If the story turns out to be true, good: now you know what you're dealing with, and you can act on it.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What happened? What did you think it was? Could it have been something else?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What would a camera have seen? What story did you add? Is there another story that fits?"

Practice that actually builds it

The cards in the last section are weekly games and pages. A skill like this is built the way a habit of brushing teeth is built, with something tiny and daily and something a little larger once a week. Here is the repeatable core, followed by the one deeper card.

The daily thread: three minutes

The pause breath — Ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (3 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Feel your feet on the floor. Count to three slowly. Ask, "What do I actually know right now?" That's the entire card. Do it at the door before you go in, before you open a message, when someone raises their voice. With the youngest children, count on fingers and say it together: *feet, three, what do I know?* With teens, make it theirs: some will do it with a single slow breath and say nothing. You'll know it's working when you catch the ordinary moments, not just the hard ones. A pause you've practiced on a missed bus is much more likely to turn up on a bad afternoon.

My body did it first — Ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (10 minutes · none · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: never tell a child their fear "is just a thought."

Once a day, usually at supper or in the car, each person names one reaction their body had before they had a thought: a jump at a slammed door, a hot face, tears that came on their own. Everyone says the same sentence: "That's allowed." Then each person asks, "What do I want to do next?" and answers if they like. Grown-ups, go first, and choose something ordinary: "My stomach dropped when the phone rang." This card does two jobs. It takes the shame out of first reactions, and it

teaches the order of events, body first and story second, so the pause has somewhere to stand. If a child tells you a fear that is real and big, like fear of a person or a place, don't answer with the card. Listen, believe them, and see Chapter 5 and Chapter 7.

The weekly page: thirty minutes, once

Choose one day, perhaps Sunday after supper, for the written version at each person's level: the three columns for Ages 11–14, the five-line record for Ages 15–18 and adults. Keep the same pen and notebook each week, so the pages become a small private record of how your stories change. For the youngest, the weekly page is the plates game, with a new scene each time. Put the plates on the fridge on Sunday and take them down the next Sunday.

The story game — Ages 5–10 (15 minutes · a picture of a scene · no screen · Think It Through)

Find a picture of a scene: two children and a spilled drink, a dog beside an upturned plant pot, anything with a little mystery in it. Ask your child to tell three different stories that could fit what's in the picture. *The little one knocked it by accident. The big one was trying to help and tipped it. The dog did it.* After the third story, ask, "Which story did you think of first?" and "Which one is the kindest?" The second question matters. It shows a child, very gently, that their first story isn't the only one and that it's often not the kindest. Older children who are watching love to join in, and a game like this belongs in a family tradition more than in a lesson.

A deeper try-it for the adult learner

Cousin ideas — adult learner (60 minutes · printed article, notebook · no screen · Read a Little)

This is a deeper card.

Print the article by Robertson and Codd on Stoicism and cognitive therapy, and read it with a pen.[6] You'll see how cognitive therapy's founders credited the Stoics, and you'll also see the authors' own enthusiasm for the Stoic way of life. Notice both. Then write two short paragraphs: one on what a *lineage* is (an old idea that people picked up and reshaped), and one on what it is not (a promise that the old practice works the same way as a modern treatment). Add a note on how you'd tell a friend, accurately, what the Stoics have to do with therapy. If you want to look at the program results in this chapter's earlier section, open the Modern Stoicism research page too, and read the numbers with the design in mind.[7]

A good rhythm for a busy household is the pause breath every day, the body-first card at supper twice a week, one weekly page, and one story game on a Saturday morning. That's under an hour in a week, and you can drop any piece when life gets loud.

If it isn't clicking

"My child says they don't have a story." Very young children often don't, and that's fine. Go back to the faces. Show your own: "I jumped. Then I thought, oh, it's only the pan." Say your story out loud, in plain words, a few times, and let them catch it from you.

“My teen rolls their eyes.” Eye-rolls are information, not failure. A teen may be hearing “your feelings are wrong.” Say what you mean: “I’m not asking you to feel differently, I’m asking whether the story is the whole picture.” Give them the paper and leave the room. A private page they own will do more than a conversation they feel graded on.

“It feels like I’m trying to talk myself out of feeling things.” That’s the right worry, and the answer is to go back to the first rule: feelings are allowed. If using the pause feels like pushing a feeling down, you’ve slipped from reappraising into suppressing, which the research suggests costs more than it saves.[8] Name the feeling out loud. Then look at the story.

“The story I told turned out to be true.” This happens a lot, and it’s not a failure of the practice. The pause doesn’t promise a happier story; it promises a clearer one. If she really was angry, you now know, and your next move can be to say sorry or to ask what happened. If someone really did treat you unfairly, look at Chapter 5, because noticing is the first step and acting is the second.

“Someone is hurting my child.” If a child tells you they’re being picked on, hit or frightened, don’t answer with this chapter. Believe them, and act. The Stoic habit of looking at the story is for a child’s own thoughts about an event, never for explaining away what an unkind person did to them. Chapter 5 has a plan for telling and being believed.

“I turn the page into a way of blaming myself.” If every page ends in “so it’s my fault,” you’re doing the opposite of what the Stoics asked. The point is to find *your part*, and then stop. Add a line: “And what was *not* mine?” Chapter 2 is the place for that.

“The same worries keep looping.” If upsetting thoughts go round for weeks, or a child’s fear or sadness is getting in the way of sleep, school or play, talk with a doctor or counselor. This practice is a good companion for ordinary days, and it isn’t a treatment.

Tools, including AI

The best tools for this chapter are on the kitchen table: paper plates, crayons, a pencil, a notebook that’s yours alone. A phone’s camera can help with the “camera and caption” card, if you take a photograph of an ordinary scene to describe, with the permission of anyone in it.

If you’re curious whether a tool could help, the rule is the one in the Philosophy Hour and Chapter 8: *try first, ask after.* Do your own three columns or five lines first. Then, if you like, you might ask a chat tool to suggest three other stories that fit the facts you wrote, so you can compare them with your own. Leave out names and private details, and never put a child’s feelings, grief or family situation into any tool. Don’t ask a tool what someone else “really meant”; it can’t know. And don’t ask it to decide whether your story was right. That’s your pause, not its. Chapter 8 covers the rest, including how to check anything a tool tells you about the Stoics.

What “done enough” looks like

You’re done enough with this chapter when each person in your house can say, with a little practice, “*That’s what happened, and that’s the story I added.*” They don’t need to say it beautifully. You’re

done enough when the pause breath is something a child will do when asked, and when a first reaction, a jump or a flush or a tear, can be mentioned at the table without embarrassment. You'll also notice one small change in yourself: a half-second more room before you answer.

You aren't done when everyone stays calm. Calm isn't the aim of this chapter; looking is.

- **Ages 5–10:** can draw or say the first feeling and one story about it, and can tell a second story for the same picture.
- **Ages 11–14:** can fill in a three-column page with an honest column one and a possible column three.
- **Ages 15–18:** can complete a five-line record and say what is *partly* true, and can disagree with the Stoic text in a sentence.
- **Adult learner:** can catch one story a day while it's running, and say plainly what lineage means and what it doesn't.

Next is what all this noticing is *for*: what good is worth working at, and what each of us is here to do well. That's Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 — One Good Thing: Virtue, Four Ways



Why this matters

In the last chapter you practiced noticing, the little gap between what happens and the story we tell about it. Noticing is a fine skill, and it raises a fair question: *noticing for what?* If I can catch a story as it runs, what am I trying to do with the extra half-second?

The Stoics had an answer, and it's the boldest thing they said. They held that there is really one thing worth working at above all the rest: being a good person, in the everyday sense of that phrase. Not being rich, well liked or healthy, though those are nice to have. Being someone with good sense, courage, fairness and self-control, who acts on them. They called that *virtue*, and they spread it across four familiar names, which we'll meet in a moment, so that it's something you can recognize in a kitchen and not just in a statue.

You don't have to agree. Plenty of thoughtful people have argued with this for two thousand years, including the Stoics' own neighbors, and one of the best tricks in this chapter is to argue it yourself, on both sides. What you get from the teaching, whether or not you end up agreeing, is a clear, short list of things to look for in a day: *Did I think before I acted? Was I brave about something? Was I fair? Did I hold back where I needed to?* That's a list a six-year-old can use and a sixty-year-old still needs.

It's also a sturdy answer to a hard season. If a day goes badly, the weather turns, you lose a game or fall behind in school, there's still a question you can ask that is yours to answer: *What was the good thing to do here, and did I do it?* That doesn't pretend that the loss didn't matter. It gives a child, and a grown-up, something to stand on while it does.

A promise about what this chapter won't claim. It doesn't say that being good makes you happy, or protects you, or guarantees anything at all. The Stoics themselves argued bitterly about that question, and the idea that virtue is enough for a good life is a strong and contested claim. We'll teach it as an idea to try on. And we won't ask a child to give up anything their family believes. Many traditions have their own words for goodness and their own stories about it, and those words are welcome in your Hour. The four names here are a way of talking, not a rival.

Understand it yourself

The four

The old list has four parts, and the encyclopedias that explain Stoicism give them as wisdom (sometimes translated "practical wisdom" or "good sense"), courage, justice and temperance, which today we'd call self-control.[1] Here they are in kitchen words:

- **Wisdom, or good sense:** seeing what is actually going on and what would be a good thing to do about it. Thinking before you act. The pause from Chapter 3 is the front porch of this one.
- **Courage:** doing the right thing when you're afraid or when it costs you something. Owning up to a mistake. Saying "I disagree" kindly. Trying again.
- **Justice, or fairness:** giving each person what's fair and treating them as someone who matters. Sharing, telling the truth about who did what, speaking up when someone is treated badly.
- **Temperance, or self-control:** holding back where holding back is right: a reply, a second helping, a complaint, a temper.

Here is how the four can show up in one ordinary afternoon. *Imani, a mother of two, picks up her son from school and learns that he left his lunch box on the bus. She takes a breath before she*

answers, which is good sense. She says, "Tell me what happened," and doesn't guess, which is fairness. When he admits he'd been fooling around instead of watching his bag, she tells him it took courage to say so. She doesn't buy a new lunch box that day, but offers to go with him to the lost-and-found tomorrow, which is a small act of self-control on her side, because the first thing she wanted to do was fix it all herself. This is an illustration. None of that is dramatic, and every one of the four was in the room.

The list is old and the lines between the four blur. Fairness takes courage; self-control takes sense. That's fine. The point is to have four handles for a day, not four boxes that never touch.

The one good

Now for the bold claim. The Stoics, following an idea that goes back to Socrates, held that these four are the only things that are truly *good*.[1] Health, money, reputation and comfort aren't bad, but in their view they aren't good in the same way, because a person can use any of them well or badly. A rich person can be generous or cruel; a healthy one can be kind or selfish. Only the use, the character behind it, is good in itself. Aristotle, who also cared about virtue, disagreed in an important way: he thought a good human life needs some outside goods too, such as health, friends and a measure of comfort.[1]

The Stoics gave the in-between things a name, *preferred indifferents*. As the Stanford Encyclopedia explains in its article on Seneca, things like health or wealth have value and are fine to prefer, but they aren't *good* in the sense that virtue is.[2] Notice what that does not say. It doesn't say your health or your family's well-being doesn't matter. It says that when you're deciding who you are, those things aren't the measure. If a child is sick, the Stoic answer isn't "your sickness doesn't count." The answer is *we prefer health, and we'll work for it, and we'll still be able to be kind in the meantime.*

It's good to say plainly that thoughtful people don't all accept this. "Virtue alone is enough for a good life" is a strong claim, and the Stoics' own school fought about it. You can hold it, argue with it, or take part of it, and still use the four names.

The work of a human being

Marcus Aurelius, who was an emperor with plenty of reasons to stay in bed, wrote a note to himself about a morning when he didn't want to get up: "In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present—I am rising to the work of a human being."[3] He goes on to ask whether he was made to lie in the blankets keeping warm, and points to the bees, the ants and the spiders, each busy at its own part of the world's work. Marcus's idea of that work, as one encyclopedia puts it, was being useful to the people around us.[1] Chapter 5 follows that thread. For this chapter, it's enough to notice the tone. This isn't a sermon. It's a man talking himself out of bed.

Epictetus offers a companion thought: "…this is your business, to act well the character assigned you; to choose it is another's."[4] In the passage he's using the picture of an actor who plays whatever part the author gives. Your job is to play your part well. Be careful with this one. It can sound like an order to accept any place you're given, and it isn't. Epictetus himself had been enslaved, and nobody should use his line to tell someone to put up with mistreatment. What it can mean for us

is smaller and kinder: *whatever your situation today, there is a good way to act in it, and that is yours to do.*

Correcting a famous phrase

You may have seen "the obstacle is the way" printed as if Marcus wrote it. It's the title of a modern book, and the phrase doesn't appear in Long's translation of the *Meditations*. What Marcus does say, in Book 5, is close and well worth having: "the mind converts and changes every hindrance to its activity into an aid."[3] Notice it's about *action*: a hindrance to what you're trying to do becomes, with a clear head, something to work with. It's not a promise that every obstacle is secretly good.

Teachers who are not saints

One more thing that will help you teach this honestly: the people we learn this from were not perfect. Seneca, who wrote beautifully about how little we need, was one of the wealthiest men in the world.[5] The charge that this made him a hypocrite was first made by an enemy, Publius Suilius, and how much weight it carries is not clear, but the question is a fair one. Marcus ruled an empire in a troubled age, with attacks on its borders, rebellions and a plague.[6] Epictetus had been enslaved. These are people worth reading, and none of them is a model whose every choice you should copy.

That's useful for children. A child who learns that good teachers can be flawed has been given a very practical gift: they can read the *argument* and weigh it, and they don't have to worship the *person*. We do that in this chapter, in a card for older teens and adults.

How to try it this week

Every house has these four virtues already, in the form of ordinary days. Your job this week is to point at them. You'll tell four small stories to the youngest, ask the older ones to map real moments, give teens something to argue about and give yourself a notebook line or two. Keep it light. Nobody is being graded on goodness, and no child should ever hear "that wasn't very brave of you" as part of this chapter.

If you only have time for one thing, do the dinner-table card in the practice section: each person names one moment from the day when they saw one of the four, in anyone, including themselves.

Ages 5–10

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the child: Tell the stories in your own voice, slowly, and stop to let the child say what they think. There are no right answers, and this isn't a quiz about virtues.

Four small stories (15 minutes · none · no screen · Read a Little)

Tell four short stories, one after another, about children like yours. Here are four to start with, and you're welcome to swap in your own. *These are illustrations, not real children.*

Cal, age 6, breaks a cup. Cal knocks a cup off the counter and it cracks. He wants to hide the pieces. His tummy feels funny. Then he walks to the next room and says, "I broke the cup. I'm sorry." Mom says, "Thank you for telling me." That's being brave.

Rosa, age 10, has one cookie and a cousin. Rosa and her little cousin find one cookie left. Rosa breaks it in two. Then she says, "You pick first, and I'll take what's left." That's being fair.

Cal waits. Cal wants the swing. A girl is on it. He counts to twenty with his hands on his knees and watches the leaves. Then it's his turn. That's holding back, which grown-ups call self-control.

Rosa thinks first. Rosa wants to pour the juice for everyone, and the jug is big. She stops and thinks: *I might spill it. I'll ask Dad for the little jug.* That's good sense, which means thinking before you do.

Afterward, ask, "Which one did you like best?" Then, "Did something like that happen to you?" Let them wander. If your child says "I did the cookie thing at school," lean in and ask about it. In my words, the four old names for these are good sense, bravery, fairness and self-control. You can teach the names or not; the child can keep the stories.

Small brave things (20 minutes · paper · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Make a list on one sheet of paper, with your child's help, of small brave things a person can do: asking for help, saying sorry, trying again after a mistake, saying "no thank you" politely, going to a new place with a grown-up. Let your child draw a little picture beside each one. Then ask them to pick one to try this week. *Cal chose "say hi to the new boy."* Write it on the paper. Check in with a gentle question at the end of the week, "Did you try it? What was it like?" and be glad whether they did or not.

A word to the grown-up: never use this list to point at what a child *didn't* do. If a child is scared of something, the brave thing may simply be telling you. The same card, taller, is in the Ages 11–14 section.

Words you might use with a six-year-old: "bravery" for courage, "fair" for justice, "waiting" or "holding back" for self-control, and "thinking first" for good sense. For a ten-year-old, the real words are fine, and you can ask whether they know any of them from stories. Resist adding more virtues. Four is plenty for one week.

Listen for: your child naming a moment from their own day as one of the four, even loosely: "I was fair at lunch." Say, "That's right. That's one of the things people are for." Let any answer that has kindness in it count.

Ages 11–14

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the teen: Offer these as a way to look at the day, with no moral attached. Do yours at the same time, in your own notebook, and say nothing about theirs unless they bring it up.

The work of a human being (10 minutes · index card · no screen · Think It Through)

Marcus Aurelius was a Roman emperor who wrote private notes to himself. On one morning when he didn't want to get up, he reminded himself, in my words, *I'm getting up to do what a human being is for.* Read that idea aloud, then hand out index cards and ask: "What is my work today?" Write one sentence. It might be big ("study for the test and be kind about it") or small ("Don't snap at my brother before school"). Put the card in a pocket. Look at it at lunch and again at bedtime. *Ezra, age 13, wrote "Practice the piece before I'm asked" and was surprised how much it changed the afternoon. This is an illustration.* The card is also for Ages 15–18 and adults, and they use the actual line (see below).

Four virtues map (30 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Draw four boxes on a page and label them *good sense, courage, fairness, self-control.* In each, put one real moment from this month when you saw that virtue, in you or someone else. Then, beside each, write one moment you wish had gone differently, in words as kind as you'd use for a friend. *Ezra's "courage" box had "told the truth about the broken lamp"; his "self-control" box had "ate the last of the ice cream, and I wish I hadn't." Both were fine.* Look at the whole page when you're done. Which box was easiest to fill? Which was hardest? A good rule: *when you notice a box that's empty, don't judge it, choose it.* That's the one to work on this week.

Listen for: specifics. "I was fair" is a start; "I let Alma go first at the game, even though I wanted to" is a moment. If the answers stay vague, ask for the camera version, an idea you met in Chapter 3: "What would someone have seen?"

Ages 15–18

Say this first, to the teen: You're not being asked to agree with the Stoics. You're being asked to argue with them well, and to see whether any piece of their picture is useful to you.

Preferred, not good (40 minutes · a debate partner · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card.

Find a partner: a parent, a sibling, a friend. Round one: one of you argues the Stoic claim that *only virtue is good*, with health, money and friends useful but not part of the good itself. The other argues Aristotle's view that a good life also needs some outside goods, such as health and friends.[1,2] Use real examples: a person who is ill and kind, a person who is healthy and mean, a good person with no friends. Round two: switch sides and go again. Afterward, each of you says which round was harder and why, and what you actually think now. The chance to swap sides matters more than the winning. *Mei, age 17, said that arguing for Aristotle came easily, but arguing the Stoic side made her notice she was using the Stoic idea in her own life without a name for it. This is an illustration.* That counts as a result.

Use the same line from Marcus as the younger tracks, in full this time, from Long's translation: "In the morning when thou risest unwillingly, let this thought be present—I am rising to the work of a human being."[3] Write one sentence, *what is my work today?* The card is the same as the one in Ages 11–14, taller: keep it in your phone's notes or on an index card, and add a second line, *What could get in the way, and how would I use it?*

The four-virtues map from Ages 11–14 works well for you too, with more detail. Make it in a notebook, and choose one box to tend for a week.

To give the debate some traction, start with one hard case and argue it both ways. *A friend of yours has been sick for a year, has little money, and is still the kindest person in your class. Is her life going badly, or well?* The Stoic side will say she has the one thing that counts. The Aristotelian side will say that her sickness and her worry are real losses that a decent account of a good life can't wave away. Most people discover they hold a mixed view: that kindness is the thing we most admire, and that nobody should be asked to do without health or friends in the name of it. That mixed view is allowed. It's also close to what the Stoics themselves said when they called health a "preferred" thing, so you may find the two sides closer than they looked at the start.

Listen for: an argument that includes a real objection and a real concession. "The Stoics are wrong about X, but I think they're right that Y" is the sound of a mind at work. Resist the urge to settle it for them.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

This one is for you. You've lived long enough to know people who had all the advantages and none of the character, and the reverse. Use that knowledge here, and let the four names be a mirror for you and nobody else.

Teachers are not saints (40 minutes · printed encyclopedia passage on Seneca · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card.

Print the passage on Seneca in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy that discusses his wealth and the criticism of it.[5] Read it with a pen. Then write a page on this question: *What should a student do with a teacher who doesn't live up to what they teach?* You'll probably land somewhere between "throw out the teaching" and "ignore the person," and the place you land is the answer. Most thoughtful readers say: read the argument, not only the biography. Then, one step closer to home, write about a teacher, boss or parent whose lessons you've kept in spite of their flaws, and what that took. *Ruth, a woman of 52 who coached a youth soccer team, wrote about her father, who had a bad temper and taught her to be fair, and said it was the first time she'd put both halves on one page. This is an illustration.*

The work of a human being, taller. Use Long's line from Marcus and write your work for *this stage of life*: not "be a better person" but something with edges, such as "see my mother on Thursday and listen the whole time." Then ask what's likely to get in the way. Marcus's other line, about turning a hindrance into an aid, is a useful companion, so long as you don't expect it to turn every obstacle into a gift.

The small-restraint and next-right-small-thing cards in the practice section are made for adults with full schedules, and the dinner-table card is a good one to do with the family.

One more use for the four, on a bad day: when something has gone wrong and you can't see what to do, run down the list. *Good sense:* what do I actually know, and what would a calm person check first? *Courage:* is there something I'm avoiding saying or doing? *Justice:* who else is in this,

and what do they need? *Self-control:* what am I about to do that I'll want back tomorrow? Four questions take under two minutes, and they have rescued more than one tense Wednesday. Keep them on a card in your wallet if you like.

Listen for: your own voice going gentler. A good week with this chapter often ends with an adult saying a kind thing about their own failings that they'd never have said about someone else's. That's the opposite of making excuses; it's a fairer weight.

Talk box

"Which of the four showed up in me this week, and which could use a hand?"

- **Good sense:** When did I think before I acted? Name one time, however small.
- **Courage:** When was I brave, even a little? What did it cost me?
- **Fairness:** Who got a fair share from me? And who might not have?
- **Self-control:** Where did I hold back, and was it the right place to?
- **Tend:** Which one could use a hand, and what's one small thing I'll try?

What to do with the answer: Choose one of the four to tend this week, say it out loud or write it down, and leave the others alone. A virtue that "could use a hand" is a place to practice, never a verdict.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "Did you think first, or was it hard to be brave, fair or patient? Which one do you want to try tomorrow?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "Which of good sense, courage, fairness and self-control did you use this week? Which one would you like a little help with?"

Practice that actually builds it

The cards in the last section are the week's menu. What follows is the repeatable part: small things you can do every few days without much planning, which is how a virtue grows. Think of them as practice scales. Nobody becomes brave by reading about courage, but a person who does a little brave thing every week gets steadier at it. The two deeper cards in the last section, "Preferred, not good" and "Teachers are not saints," are the chapter's heavy lifting for older teens and adults. Everything below is lighter.

At the table

Virtue hunt at dinner — Ages 5–10, 11–14 and adult learner (10 minutes · none · no screen · Look Back)

Once or twice a week, at supper, each person names one time that day when they saw courage, fairness, self-control or good sense, in anyone, including themselves. It can be in a cartoon, on the bus or at the grocery store. The rule is that you must be specific: not "she was nice" but "she waited and let the old man go first." Teens often say "nothing happened," and you can say, "Then tell me about a time you almost did it." Don't comment on each other's answers beyond "thank you." The

more ordinary the examples get, the more it's working. Ages 15–18 can join, and it makes a good ten-minute Look Back for any day.

Fair shares — Ages 5–10 (20 minutes · a cake, brownies or paper pieces · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

One person cuts and another chooses first. That's the oldest fair-share trick there is, and children love it because the incentive is obvious: if you cut it unevenly, you get the smaller piece. Try three ways to share the same treat (the cutter picks first, the chooser picks first, one person decides) and ask which feels fairest and why. This is where fairness stops being a word and becomes a feeling in the stomach. Use paper pieces if you'd rather not make a fuss about food. If there's a younger sibling who always gets the last of everything, let them be the chooser for once.

Over a few days

One small restraint — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (25 minutes · notebook · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: choose something to hold back that has nothing to do with food or weight if you or anyone in the house has struggled with eating. A reply, a complaint, a scroll, an interruption: any of those will do.

Choose one small thing to hold back for two days. Make it very small: a sarcastic comment, a second look at your phone at supper, the urge to correct your brother. Write it at the top of a notebook page. Each night, log what happened, whether you managed it, and how it felt. Don't pass judgment. Some days the log will say, "Forgot until bedtime," and that is information too. What you're practicing is the half-second from Chapter 3, now pointed at one habit. A child who wants to try this should have the choice of what to hold back; a restraint someone else picks becomes a punishment.

The next right small thing — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (10 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

When you're stuck, whether on homework, a dispute at home or a tangle of dishes and emails, ask, "What is the next right small thing here?" Do it before you decide anything bigger. It might be to wash one plate, reply to one message, say sorry for one sentence. This card is the best friend of anyone who freezes when a problem feels too big, and it's also a nice way to practice good sense without fuss. Teens and adults will sometimes say it feels too simple. That's the point: virtue shows up mostly in simple moves.

A rhythm that works for many households: the dinner hunt twice a week, one small restraint at a time, and the next-right-small-thing question whenever it's useful. For the youngest, the fair-share game once a month is plenty. If you'd like a longer arc, run the Four virtues map again at the end of the month on a fresh page and put the two maps side by side.

A sample week in one house

Here's what one week might look like in the house where Imani lives with her son Cal, age 6, and her daughter Rosa, age 10. On Monday, Imani tells the four stories at bedtime and asks which one Cal liked best (he chose the cup). Tuesday, at supper, the family does the dinner hunt, and Rosa spots a bus driver who waited for a woman with a cane. Wednesday is a school-night skip. Thursday, Rosa starts a small restraint, no eye-rolling at her brother for two days, and writes it on a sticky note on her mirror. Friday, Imani does the next-right-small-thing question about a pile of mail, opens one envelope, and stops. On Saturday morning the three of them cut a coffee cake by the chooser's rule, and Cal, who is cutting, makes very even pieces and announces that he has "learned the trick." On Sunday evening, Imani writes two lines in her notebook, one about Rosa's two days and one about her own mail. *This is an illustration.*

None of it took long, it was spread across the week, and nobody sat through a lesson. If a week like that is too much for yours, cut it to two cards. A good week is any week in which you pointed at the four, once, and meant it.

If it isn't clicking

"It sounds preachy." If a child hears virtue as a lecture, you've probably been talking too much. Tell a story, ask one question and then stop. Let the child's own examples do the work, and look for virtue in places that aren't about them: a character in a book, a stranger at the store, an animal in a documentary.

"My child says they're not brave." Many children carry a private belief that bravery means being fearless. Tell them what it actually is: doing the right thing while a little scared. Say it in plain words, and tell them about a small thing you did while scared this week. Never use the word "brave" as a way of asking a child to hide how they feel.

"They only name things other people did." That's a very good start. Seeing virtue in others is how you learn what it looks like. Add a second round another week: "And one thing *you* did that fit."

"I get stuck on my failures." If every page of your notebook ends in a list of what you did wrong, you've turned this into the opposite of the thing. The Stoic habit is *looking*, and the looking is meant to be fair. Add a line for something you did well, in the same size handwriting.

"My teen thinks this is just rich people's philosophy." There's something in that, and it's good to say so: the old teachers were a slave, an emperor and a very rich adviser, and their lives were nothing like ours. Ask your teen: "What would count as courage if you had no power? What would it look like if you had a great deal?" That's a conversation worth having at the table, and the answers often surprise parents.

"We're religious, and this feels like a rival." It needn't be. The four names are an old way of talking about habits that most traditions also prize. If your family has its own words for goodness, use them alongside, or in place of, the Stoic ones. The practice is the looking, not the vocabulary.

"Someone in our home is ill, or money is tight, and 'only virtue is good' sounds cold." It can,

and it isn't meant to. The Stoics preferred health and a stable home, and said so, and so can you. The point of the chapter is that there's still something good for each person to do today, not that the hard thing doesn't count.

Tools, including AI

Paper, a pencil, index cards and a notebook are all the tools this chapter needs, and a kitchen table. If a screen helps, use it for reading the encyclopedia passage in the Seneca card, or for an audio reading of the Marcus lines, which are free from public-domain sources.

If you try a chat tool, follow the rule from the Philosophy Hour and Chapter 8: *your own attempt first, then ask.* Fill in the four-virtues map yourself. Then, if you like, ask a tool to play the Aristotelian in your debate, so you can practice answering. Keep names, family details and your child's own stories out of it. And never take from a tool a line that "Seneca said" or "Marcus said" without finding it in the translation yourself. Tools sometimes invent quotations, and the internet is full of lines attributed to the Stoics that they never wrote. Chapter 8 has the checking habit.

What "done enough" looks like

You're done enough with this chapter when everyone in your house can name the four in their own words, and when you've seen each person spot one of them in real life, in someone else, in a story or in themselves. You've done enough if a child can say what "fair" feels like in the stomach, or a teen has argued both sides of "only virtue is good" and kept a thought about it. You've done enough if you, the grown-up, have chosen one of the four to practice and told someone.

You haven't failed if the virtues feel abstract in week one. They get concrete by the second or third pass through the practice cards, once real moments start arriving.

- **Ages 5–10:** can tell, in their own words, a small story about being brave, fair, patient or sensible.
- **Ages 11–14:** can fill in the four-virtues map with a real moment in each box, and name which one they'll practice.
- **Ages 15–18:** can argue "only virtue is good" from both sides and say what they think now.
- **Adult learner:** can name one of the four to work on, and say what to do with a flawed teacher.

Next is the second thread of Marcus's line, the people beside you: the circle that virtue is for. That's Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 — The People Beside You



Why this matters

Suppose you did everything in the last four chapters perfectly. You noticed what was yours, you caught your stories, you worked at being wise, brave, fair and steady. And then you shut the door and kept all of it to yourself. The Stoics would say you had missed the point. Their whole picture of a good life was never of a person alone on a mountaintop, finely tuned and quiet. It was of a person in a crowd, in a family, in a town, doing their share. The third clause of our focus line says it plainly: *be good to the people beside you.*

This chapter is about that clause, in three parts. First, the idea that we belong to each other, that a household, a street and a town are circles we live in, and that it's natural to widen them. Second, what to *do* about it, because the Stoic idea of what is "up to us" was never an excuse to sit still. Third, the honest difficulties: people who are unkind, harm that isn't our fault, and the plain fact that the old Stoics lived inside slavery and, as far as we can tell, did not set out to end it. A teaching that skips those three would be pleasant and not very useful.

For children, this is the chapter where the Hour is most obviously fun. Circles drawn with chalk on a driveway. A walk around the block to say hello. A chore done for a sibling without a word. For teens, it's a chance to ask where their circles stop and who sits just outside them. For adults, it's about the next step: a vote, an hour of volunteering, a call to a neighbor.

It's also the chapter where we say, clearly and early, a thing every child should hear from an adult at least once: *if someone is hurting you, tell, and you will be believed, and we will act.* No part of this book, and no old teacher quoted in it, is a reason to put up with being hurt. Staying calm is for your own thoughts. It's never a reason to stay quiet about harm.

Understand it yourself

Made for each other

The Stoics had a word, *oikeiosis*, that's hard to translate and easy to feel. It points to the idea that things become *properly ours*: first ourselves, then those near us, and then, by degrees, more and more of the world. The encyclopedias describe it as a kind of expanding affection, and as the base of Stoic ideas about community and about being a citizen of the whole world.[1,2] A baby cares for herself; a child comes to care for a parent and a sibling; a person who is growing well comes to care for neighbors, strangers, people far away. That growth is natural, the Stoics thought, and part of what a human being is for.

Marcus Aurelius put it in a handful of vivid pictures. In one he says people are made for each other the way parts of a body are: "we are made for co-operation, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of the upper and lower teeth."[3] In another, he borrows from the hive: "That which is not good for the swarm, neither is it good for the bee."[3] Read the second one slowly. It doesn't say the bee doesn't matter. It says the bee can't be well if the hive is not. And if you think of your own family or class or team, you probably already know what that feels like. A single person who is treated badly pulls on everyone else.

Marcus was talking to himself, and the context is practical. In the passage with the teeth and eyelids, he's reminding himself that the difficult people he'll meet today are still, in his phrase, kin, and so it makes no sense to be furious with them. That's a hard idea. It isn't the same as agreeing with them or staying in their way. It's about whether he'll treat them as belonging to the same human family.

Widening circles

A later Stoic named Hierocles is reported to have pictured our concern as circles that widen outward from each person. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy calls this "Hierocles' circle of expanding affection."[2] The rings we draw in this chapter (home, street, town, the world) are our version of the picture, not a list from the old texts. The picture is useful even if we hold it loosely, because it gives us a simple job: to treat a person in an outer circle with a little more of the care we'd give someone in an inner one. For a child the picture is a drawing. For a grown-up it's a question about where one's care stops, and why.

Nobody can love all of humanity equally, and the Stoics didn't ask that. What they asked for was *movement*: toward the neighbor, toward the stranger, toward the person at the edge of the circle. Even a small shift counts. That's why the cards for this chapter keep asking for one small step.

What "not up to us" doesn't mean

You'll remember from Chapter 2 that the Stoics said many things aren't up to us. Sometimes that's heard as, "Then there's no point in acting." The old texts say the opposite. The encyclopedias stress that justice is one of the four virtues, and that the Stoic practice of action is explicitly directed to other people.[2] Several Stoics took part in public life: Seneca advised an emperor, and Marcus was one.[4,5] What is "not up to us" is the result. What *is* up to us is whether we write the letter, make the call, show up and vote. Not being able to control the outcome is no reason not to act. It's the reason to act well and let go of the rest.

This is a difference you can feel in the body. A person who says "it's out of my hands" and goes to bed is not practicing Stoicism. A person who says "I can't make the council decide, and I can speak at the meeting" is.

An honest line about slavery

You should know this before you teach it. Seneca wrote a letter to a friend who treated his slaves kindly, and the letter says: " 'They are slaves,' people declare. Nay, rather they are men."[6] It's a striking line, and it describes how badly slaves were often treated at the tables of the rich. Epictetus, who taught that what matters is how you act with what you're given, had himself been enslaved.[7]

And yet, as far as the texts we read for this book show, neither Seneca nor Epictetus called for an end to slavery, and Seneca lived inside the institution his letter criticizes. That's not a small footnote. It's an example of how a good idea can sit side by side with a great blindness. The right way to hold it, we think, is this: the *seed* is in the old texts, the idea that every person is a person, and the work of growing it was left to us. It would be wrong to say the Stoics campaigned against slavery. It would also be wrong to say they had nothing to teach about dignity. Both are true, and children can understand both.

When someone is unkind

One more honest piece. Marcus's reminder that difficult people are kin must never be used on a child who's being hurt. If a classmate shoves, mocks or excludes a child, the right answer is not

"think about how it's your judgment that upsets you." The right answer is "I believe you, and I'm going to help." The Stoic move of looking at your own story applies to your own thoughts about an event. It's never a way of explaining away what someone did to you. Where there's bullying, a child tells a trusted adult, the adult believes them and acts, and the child doesn't have to handle it alone. Chapter 7 says more about when to bring in a doctor or a school counselor.

How to try it this week

This is the chapter to do *with* people. Most of the cards need a neighbor, a sibling, a classmate or a bit of the town. Don't wait for a perfect moment, and don't plan a grand project. One small kind thing, done quietly, is a perfectly good week. And one card, "Tell and be believed," is worth doing in every house whether or not there's any sign of trouble.

If time is short, do two things: the quiet kind act from the practice section, and the bullying plan in the Ages 5–10 section.

Ages 5–10

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the child: Today's game is about who is in our circle, and it starts with a promise: *you can always tell me if someone is mean to you, and I will believe you.* Say it out loud, in your own words, and mean it.

Circles on the floor (20 minutes · chalk or yarn · no screen · Think It Through)

Draw circles on the driveway with chalk, or lay yarn in rings on the living-room rug: a small one in the middle, then a bigger one around it, and a few more. The middle is *me*. The next is *home*, then *our street*, then *our town*, then *the whole world*. Put names or little drawings in each: Mom and Grandpa and the cat at home, the neighbors and the mail carrier on the street, the teacher and the librarian in town. Then ask, "Who else could we put in a bigger circle?" Ask, "Is there someone we don't know who might need a friend?" *Pilar, age 8, put "the crossing guard" in the street circle and "kids in other countries" in the biggest ring, then added "and the people who make our shoes." This is an illustration.* Don't correct what goes where. The point is to see that the circles can grow. In my words, this is an old idea from the Stoics: that we start with ourselves and widen out.

Tell and be believed (20 minutes · paper · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: if a child is being bullied, believe them and act; do not tell them it is "not up to them."

Make a plan, on paper, with your child. Ask: "If someone was mean to you or hurt you, who would you tell at school? Who would you tell at home?" Write down two or three names. Ask, "What would you say?" Let your child choose words and practice them aloud. *"Stop. I don't like that."* "*I need to tell a grown-up." "Something happened, and I want to tell you."* Then tell your child what *you* will do: "Thank you for telling me. It isn't your fault. I'll help." Say it as a promise. Then keep it: believe them, and take it to the school or group leader. A child should never hear that bullying is "just what kids do," or that they should "just ignore it." Stoic calm is for your own thoughts. It is never a reason to put up with being hurt. The same card, taller, is in the Ages 11–14 section. If your child is the one who has hurt someone, see "If it isn't clicking."

Listen for: names. A child who can say "I'd tell Mrs. Okafor, or you" has a plan, and a child who names nobody needs your help finding someone. Also listen for what's hard to say. Give them time, and thank them for whatever they tell you.

Ages 11–14

Say this first, to the grown-up beside the teen: Tell them you're curious where the edges of their world are, and that you'll draw yours too. Promise that what they draw is theirs to keep private, and that you won't read anything they don't offer.

Where my circle stops (30 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Draw your circles on paper, as in the little-kids game, but with real detail: you in the middle, then your closest people, then friends and family, classmates, neighbors, your town and the wider world. Then mark who you've left *outside* the circles you drew, and ask why: the kid who sits alone at lunch, the neighbor who's always grumpy, the people who live across a border you've never visited. Be honest. The question isn't "who's a bad person to leave out," it's *where do I stop, and is that where I want to stop?* Choose one small step toward one person or group outside. *Wen, age 12, put "a classmate who eats alone" outside and decided to say "hi" every morning for a week. By Friday, they were sitting together. This is an illustration.* Write your step on the page and tell one person you trust.

Tell and be believed, taller. *Safety:* if a teen is being bullied, believe them and act; do not tell them it is "not up to them."

For you, it's a plan you write yourself: who you'd tell at school or in your group (a teacher, a coach, a counselor, a family member), what exactly you'd say, and who would act. Write down one sentence you could say if you didn't know how to begin: "Something's been happening and I want help with it." Add what you'd do if the first person didn't act: go to a second one. Teens often don't tell, because they fear making it worse or being called a snitch. Say that out loud, and say that it's brave to ask for help, and that adults can often act quietly if you ask them to be careful. *Stoic calm is not a reason to put up with being hurt.* The same goes online, where a hurtful post or message is just as real.

The hive-and-bee game in the practice section is a good one to play with a sibling, and the kind-act card works well in this age group. Pick the one that fits.

Listen for: specifics about people, not abstractions. "I leave out kids who always talk about video games" is a start; "I wonder what they'd say if I asked about a game I like" is a step. If a teen says, "I don't have a circle," take it seriously. Ask who they'd *like* to be in it, and help them take one small step.

Ages 15–18

Say this first, to the teen: This is the chapter where the old texts and the real world rub against each other. Tell them you'd like to hear what they think of a passage that's both moving and uncomfortable, and that disagreement is welcome.

“Slaves? No, comrades” (45 minutes · printed Letter 47 (Gummere) · no screen · Read a Little)

Safety: this card names slavery plainly.

Print the opening of Seneca’s Letter 47 in the Gummere translation and read it aloud together.[6] You’ll notice how modern it sounds at first, a man telling a friend to treat the people who serve him as human beings. Then say, plainly, what the Stoics did *not* do: they did not call for the end of slavery. Epictetus, who had been enslaved, taught that your worth lies in how you act, and he did not campaign for abolition.[7] Talk about how both of those can be true. Then each person writes a paragraph: *What would I add today?* Many teens say that treating someone kindly isn’t enough if they have no freedom, and that’s a deep point. It’s the one the Stoics’ own world couldn’t see, and it’s ours to carry on. If a passage in the letter is hard to read, stop. It’s a plain account of cruelty, and you don’t have to go through all of it.

Justice and action (60 minutes · paper, an envelope or form · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

This is a deeper card.

Choose a local matter you care about: a crosswalk with no light, a library with cut hours, a park that needs a cleanup, an election you can follow. Do one thing that’s yours to do. Write a letter and put it in an envelope. Make a call. Fill out a form. Sign up for an hour of volunteering. You can’t control whether the city council listens. You can control whether you’ve spoken. Notice how it feels to do something small without needing it to work. This is the old idea of acting well and letting go of the result, and the Stoics, who held that justice is a virtue, would say it’s the honest answer to “it’s not up to me.” *Arjun, age 15, wrote to the city about a broken bus-shelter bench, got a form reply in two weeks, and the bench stayed broken. He said afterward that he’d still do it again, because the bench had turned from a complaint into something he’d done something about. This is an illustration.*

Listen for: an answer to “what would I add today?” that is *theirs*, not a repeat of what you said. Also listen for the difference between “what I feel about the problem” and “what I did.” The second is the sound of action.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

This one is for you. You’re probably the one in the house who is most tangled up in other people’s needs, and the chapter’s job for you is not to add to the pile. It’s to decide, honestly, where your care goes, and to take one step further than your usual.

Widen one circle (35 minutes · a local calendar or notice board · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

This is a deeper card.

Pick one group outside your usual circles, perhaps a neighborhood association, a food pantry, a faith community different from yours, an open town meeting or a library event. Take one step: listen to a story, attend an open event or offer an hour. Don’t commit to anything large. The Stoic idea is *movement*, and one hour counts. Look at a local calendar or the notice board at the library or grocery, and choose the first thing that makes you a little curious. *Colleen, a woman of 38 who worked nights, chose a Saturday-morning open house at a refugee-support group, and said*

afterward that she hadn't expected to be asked to carry a table, which she was glad to do. This is an illustration. Afterward, write three lines: what you did, who you met, what you'd do next.

Justice and action, taller, and "Slaves? No, comrades," taller (the same cards as in Ages 15–18). Do the action card in adult size: choose something where you have a little standing, such as a vote, a petition, a letter to your representative or a neighbor's problem you could take to the right office, and do your one thing. And read the opening of Letter 47 at your own pace. As an adult, you might add a second question: *Where in my own world is there a group of people whose treatment I've stopped noticing, and what is one small, real thing I could do about it?*

A word to the parent: Your circle includes you. If you can't do any of this because you're stretched thin, the first widening is to ask for help, and that's a Stoic move too.

Listen for: that you've done a thing, and not only thought about it. A small, concrete action, even one that goes nowhere, is the sign. Another sign is a subtle one: the sentence "it's not up to me" begins to be followed by "but this part is."

Talk box

"*Who beside me needed something this week — and what did I do about it?*"

- **Circle:** Who was in my circle this week, and who was just outside it?
- **Felt:** What did I do that they could actually feel? A word, a hand, an hour.
- **Missed:** Was there something I could have done, and didn't? What got in the way?
- **Hurt:** Did anyone hurt me or someone near me? Who did I tell, and did anyone act?
- **Next:** What is one small step toward one person this coming week?

What to do with the answer: Choose one person and one small step, and put it on a card where you'll see it. If someone was hurt, don't stop at the talk: say who will do what, and by when.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "Who did you help this week? Was anyone mean to you? Who would you tell?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "Who did you help or notice this week? Was anyone left out or hurt? What one small thing could you do for someone next week?"

Practice that actually builds it

The cards above are the week's menu. What follows is the repeatable part: small things you can do again and again with no planning. Kindness behaves like most habits: it grows from a little, often, and withers from a lot, rarely. Nobody becomes generous by deciding to be. A person who does something small for someone else most days is a person who finds it easier next week.

Every day, almost

One kind act, quietly — Ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (10 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Once a day, or whenever you can, do one kind thing that nobody will credit you for. Fill the dog's water without being asked. Put the stray cart back. Hold the door a beat longer. Leave a good note on a desk. The rule is *quietly*: no announcing it, no waiting for thanks, no telling a sibling "I did that." That's not because kindness should be a secret. It's because the moment you start collecting credit, the act turns into a show. At the end of the day, in your Look Back, count the acts, and don't count thank-yous.

The hive and the bee — Ages 5–10 and 11–14 (15 minutes · none · no screen · Think It Through)

In my words, this is a Marcus Aurelius idea: a bee can't be well if the hive isn't, and what is good for everyone in the hive is good for each bee. Ask your child to think of a group they're in: a family, a class, a team. Then ask, "What helps the whole group? How does that help *you*?" and "When the group is having a hard time, what happens to each of us?" Let them draw a hive on paper, and put in it the people in their group, with a line for what each person adds. Then ask, "What's one thing I could do for the hive this week?" A child of seven might say, "I could clean up after my art." A twelve-year-old might say, "I could stop teasing Dad about his music." Both are right. If a sibling's trouble comes up, listen without fixing.

Neighbor walk — Ages 5–10, 11–14 and adult learner (30 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Walk the block, or a block, and greet people. That's the whole task. Say hello to three people and learn one name, or ask one question: "Is that your dog? What's his name?" It's the widening circle in its simplest and friendliest form, and it takes less courage than you'd think once it's a game. For younger children, make it a treasure hunt: how many different neighbors can we say hello to? For teens, it can be awkward, and that's fine; suggest they take the dog or a younger sibling. For adults, notice what happens in your own body when you say hello to a stranger. Many people feel a flicker of dread and then a small warmth.

Over a week

Chore swap — Ages 5–10, 11–14 and 15–18 (35 minutes · a list of household chores · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

This is a deeper card.

Write down every chore that keeps your house running, from emptying the dishwasher to renewing the car registration. Then each person picks one that someone else usually does, and does it for a week, with the other person watching and learning. It's a fast way to see what is invisible. Children are often astonished by how much is going on, and parents are sometimes surprised by what a child notices. At the end, ask: "What did you not know about? What would you like to do more often? What would you like to give up?" Don't turn it into a complaint session. The aim is to see each other. If chores in your house are a sore subject, start with one trade, small and cheerful, and see

how it goes.

A sample week in one house

Here's what a week might look like in the house where Hamid lives with his daughter Pilar, age 8, and his son Wen, age 12. On Sunday, Hamid draws the circles on the back of a cereal box with Pilar, and she puts in the crossing guard. On Monday, the family makes the "tell and be believed" plan at supper, and Wen asks whether he can write his own, which he does that night. On Tuesday, Hamid does the quiet kind act and tells nobody; he notices Pilar did too, and says nothing. Wednesday is the neighbor walk, and Pilar learns the name of the mail carrier. On Thursday, Wen does his sister's job of feeding the cat, and she does his of taking out the recycling. Friday evening, over pasta, they do the Talk box, and Wen mentions that a classmate has been eating alone. That's the seed of next week's step. *This is an illustration.*

Each piece is short, and they're spread over seven days. If it's too much, do one card. A good week is any week in which one person in the house did one small thing for someone beyond themselves, and noticed.

If it isn't clicking

"My child doesn't want to share or help." That's normal at five, and often at twelve. Don't turn kindness into a requirement they fail. Start with the quiet kind act, which is optional and private, and with the hive game, which asks what the child *notices*, not what they must *do*. Notice what they do, rather than lecturing about what they should. If a child is only generous when watched, that's fine; it's practice. Let it grow.

"My child is the one doing the hurting." This happens in many houses, and it doesn't mean you've failed. Take it seriously and stay calm. Listen to what happened, and if the other child was hurt, believe that. Say what was wrong, plainly: "That hurt Marco, and it wasn't okay." Don't shame your child; shame tends to make children hide things. Then help them repair: say sorry in their own words, make it right in a way that makes sense, and learn what they could do differently. Ask what was going on for them. If it's a pattern, talk with the teacher or counselor, and ask for help. This is the right time to use the "Tell and be believed" card in the other direction: *you can tell me when you've done something you're ashamed of, and I won't stop loving you.*

"My child is being hurt." Believe them, say so, and act. Write down what happened, with dates and names, and take it to the school or group leader. If it doesn't stop, go up a level. It's not up to a child to make it stop on their own. A parent who says "just ignore them" has put the weight in the wrong place. If you're worried about your child's safety or if they say they want to hurt themselves, Chapter 7 has the plain steps to take.

"I don't have a circle." Some teens and adults really are lonely, and widening a circle is hard when the middle is thin. Start with the smallest thing: one regular hello, at the same shop, at the same time each week. A circle often grows from a nod. If you're lonely enough that it's hurting, say so to someone: a doctor, a counselor, a friend. This book can't fix that, and the Stoics didn't think a person should try to go it alone.

“I’m tired. Everyone needs something.” If that’s your life right now, the widening starts with your own circle. Ask for help, and say yes when it’s offered. A parent who is running on empty isn’t failing a Stoic standard. The old advice was never to burn yourself out for strangers, and it’s a mistake to read it that way. Pick the smallest step, or skip this chapter’s action cards for a week and do only the Talk box.

“The news is too much.” Teens and adults often say the world’s trouble is too big for any act to matter. Turn down the volume on what you read, and pick one problem within reach. The Stoic idea of “up to us” is a gift here: you can’t fix the world, and you can do one thing in your block, your school or your town. Do that, and let it be enough for the day.

“Someone in my circle is unsafe.” Widening your circle doesn’t mean staying close to someone who harms you. You can wish a person well from a distance. If someone in your life is hurting you or someone you love, the right step is to get help and get safe, and Chapter 7 can point you to that. Don’t use any Stoic idea, such as that person being “kin,” as a reason to stay.

“My teen says kindness is for suckers.” Some teens go through a stretch of testing whether caring is safe. Don’t argue the point. Ask, “When has someone being decent to you made a difference?” Most teens can name one: a coach, a cousin, a friend who stuck around. Then ask what it cost that person. Kindness isn’t the same as letting people walk over you, and the Stoic virtue of justice includes a firm “no” when somebody is being treated unfairly, including you. A teen who sees kindness and backbone in the same person is usually less cynical by the end of the talk, though not always by the end of the week. Let it be unfinished.

“Volunteering feels fake.” A little bit of self-consciousness is normal. If it still feels like a show, choose a task where nobody sees you: stuffing envelopes, washing dishes, sorting donations. And don’t confuse feeling a bit odd with doing it wrong. Feeling out of place the first few times is ordinary.

Tools, including AI

You need very little: paper, chalk or yarn for the circles, a map of the neighborhood, a local calendar of events (the library’s or the town’s, on paper or on a screen), and a pen. A phone’s map app can help you find a nearby park or a community group; use it for looking, not for deciding who matters.

If you use a chat tool, keep to the rule from the Philosophy Hour: *your own attempt first, then ask.* Write your own circles and your own plan. Then, if you like, ask a tool to suggest local volunteer options, to help you find the right office for a letter, or to tidy the grammar of what you wrote. Don’t ask it to write the letter for you; a letter in your own words counts for more, and the point of the card is that *you* did it. And keep names, schools, ages and details of anything that has happened to your child out of any tool. If a child is being hurt, that’s for the people who can act, such as a teacher, a counselor or a doctor, not for a screen. Last, check any line a tool gives you from Marcus or Seneca against the actual text, as Chapter 8 explains, because tools sometimes make up quotations and there are plenty of fake Stoic quotes online.

What “done enough” looks like

You’re done enough with this chapter when each person in your house has done one small thing for someone outside their usual circle, and has noticed how it felt. You’re done enough if a child can say who they’d tell and what they’d say if someone hurt them, and a grown-up has promised to believe them and meant it. You’re done enough if a teen has talked about where their circles stop, and an adult has taken one real step, such as a call, a vote or an hour.

You haven’t failed if the circles feel small, or if a week goes by with nothing but a hello. Hellos count. A small circle that’s honestly tended is better than a large one in name only.

- **Ages 5–10:** can draw their circles, and say who they’d tell if someone was mean and what they’d say.
- **Ages 11–14:** can name one person outside their circle and one small step toward them, and has made a “tell and be believed” plan.
- **Ages 15–18:** has read Letter 47, said what they’d add today, and done one action.
- **Adult learner:** has taken one step outside the usual circle and written down what happened.

Next is the daily rhythm that holds all of this together, the morning and the evening. That’s Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 — Morning and Evening Practices



Why this matters

A day has two doors. One opens when you wake and the other closes when you go to bed, and most of us walk through both half asleep. The old Stoics noticed something about those doors. They're small, they come around every day whether we like it or not, and a few quiet minutes on either side of the day change how the day in between is lived. Not magically, and not for everyone, and not

by itself. But the practice is old: Seneca describes a nightly review in a book written nearly two thousand years ago.

This is the chapter of the daily rhythm. In the morning you look ahead: what's my work today, what's likely to be hard, what's mine to do about it. In the evening you look back: what did I actually do, whom did it touch, what will I look at tomorrow. Together they hold up the third and fourth clauses of our focus line, *do it well* and *look back honestly*, and they give the rest of the book somewhere to live. The Philosophy Hour is once a week. These are the small daily threads that tie one Hour to the next.

A word about size. Everything in this chapter is small, on purpose. A line on an index card. Three questions at bedtime. A plan for one conversation. Start with three minutes, not with an hour of journaling at dawn or a forty-minute review at midnight. A small practice you'll actually do is worth more than a big one you dread. If you take only one thing from this chapter, take the smallest card and do it for a week.

A word about tone, too. The evening look-back is not a trial. The Stoics who practiced it were, by their own report, trying to be fair to themselves, and a child or a grown-up who ends the day by listing faults has missed the point entirely. We'll say more about how to keep it kind. And the morning look-ahead is not a way to scare yourself. It's a way to get ready for ordinary things: a hard conversation, a test, a crowded bus. If thinking ahead makes someone more worried, they should stop, and the "If it isn't clicking" section says what to do instead.

Understand it yourself

The morning

You've already met one morning line in Chapter 4: Marcus Aurelius, an emperor with plenty of reasons to stay in bed, telling himself that he is rising "to the work of a human being." That idea is the core of the morning card: before you check the news or your phone, say what your work is today, in a sentence. It doesn't need to be grand. For a parent, today's work may be to be patient with a toddler. For a student, to try a hard problem before asking for help. For a child, to be kind at recess. A single line is enough, and it points the day.

Marcus left another morning note, and it's the more surprising one. "Begin the morning by saying to thyself, I shall meet with the busybody, the ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, envious, unsocial."[1] It sounds gloomy until you read on. He goes on to say that these people act as they do out of ignorance of what is good, and that he can't be harmed by them and can't be angry with them, because they're his kin. The point of the list isn't to expect the worst. It's to *not be surprised*. If you know in the morning that the day will include someone difficult, you've already taken away some of the shock, and what's left is the part that was always yours: how you'll act. The old teachers called this rehearsing, or "premeditation," in plain terms, thinking ahead.

Rehearsing a small thing

The best-known rehearsal in the Stoic books is a very ordinary one. Epictetus: "When you are going about any action, remind yourself what nature the action is. If you are going to bathe, picture to yourself the things which usually happen in the bath: some people splash the water, some push, some use abusive language, and others steal."[2] His advice is to get ready for what usually happens, so that you can keep hold of your own choices when it does. You'll see that this is the same card as Chapter 3's bath rehearsal, now moved to the morning. A rehearsal is just a short look ahead at one real thing: what usually happens, which part of it is yours, and what you'll do.

Seneca adds a gentle reminder. In a letter to his friend Lucilius (you met the line in Chapter 1), he writes that "we suffer more often in imagination than in reality."[3] It's a useful sentence, and it's easy to misuse. He isn't saying that worries are silly, or that every fear shrinks when examined. He's saying that the *waiting* is often worse than the event, and that you can sometimes take a bit of the sting out by naming what's coming and making a plan for it. A rehearsal is a small, solvable thing, such as what to say to a teacher or how to get to the bus, and not a dark journey through everything that could go wrong.

Here the safety note matters. For a child or teen who already worries a great deal, looking ahead can feed the worry instead of calming it. So keep rehearsals small, concrete and solvable: a rainy picnic, a hard conversation, a late bus. Don't ask anyone to dwell on disasters, and never ask a child to imagine something terrible happening to people they love. If worry is keeping someone from sleeping or going to school for weeks at a time, that isn't something to practice away. It's a reason to see a doctor or a counselor, and Chapter 7 says more.

The view from above

One more look-ahead, and this one is more of a look-up. Marcus wrote: "Look round at the courses of the stars, as if thou wert going along with them; and constantly consider the changes of the elements into one another; for such thoughts purge away the filth of the terrene life."[1] Teachers have called this the view from above: imagining your street, your town, your day, from far up. It widens the frame. Things that felt like the whole world look like part of a very large landscape, and you notice people and places you'd stopped seeing.

It's a *widening*, and it needs a caution. It must never become a way of telling someone that their trouble is small: "Look at the stars, your problem is nothing." That's cruel, and it's not what Marcus is doing. He's reminding himself that he is one person among many, doing one ordinary job. If someone's pain is real, the view from above doesn't shrink it. It only adds room around it. Use it to see more, never to dismiss.

Small loss, big thanks

An adult practice from the old books is to imagine, briefly, not having one ordinary thing you rely on: hot water, a key, a working phone. You imagine it for a minute, and then you thank the thing you have. People sometimes call it "negative visualization." Seneca writes that calamity can arrive at any hour, and the Stoic point is mostly about appreciation: what is present is worth noticing

while it is present.[4] Keep it small, and keep it about *things*, never about people you love. If you're recently bereaved, skip it. It isn't for you now, and nobody who has lost someone should feel they have to do an exercise about loss.

The evening look-back

The evening is where the Stoics are at their gentlest. Seneca reports a habit of a man named Sextius, who at the end of the day, once he had gone to bed, asked his spirit: "What bad habit of yours have you cured to-day? what vice have you checked? in what respect are you better?"[5] Then Seneca adds a line that surprises people: "how sweet is the sleep which follows this self-examination?"[5] The review wasn't meant to produce guilt. It was meant to produce good sleep.

Seneca goes on to say that he does the same: each night he goes over what he said and did that day, hiding nothing. The part to notice is how he treats himself. When he finds a mistake, he forgives himself, and he reminds himself what to do differently next time. That's the whole shape of a good review: look honestly, forgive, adjust. Seneca expects the practice to make anger gentler over time. We pass that along as his expectation, not a promise. It's one man's report, and what we'd offer is only that the practice has been found worth trying for a very long time.

So the review has three moves. *Look*: what happened, what did I do. *Be fair*: what went well, where did I fall short, without a sentence handed down. *Turn*: one small thing for tomorrow. If it ends with a verdict, it hasn't worked. If it ends with a plan and a bit of kindness, it has.

A note on journaling: writing the review down is helpful for many people because paper holds a thought still. We make no claim that it cures anything, and some people prefer to think it through in their heads or say it aloud. Do whichever you'll actually do. Whichever you choose, it's private, and it belongs to the person doing it.

How to try it this week

You don't need all of these. Choose one morning thing and one evening thing, and keep them for the week. If you pick only one, pick the evening one for a child, and the morning one for a grown-up. Most households find that bedtime already has a spot for three quiet questions, and that mornings are too crowded for anything more than a line.

Start the week by asking everyone one plain question: **"What's one thing coming up this week that you'd like to be ready for?"** Write down one line from each person. You'll use it on Wednesday.

Ages 5–10

Keep this track warm and short. A young child doesn't need a "practice." They need a few quiet minutes at the end of the day with someone who's listening, and a small, friendly habit of thinking ahead. Nothing here is a test.

Rain plan, sun plan (10 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Before an outing, make two plans: one for sun, one for rain. A trip to the park, a birthday party, a walk to school. Say them out loud together. *"If it's sunny, we'll go to the swings. If it rains, we'll take the umbrella and jump in puddles."* Then ask, "How does having a second plan feel?" Many children say, "Better," and that's the point: a second plan means you're ready, and you don't have to be upset if the first one doesn't work. In my words, it's an old idea from the Stoics: get ready for what might happen, so you can keep hold of your own choices when it does.

Finn, who is nine, made a rain plan for his soccer game: "If the field is wet, we do passing drills in the gym, and I bring dry socks." When the game was rained out, he got out the dry socks before anyone told him to. This is an illustration.

Evening review, little ones (5 minutes · none · no screen · Look Back)

Safety: keep it warm; never use it as a trial or to list faults.

At bedtime, ask three small questions: **"What's one thing you liked doing today? What was one thing that was hard? What's one thing you might try tomorrow?"** Then listen. Don't fix, don't correct, don't add what you noticed. Say, "Thank you for telling me." If your child says "nothing" to a question, say, "That's fine," and move on. Some nights, one answer is plenty. The goal isn't a good answer. It's the habit of looking back, in a kind place, with someone who's glad to hear it.

If something hard comes out, such as a friend who was mean or a worry about school, give it a few minutes of attention and then say, "Let's think about that tomorrow." Don't send a child to sleep with a problem you've just opened and haven't closed. If a worry keeps coming back, Chapter 7 has more.

View from the window (20 minutes · a window, paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: stay on the ground floor or at a safe window; never a roof or an edge.

Look out at your street from a window, or from a hill if you have one. What do you see? People, cars, trees, a dog. Then draw it on paper as if you were a bird looking down from high above. Ask, "What looks different from up here?" Children often say, "The cars are tiny," or "I can see the whole playground." That's the card. The idea is that seeing more of the picture helps us notice things we'd missed. It isn't a way to tell yourself that your problem is small.

Listen for: names, small details, and "I forgot to say." A child who says, "Today I liked the part when Dad helped me," is telling you what mattered. A child who says, "Nothing was hard," may be tired, or may be saving it. Keep the door open.

Ages 11–14

Teens at this age mostly want two things from a daily practice: that it be short and that it be private. Give them both. They may say it's "cringe," and that's their right. The cards below are for those who'll try, and for anyone willing to try them for just three days.

The pocket plan (10 minutes · an index card · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Think of one small hard thing coming up in the next two days: a conversation, a test, a tryout, a crowded bus. On an index card, write three lines: *What usually happens? What part is mine? What*

will I do? Keep the card in a pocket. Look at it once before the thing happens. That's all. It's the old bath rehearsal for a real event. Keep the thing small and solvable; skip the "what if everything goes wrong" version.

Kofi, who is thirteen, wrote: "Usually: I freeze when the teacher calls on me. Mine: take one breath, say 'let me think.' Do: say 'let me think' out loud." He told his father later it worked on the second try. This is an illustration.

Evening review, teens (10 minutes · a notebook · no screen · Look Back)

Three lines, in private: *What I did well. Where I fell short. One thing for tomorrow.* Write them kindly, the way you'd write to a friend. Nobody reads the notebook unless you invite them to. If you miss a night, skip it; don't make it up. A teen who writes only "nothing" is still practicing the habit of stopping, and that's enough for the week.

Parents: this one is theirs. Don't ask to see it, and don't ask how it's going more than once. You can say, "I do mine too," and leave it at that.

Hard-thing rehearsal week (45 minutes · a notebook · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

This is a deeper card.

Safety: stop if anxiety rises. If worry keeps you from sleep or school for weeks, see a doctor or counselor.

Pick one recurring stress: speaking up in class, a family dinner, a team practice where you feel out of place. Over three days, rehearse one small step at a time. Day one: write what usually happens, in plain words, and one thing in it that's yours. Day two: choose the smallest step you could take, like saying one sentence in class, and write what you'd say. Day three: do the step, or do half of it, and write what happened. It's fine if the third day's step is smaller than the plan. The point is the sequence, which is what turns dread into something you can handle in pieces. If rehearsing makes the thing feel bigger, drop it and try the pocket plan instead.

You may also like *View from the window*, under Ages 5–10: it works at this age with a drawing of the neighborhood as a map. And **Morning one line** and **Notebook page**, in *Practice that actually builds it*, are made for this age.

Listen for: a teen who says, "I knew what to do and I did it, sort of." That's the sound of a small step. Don't make it bigger than it was.

Ages 15–18

At this age, the morning and the evening can be taken seriously, or dropped, and either is a choice. The two cards here are the longer ones. One is a reading; one is a practice you can do in your own head.

View from above, longer (40 minutes · a printed page of Marcus, Book 7 (Long) · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card.

Safety: do not use this to dismiss your own pain.

Print the page of Marcus's *Meditations*, Book 7, that has the lines about looking round at the courses of the stars (Long, MIT).[1] Read it once aloud. Then write a paragraph "from above": your day, your town, your life. Describe what you'd see if you were looking from far up. Where are the people you don't usually notice? What is going on in the edges of your life that you've stopped seeing? Read the paragraph aloud, to yourself or to someone. Then add a last line: *What I notice from here that I didn't from down there.*

This is a way to see more. It can also be a way to hide from what's hard. If you find yourself writing "none of it matters," stop and write the next paragraph from the ground: your own place, your own feelings, nothing smaller than they are.

Suri, who is sixteen, wrote her paragraph from above and found that the corner where she waited for the bus was the first place in her town she'd looked at in a year. "I'd never seen the bus stop was in front of a bakery," she said. This is an illustration.

Small loss, big thanks (15 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: never practice imagining the death of someone you love; stop if it is distressing; skip if you are recently bereaved.

Imagine for a minute not having one ordinary thing: hot water, a key to your front door, a phone that works. Then thank it, in a sentence. *"Thank you, hot water."* Keep it small, and keep it about things, never people. The point isn't to make yourself anxious. It's to notice that most of what holds your day up is ordinary and easy to miss. Many teens find it a bit silly the first time. Try it three times before deciding.

Also for this track: *The pocket plan, taller*, *Evening review, teens* and *Hard-thing rehearsal week*, all above under Ages 11–14, written the same way with a bigger situation. And *Notebook page* and *Weekly look-back walk* in *Practice that actually builds it.* For a 40-minute Hour, choose *View from above, longer* or the hard-thing week. Not both.

Listen for: whether the review ends kindly. A teen who writes three lines of faults needs a different last line, such as "and I'm still going to try." Suggest it once. Don't push.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

For adults, the problem with these practices is rarely understanding them. It's finding the five minutes. So the cards are small, and you may do them in the car, in the kitchen or in bed. This is a long game, and a modest one.

The Sextius review (15 minutes · a notebook · no screen · Look Back)

Find the lines in Seneca's *On Anger*, Book 3, section 36 (Stewart translation) about Sextius's nightly questions.[5] Read them once. Then do the same in your own words, in your notebook, at the end of a day: *What did I do well today? Where did I fall short? What will I do differently?* Write them as you would to a good friend. Then, and this part matters, end with something kind, not a sentence. Seneca ends by forgiving himself and making a plan. You can do the same: "That was hard. I'll try to listen longer tomorrow."

Alberto, a man of 50 who drives a delivery truck, started the review in a notebook he kept in the glove compartment. His first week, every line was a fault. His second week, he added one thing he'd done well each night, and said it was like putting a hand on his own shoulder. This is an illustration.

The pocket plan, taller. Use the same ten-minute card as in Ages 11–14, but choose a real situation at work or at home: a meeting, a hard phone call, a talk with an aging parent. Write the three lines on an index card. Then add a fourth: *What would I be glad I'd done?* Read it once before the event. It's not a script. It's a way to walk in with your own decision made, instead of arriving and finding out what you'll do.

View from above, taller. Use the longer card from Ages 15–18, with a wider frame: your week, your family, your work. Read Marcus's lines, and then ask, "Whom do I pass every day without seeing?" Many adults find this the part that stays. It's not about your troubles being small. It's about noticing who else is there.

Small loss, big thanks, taller. Keep the same safety rule as in Ages 15–18: skip it if you're recently bereaved, and don't use it on people. Seneca, writing about the burning of the city of Lyons, said: "We must not cry out at any of these calamities. Into such a world have we entered, and under such laws do we live."[4] This is the line most easily misread. It isn't an instruction about how you should feel about your own loss, and nobody in grief should be told not to cry. It's one man's way of saying that loss belongs to being alive. Read it as that and no more; Chapter 7 is where we talk about hard feelings and grief. For the card, keep to the small: thank the hot water, the key, the car that started.

A word to the parent: Do the morning line and the evening review where your child can see you do them. Say them aloud sometimes. "Today my work is to be patient at pickup." Children learn the habit from watching, much more than from being told.

Listen for: whether you're being as kind to yourself in the evening review as you'd be to a friend. If not, change the last line.

Talk box

"*What did I look at this morning, and what did I notice when I looked back tonight?"*

- **Morning:** What was my work today, in one line?
- **Ahead:** What did I get ready for, and did it help?
- **Evening:** What did I do well, and where did I fall short?
- **Kind:** Did I end the review with something kind?
- **Tomorrow:** What is one small thing I'll look at tomorrow?

What to do with the answer: Write one line from the evening review on an index card and keep it for the week. Notice whether the lines get kinder as the week goes on.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What did you want to do today? What was fun, what was hard, and what might you try tomorrow?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What did you look ahead to this week? Did the card help? What's one thing you'd do differently tomorrow?"

Practice that actually builds it

These three cards are the daily and weekly rhythm. Each carries a track tag so you can see who it's for. Small and regular beats big and rare.

Morning one line — Ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (3 minutes · an index card · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Each morning, say or write one line: **"Today my work is to …"** For a child, it might be "be kind to my brother" or "try the hard puzzle." For a teen, "get through the test without panicking." For an adult, "be patient with the people in the room." Keep it small. In my words for children, this is a Stoic habit from Marcus, the Roman emperor, who reminded himself each morning that he was getting up to do the work of a human being. Say it before you look at a screen. If you forget, say it at lunch; it still counts.

Notebook page — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (15 minutes · a notebook · no screen · Look Back)

A standing page, dated, with four questions: **What was mine to do? How did I do it? Whom did it touch? What will I look at tomorrow?** It's a longer cousin of the three-line evening review. Do it two or three nights a week, not every night. Keep it kind. A page that's mostly faults needs a different closing line, and a page that's all praise is probably leaving something out. We make no claim that writing it down cures anything; for many people it's a way to see the day more clearly, and that's enough.

Weekly look-back walk — Ages 5–10, 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (40 minutes · a walk, a notebook if you like · no screen · Look Back)

This is a deeper card.

Once a week, walk and talk about the week: one thing that went well, one thing that was hard, one thing we might try. No fixing, no lectures. Walking side by side, without eye contact, can make it easier for some teens and children to speak. For younger children it can be a short walk around the block. For the adults, it's a good place to say, "Here's what I'm working on," out loud. If the weather's bad, do it in the car or at the kitchen table with tea. The rule is that nobody gives advice unless asked.

A sample week in one house

Here's what one week might look like in the house where Odette lives with her son Finn, age 9, and her son Kofi, age 13. On Sunday, Odette asks the week's question at supper, and Kofi says he'd like to be ready for Thursday's oral presentation. On Monday morning, each of them says a "today my work is" line on the way out the door; Finn's is "share the tape at school." Monday night, at bedtime, Odette asks Finn the three little questions, and he says the hard thing was "when my tower fell over," and the good thing was "when it fell over and Mom laughed." On Tuesday, Kofi writes a pocket plan for the presentation and puts it in his jacket. Wednesday, Odette does her own evening review in a notebook, and notices that all three lines are faults; she adds one kind line and goes to sleep. On Thursday, Kofi looks at his card once, in the hallway, and gives the talk. He says "it was

fine," which in this house is high praise. Saturday morning the three of them walk to the corner shop and each says one thing from the week, and nobody gives any advice. *This is an illustration.*

None of it is long, and only a few of the pieces call for a notebook. If it's too much, keep the Monday line and the bedtime questions, and drop the rest.

If it isn't clicking

"I forget." Almost everyone does. Attach the practice to something you already do: the line on the stairs, the three questions while the light goes off, the review while you brush your teeth. Don't add an alarm unless you'll actually answer it. If you miss three days, restart on the fourth. There's no streak to lose.

"My child says nothing happened." That's an honest answer from a tired child. Try, "Tell me about the first thing at school," or, "What did you eat?" and then let them drift to the rest. If the answer is the same for a week, stop asking at bedtime and try the weekly walk, where talk comes more easily. A child who has nothing to say is not failing a test.

"The evening review turns into a list of everything I did wrong." That's the most common way it goes sideways, in children and in grown-ups. Seneca's own review forgives and makes a plan; if yours only accuses, it isn't the practice. Change the order: start with what went well, even if it's tiny ("I got up"). End with a kind line, and stop. If you can't do it kindly tonight, skip it. A review that makes someone feel worse about themselves is not working, and no streak is worth it. If the harsh voice is loud most nights, or you feel low for weeks, talk to a doctor or counselor; this book can't fix that.

"Thinking ahead makes me more worried." Then stop thinking ahead, at least for a bit. Rehearsal helps some people and feeds worry in others. Go back to the smallest, most solvable thing, such as a plan for the rain or for which bus to take, and skip anything frightening. If the worry is keeping you or your child from sleep or school for weeks, that calls for a doctor or counselor, and Chapter 7 can help you find the next step.

"My teen won't write anything." Then they won't. Don't read their notebook, don't ask for it, and don't bring it up at dinner. You can leave a blank notebook out and say nothing. Some teens do the review in their heads, which is fine, and some never do it. Do yours where they can see it, and let that be the lesson.

"I can't do mornings." Shift workers, new parents and anyone whose mornings are chaotic can use any time of day as the morning: the start of a shift, the first coffee, the first minute of the car ride. The practice is about looking ahead, and any "ahead" will do.

"It feels like a self-improvement program." A little of that is unavoidable, and it's worth watching. The Stoic practice isn't to become a better person on a schedule. It's to notice, kindly, what you did, and to try one small thing. If you notice yourself grading, drop the notebook for a week.

"We tried it and it didn't work." It may not, in the sense you hoped. This book doesn't promise a calmer house or a better mood, and the old Stoics didn't either. What the practice offers is a small habit of looking at your own day with a little care. If that isn't useful after a few weeks, put it down.

Tools, including AI

You need very little: an index card, a pencil, a notebook, and a few quiet minutes. A kitchen timer is fine for the three-minute cards. A phone alarm can serve as a gentle bell, set to a quiet sound; but if the phone makes the morning noisier, skip it. A window and a sheet of paper cover the view cards. An audio reading of Marcus or Seneca, from a public-domain source, is a nice way to hear the lines.

If you try a chat tool, follow the rule from the Philosophy Hour: *your own attempt first, then ask.* Write your own morning line and your own three evening lines. Then, if you like, ask a tool to help you make a rehearsal smaller, or to suggest a kinder last line. Don't ask it to write the review for you, and don't ask it to decide whether you did well. A tool can't know what your day was.

Keep your journal private. Don't paste your notebook pages, or your child's bedtime answers, into any tool, and be wary of any app that wants to keep them. A habit-tracking app that counts streaks can turn a kind practice into a score, so turn the streak off or use paper. And check any line a tool gives you from Marcus or Seneca against the actual translation, as Chapter 8 explains: tools sometimes invent quotations, and there are many fake Stoic lines online.

What "done enough" looks like

You're done enough with this chapter when each person in your house has tried one morning thing and one evening thing on at least three days, and has noticed what it was like. That's all. It isn't a streak. A household that said a morning line on three days and asked the bedtime questions on four has done the chapter.

You haven't failed if the practice drops off in week two. Many people's does. Pick it up again on a day when you remember, with the smallest card. A rhythm that's restarted a dozen times is still a rhythm.

- **Ages 5–10:** Your child has said a "today my work is" line at least once and has answered the three bedtime questions on a few nights.
- **Ages 11–14:** Your teen has made one pocket plan and tried one evening review, and knows which one they'd keep.
- **Ages 15–18:** Your teenager has done the view from above, or the hard-thing week, and has said what they noticed.
- **Adult learner:** You have done the Sextius review a few times, ended it kindly, and made one small plan before a hard thing.

Next is the hard stuff: anger, fear, grief and the feelings that don't fit a card. That's Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 — Hard Feelings: Anger, Fear, Grief and the Rest



Why this matters

Sooner or later, the Hour runs into a hard day. A child comes home furious about something that happened on the bus. A teenager goes quiet in a way you can feel from across the house. A parent, reading this book at midnight, is carrying a worry that has been sitting on the chest for a month. Somebody you love has died, or is very ill, or has moved away. The five steps of the Philosophy

Hour are lovely on an ordinary Tuesday. This chapter is for the other kind of day.

Here is the first thing to hold onto, and it's the most important sentence in the chapter: *a hard feeling is not a failure.* The people who taught this school of thought for five hundred years did not say that feelings were shameful or that the wise person feels nothing. They said that a feeling comes with a thought attached, and that the thought is the part we can look at together. That's a gentler and more practical idea than the cartoon "Stoic" of the stiff upper lip, and it's the idea this whole chapter is built on.

The second thing to hold onto is just as important. *This book is not therapy, and you are not meant to carry a heavy thing alone.* The fifth of the five locks in the front of the book is "When it is heavy, bring in a person," and this is the chapter that says what that means in practice: who the person is, how you know it's time, and what to do in the rare moment when someone says they want to die. You'll find the plain facts in one place, in a standing box in the middle of the chapter, so you can find it again at two in the morning.

The rest of the chapter is the everyday work: helping a child say what the feeling is, giving anger somewhere to go that isn't a fist or a slammed door, sizing a worry so it stops growing in the dark, and letting grief be grief. Every practice starts from one promise. Feelings are allowed. Hitting and hurting are not. And nobody does the hard part alone.

Think of this chapter as the first-aid shelf in your house. You hope you won't need most of it this week, and you'll be glad you read it once while things were calm. Nearly everything on the shelf is simple: sit beside the person, say the true thing in plain words, don't rush to fix, and stay. Take only what the week asks for. A family with no hard day this week can read the chapter, close it, and go for a walk.

Understand it yourself

The first jolt is not a failure

The ancient teachers noticed something that every parent has watched happen. Something frightening or sad occurs, and before anyone has had time to think, the body has already answered. The heart jumps. The face flushes. The eyes fill. The later Stoic writers gave these first reactions a name that means roughly "first movements," and they were clear that a first movement isn't a mistake or a moral failing. It happens to everyone, before any choice is made.[1]

What the Stoics cared about came next: what we do with that jolt. In their account, a feeling in the full sense includes a judgment, a quick "this is terrible" or "this is an insult" or "this will never be all right." The practice you've been building in earlier chapters, the pause between what happens and the story you tell yourself, is the practice of noticing that judgment and asking whether it is the whole truth. That's the part of the work that's yours. The jolt is not yours to prevent, and nobody should be scolded for it.

This matters most for children. A child who is told "stop crying" or "don't be scared" learns that the jolt is wrong, and then has two problems: the feeling and the shame. A child who hears "your body had a big reaction, and that's okay; let's see what's going on" learns that feelings can be looked

at. The ancient Stoics themselves held that small children don't have emotions in the full sense. A modern philosopher who admires much of the school, Martha Nussbaum, says plainly that this part is not correct.[2] So in this book, a child's feelings are always real, and nobody is ever told otherwise.

The good feelings the school wanted

It's a common mistake to think the Stoics wanted a life with no feeling in it. The modern word "stoic" means something more like "tough and silent," and that picture has very little to do with the teachers themselves. Diogenes Laertius, an ancient biographer who wrote about the school's views, reports that they named three steady, good states: joy, a careful kind of caution, and a settled wishing for good things that doesn't clutch at them.[3] One modern reference work adds that the school's freedom from destructive emotions was never meant as coldness; it describes that freedom as a welcome by-product of living well, not the target.[4]

So when this book says "hard feelings," it doesn't mean "feelings to be got rid of." It means the heavy ones, anger, fear, worry and grief, which deserve company and honest attention. In the practices that follow, joy gets a seat at the table too.

Anger: allowed, with a rule

Anger is allowed. Hitting and hurting are not. If you remember only one thing about anger from this chapter, make it that pair of sentences, because they're what a child needs to hear and what a grown-up needs to say without raising their voice.

The practices in this chapter give anger three tools in place of a fist: a thermometer, a pause and a person. The thermometer helps a child see that anger comes in sizes. The pause is a gap between the surge and the words, even one slow minute. The person is someone to tell. Seneca, who wrote a whole set of essays on anger, praised delay as a remedy, because it lets the first heat die down and gives the cloud in the mind time to thin.[5] You'll notice that none of these asks anyone to push the anger away. That's on purpose. In five studies, psychologists looked at how people usually handle their feelings, and found that those who habitually hide them tend to feel worse and to have more strained relationships than those who habitually look again at what a situation means.[6] It was a set of studies of how people usually cope, so it shows a pattern and not a cause, but it's a good reason to leave "stuff it down" out of any lesson plan. Suppression is not the Stoic practice as this book teaches it. Looking honestly is.

Marcus Aurelius, the emperor who wrote notes to himself, some of them during his last military campaigns, put the better answer to a wrong this way: "The best way of avenging thyself is not to become like the wrong doer."[7] (George Long's translation, Book 6.) It's worth keeping next to a very practical caution: this line is about not copying a harm. It is not about forgiving abuse, and it is never a reason for anyone to stay quiet about being hurt. If someone has seriously wronged a child or hurt them, the child tells a trusted adult and the adult acts. Chapter 5 says the same thing about bullying, and it bears repeating here: "that's not up to you" is never the answer to being hurt.

Fear and worry: small, concrete, solvable

Seneca wrote to a friend who was afraid of what might happen: "…we suffer more often in imagination than in reality."[8] (Gummere's translation, Letter 13.) That is a true and useful observation, and it's also a place where a careless teacher can do harm. Worry isn't silly, and telling an anxious person that their fear is "only imagination" doesn't help them.

The Stoic practice of thinking ahead is real, and some of the book's cards use it, but they use it on purpose in a small way. Rehearse the hard conversation. Plan for the rainy picnic. Ask what you'd do if the bus were late. These are worries with a next step. Two rules keep it safe. First, **premeditation stays small and solvable.** Second, **no practice in this book asks anyone, ever, to imagine the death of a person they love.** Not a child, not a teenager, not you. If a worry keeps circling and has no next step, it isn't a practice problem. It's a sign to talk to someone, and the box below says how.

For children, the line between good worry and stuck worry is a useful one. Good worry says "bring an umbrella." Stuck worry goes round and round and has no umbrella in it. A worry with a next step can be turned into a plan. A worry without one wants a listener.

Grief: let it be grief

Seneca's letter to a friend who'd lost someone is a good place to begin, and it's worth reading honestly. The famous line is short: "We may weep, but we must not wail."[9] (Gummere, Letter 63.) Seneca was writing to a grown man, and he was gentler than his reputation: he forgave tears, and he hoped the memory of the person lost would one day become a pleasant one.

The letter also says that time brings grief to an end. Many people who have lost someone will tell you it doesn't, and the American Academy of Pediatrics is blunt on the point for children: a child won't "get over" the death of someone they love within a few months or even a year, and they will spend the rest of their lives dealing with the loss, with milestones that bring it back, decades later.[10] Nussbaum draws a similar line from the philosopher's side. She accepts the Stoic claim that emotions are tied up with our judgments, but she rejects the claim that we should rid ourselves of grief.[2] Read together, these sources give us the rules this book keeps:

- **Say "died," plainly.** Use simple words and a simple cause, so a child doesn't think it was their fault. Avoid soft phrases like "went to sleep" or "went on a long trip," because young children take words literally and can end up afraid of sleep or of travel.[11]
- **Tears are allowed.** For a child, never "be strong," never "be brave," never "stop crying."
- **A child's pain is never called a lesson.** It's not a gift or a test. It's pain, and a person who loves them sits beside it.
- **Grief doesn't end in a few months.** Birthdays, holidays and the date of the death can all bring it back, and that's ordinary.
- **Don't assume older children are fine.** Older children and teenagers often hide grief, sometimes to protect their family and sometimes to avoid looking weak, and a calm face doesn't mean a quiet heart.

The standing box: when to bring in a person

Everything above sits inside a larger frame, which is the book's safety spine. It is stated here once, in full. It's the only place in the book where every item is listed.

> **Standing box — when it is heavy, bring in a person**
>
> **Get a person when you see any of these:** - Worry or sadness that lasts for weeks and gets in the way of sleep, school, play or meals. - A loss of interest in things the person usually loves. - A big change in how a child or teen acts (a talker goes silent; a gentle child starts hitting). - A frightening event, or anything that feels like trauma. - **Any talk of wanting to die, or of hurting themselves.**
>
> **The right door is a person:** your family doctor or pediatrician, a school counselor, a counselor or therapist. A pediatrician can talk privately with a child who doesn't want to speak in front of a parent, and can refer you to grief counseling and support groups.[10]
>
> **If someone talks about wanting to die or to hurt themselves:** stay with them. Don't leave them alone. Listen, and tell them you're glad they told you. Bring in help right away. **In the United States, call, text or chat 988, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: 24 hours a day, every day, free and confidential.** You don't have to be sure someone is suicidal to call; the Lifeline also supports people who are lonely, struggling with a relationship, or in distress for other reasons.[12] There are options for Spanish speakers (dial 988 and press 2, or text AYUDA to 988), for Veterans (dial 988 and press 1), and for people who are deaf or hard of hearing (a videophone service).[13] If someone is in immediate danger, call your local emergency number. Ask the crisis counselor or your doctor what else to do to keep the person safe.
>
> **988 is a United States service.** If you live anywhere else, use your local emergency number and your country's own crisis or mental-health services; ask your doctor which one to call. This book names no numbers outside the United States because it has not verified them.
>
> **This book is not therapy.** A practice from these pages can sit beside real help, but it never replaces it.

A few words about what's in that box. The first list isn't a diagnosis. It's the AAP's observation, in plain words, that major changes in how a child lives day to day are a reason to call the doctor, and that losses which feel overwhelming can feed anxiety, depression, self-harm and thoughts of suicide in children and teens.[10] If you're unsure, call. A pediatrician would much rather hear from you early. And one more rule belongs to every journal in your house: **journals are private.** A parent reads a child's notebook only if the child invites it. The one exception is the one in the box: if a child says they want to hurt themselves, safety comes first, and you stay close and bring in help. Every practice in this chapter that involves writing assumes that private page, and the notebook never goes into a shared device or a tool.

How to try it this week

Pick one track for each person, and take only one or two cards. A hard-feelings week isn't a week to do more; it's a week to do one thing well and keep it kind.

Ages 5–10

To the grown-up beside the child: Get down to the child's level, and tell them first that every feeling is welcome in your house. Start with weather, not with "what happened?" Questions can wait until the child has said the feeling out loud.

Name the weather (5 minutes · none · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Ask: "What kind of weather is inside you right now? Sunny, stormy, foggy?" Any answer is allowed. Say thank you for telling you, and then stop. You're not fixing the weather; you're helping the child learn that weather can be named. *Emil, age 7, looked up and said, "Foggy." "Foggy like what?" his mother asked. "Like I can't see my shoes." She said, "Thank you for telling me," and handed him his shoes. The fog was still there at breakfast, and so was she. This is an illustration.*

Do this at the start of the Hour for a week. By day three most children start offering the weather before you ask, and some start asking you.

Anger thermometer (15 minutes · paper, crayons · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: No hitting or hurting. Anger itself is allowed.

Draw a thermometer from 1 to 10 when everyone is calm, not in the middle of a meltdown. Beside each number, mark with the child what helps: drinking cold water, running outside, pressing hands against a wall, telling someone. Practice one of them at a 4 before you need it at a 7. Say it plainly: "Being angry is fine. Hitting is not. Here's what we do instead." Then use the same words every time, so that they feel like a family song and not a telling-off. A short version for the child to say back: "Big feelings are allowed. Hurting is not."

If the anger comes out as a hit before you've had a chance to practice, don't shout back. Say, "I won't let you hurt anyone, and I won't let anyone hurt you," move everyone to a safe spot, and wait. The thermometer comes later, once the child's body has settled. Practice teaches best when nobody is in trouble.

Delay one minute (3 minutes · a clock · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

When a child (or you) feels the surge to say something sharp, wait one slow minute. Then decide. A sand timer helps, and so does saying your own number out loud: "I'm at a 6. I'm taking a minute." Children learn this one by watching you do it.

In my words, for the child: A very old teacher named Seneca said that waiting a little while helps anger cool down. You can try that, and you can try it with me.

Two reminders for the grown-up. First, when a child is hurt or sad, don't make it a lesson; sit with them. Second, if a child talks about a death, use the word "died," give a short, true cause, and say plainly that it wasn't their fault. Heading 4 has the card for that day.

Listen for: A child who can give a size or a color for the feeling ("it's a 7," "it's red"), or who can point to one thing on the thermometer that helps.

Ages 11–14

To the grown-up beside the young person: Say less and listen more; this age group can hear a lecture coming from the next room. Offer the cards as things they can pick up or leave, and keep every notebook private unless it is offered. A good first sentence is, "Something seems heavy. You don't have to tell me what. I'm here." A poor one starts with "Why" or "You should."

The best revenge (20 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: If someone wronged you seriously or hurt you, tell a trusted adult; this card is not about forgiving abuse.

In my words: Marcus Aurelius, an emperor who wrote notes to himself, said that the best way to answer someone who did you wrong is to refuse to become like them. Read that to yourself twice. Then write about a time you were wronged. What would copying it have looked like? What would *not* copying it look like? You might still tell the person it wasn't okay. You might still tell an adult. "Not becoming like them" doesn't mean saying nothing.

Ottilie, 13, had a friend who spread a rumor about her. Her page listed what copying would look like: spreading a better one back. Then she listed what not copying looked like: telling the friend plainly that it hurt, and telling her dad about it, too. She kept the page in her notebook and showed no one. This is an illustration.

When to get a person (10 minutes · index card for the fridge · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: 988 is a US service; elsewhere use local emergency and crisis services.

Write the card together, on one index card, and put it somewhere everyone can see. It says when a person is needed: worry or sadness for weeks that hits sleep, school or play, or any talk of wanting to hurt yourself or die. It says who: our doctor, a counselor, and, in the US, 988 (call, text or chat, any hour, free, confidential). Add your own promise on the bottom, in your own words: "You will never be in trouble for telling me."

Worry notebook (10 minutes · small notebook · no screen · Look Back)

Safety: Stop and talk to an adult if worries are about harming yourself.

Write the worry down, then close the book. Open it the next morning and notice which worries lost their grip overnight. It's not a way to make a worry go away; it's a way to see which ones were louder at night than they were by day. Any worry that's still there and has a next step, take the step. Any worry that's still there and has no next step, take it to a person.

(The anger thermometer from the younger track works here too, "the same card, taller." Just put real situations on it.)

Listen for: A young person who can say one thing they'd do and one thing they'd skip, and who knows where the help card lives.

Ages 15–18

To the grown-up beside the teen, and to the teen: You're old enough now to read the real texts and argue with them. You're also old enough to be the person a friend calls first, and that's a weight worth sharing on purpose.

We may weep, but not wail? (30 minutes · printed Letter 63 opening (Gummere) · no screen · Think It Through)

Safety: Never apply this to a child's grief; never say "be strong."

Read the opening of Seneca's Letter 63 in Gummere's translation. Seneca is writing to a friend whose friend has died, and one line has traveled for two thousand years: "We may weep, but we must not wail."[9] Then read what Martha Nussbaum says about trying to remove grief: she accepts that our emotions carry judgments in them, but she thinks the Stoic aim of ridding ourselves of grief is wrong.[2] Now write what *you* would say to a friend who's grieving. Is it closer to Seneca, to Nussbaum, or to neither? Grief is allowed. The page will show you what you believe about it.

Hana, 17, wrote to a friend whose father had died: "I don't have the right words. I'm here. You don't have to be okay." She noticed that nothing in her note told her friend to be strong, and that was on purpose. This is an illustration.

The same card, taller: the best revenge. In Long's translation, Marcus writes: "The best way of avenging thyself is not to become like the wrong doer."[7] Write about a time you were wronged, and then about the version of you that didn't copy it. The same safety line applies: if you were hurt, this card is not asking you to stay silent or forgive. It's asking what you'll carry out of it.

The same card, taller: when to get a person. Write the card for yourself, not only for the family. Add one more rule that's yours: **if a friend tells you they want to die or hurt themselves, don't keep it secret and don't carry it alone.** Stay with them, tell a trusted adult right away, and in the US call, text or chat 988 together if it's safe to do so. A friend who is angry with you for telling is a friend who is alive.

When a friend is simply sad, and not in danger, you don't need a speech. Say you're glad they told you. Ask what would help, and offer something small, like sitting with them at lunch or walking home together. Don't promise to keep a secret before you've heard it, and don't try to cheer anyone out of a feeling. Being a steady person for a friend is a real kind of justice, and it's a skill you'll use for the rest of your life. It's also all right to notice that you are tired. Looking after a friend is easier when you have your own person to talk to.

Listen for: An answer that gives a grieving person permission to feel and doesn't try to fix them, plus a help card with real names on it.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

To you: You may be reading this for yourself, or because someone you're raising had a hard week, or both. Either way, the first practice is the one you'd teach: treat your own feelings as weather you're allowed to name. The cards below are the teen cards, "the same card, taller," with adult stakes.

The same card, taller: We may weep, but not wail? Read Seneca's Letter 63 opening, then Nussbaum's caution, then ask yourself where you stand. Seneca expected grief to wear away quickly. If you've lost someone, you already know whether that matches your life. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that a child who loses someone won't simply "get over" it in a few months, and that milestones can bring the loss back decades later.[10] If your own grief is the Hour's subject today, read the line, write one honest page, and stop. This isn't the day for argument.

The same card, taller: the best revenge. Marcus again: "The best way of avenging thyself is not to become like the wrong doer."[7] The adult version asks about a wrong at work, in a family, or in a marriage. What would copying it look like, and what would not-copying look like, and is there something left that you owe it, like a conversation, a boundary, or a person you'll tell? The card is not about forgiving abuse.

The same card, taller: worry notebook. Seneca's line to a friend about fear running ahead of what is real, quoted earlier in this chapter, is true,[8] and it doesn't mean your worry is foolish. Write each worry, close the book, reopen in the morning. Sort what you find into two piles: worries with a next step, and worries that want a listener. *Desmond, 52, lost his job in the spring and kept waking at three. After three weeks he had 14 worries on paper. Nine had a next step, and he took them. Five didn't, and he told his brother about them over coffee. He also booked a doctor's visit for the sleep, and told himself that it wasn't weakness. It was the right door. This is an illustration.*

The same card, taller: when to get a person. Put your own doctor and counselor on your own card. If you keep the card for a child, write beside it the name of someone you could call for yourself.

Listen for: An honest page, a worry sorted by whether it has a next step, and one person's name on a card you can find at night.

Talk box

"*What feeling was biggest this week — what did it need from me, and from someone else?"*

- **Body:** Where did you feel it in your body? (A tight chest, a hot face, heavy arms.)
- **Story:** What story came with it, and was that story the whole truth?
- **Did:** What did you do with it, and would you do the same thing again?
- **Told:** Who did you tell? Who could you tell next time?
- **Person:** Did anything about this week make you want a person to talk to?

What to do with the answer: Listen first. Don't fix, rush or give a lesson. If you hear weeks of heavy worry or sadness, or any mention of wanting to die or hurt themselves, take it seriously and use the standing box.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What kind of weather was inside you the most this week? What did it want? Who could we tell?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What was the biggest feeling you had this week? What did it need from you? Who else could help with it?"

Practice that actually builds it

Feelings get easier to look at the way anything gets easier: by being practiced when the stakes are low. The thermometer works best drawn on a calm Saturday. The help card works best written before it's needed. Here are the repeatable practices for the weeks ahead, and one deeper card for a day when someone has died. Each name carries its tracks.

Cool-down corner — Ages 5–10 (20 minutes · a corner, a cushion, a few quiet things · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: The corner is not a punishment.

Make a calm place together, and let the child choose what goes in it: a soft blanket, a drawing pad, a smooth stone. Use it when the child asks, or when they say yes to your offer, never as a sentence. A child who goes there on their own is learning to look after themselves.

Good worry, stuck worry — Ages 5–10 and 11–14 (15 minutes · paper · no screen · Think It Through)

Good worry says, "Bring an umbrella." Stuck worry goes round and round and doesn't have an umbrella in it. Write a few worries on slips and sort them into two piles. Choose one from the good-worry pile and write one small step. The ancient Stoics had a name for the healthy kind, which translates as something like caution, and the sorting game teaches it without the word.[3] If a worry won't sort, it's not a failure of the game. It's a worry that wants a person.

Three good feelings — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (20 minutes · notebook · no screen · Think It Through)

The ancient Stoics named three good states: joy, careful caution, and wishing for things without clutching at them.[3] Look through your week and find one of each. A joy might be an ordinary one, such as a good laugh at the table. Caution is the careful look before a risk, like checking the weather before a hike. Wishing is wanting something good for someone without needing to control it. If you can find only two, that's a week, not a verdict.

The talk after a bad day — Ages 5–10, 11–14 and 15–18 (20 minutes · none · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Safety: Do not fix, rush, or give a lesson.

Say the sentence that the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests for opening a conversation about something heavy: "I'm wondering which part of this is the hardest for you." Then listen. If they won't talk, tell them you love them and try again later. Children often hide their feelings because they think sharing will make their parents feel worse, so it also helps to say, plainly, that nothing they tell you will make you feel worse.[10,11] Walk, drive or wash dishes side by side if sitting face to face is too much. Many a good talk happens when two people are looking at something else.

Remembering together — all four tracks (35 minutes · a box, photographs, paper · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Safety: Only when someone close has died; say “died” plainly; no lessons; let them cry.

When someone close has died, make a memory box together. Put in a few photographs, a ticket stub, a note, something that smells like them. Tell stories. Say what you miss. Let each person cry or not cry. Tell any child, in simple words, that the person died, say in a sentence what caused it, and say that nothing the child did, said or thought caused it.[11] Don’t say it’s a lesson, and don’t say it’s for the best. The pain is not a lesson. Come back to the box on birthdays, on the date, on holidays and at big milestones, because grief returns with them, and that’s ordinary.[10] Keep the routines of meals and bedtimes as steady as you can, and accept the casseroles and rides that friends offer, because it shows children that people help each other.[10] If the death was sudden or frightening, ask your pediatrician about grief counseling, and look at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network’s page on traumatic grief.[14]

A calm week might hold three small things: the weather at the start of the Hour, one pause card in the middle, and the evening three at bedtime. A heavy week might hold only the evening three, and nobody should feel bad about that.

If it isn’t clicking

“My child won’t talk.” That’s common. Say you love them, offer the weather game with no questions attached, and try again another day. Some children say the real thing at bedtime, or in the car, or when you’re doing something else.

“The practice seems to be making the worry worse.” Stop. Premeditation, the practice of thinking ahead, is meant to stay small and solvable. If a child or teen is thinking about frightening things more, put the cards down, go back to the weather and the help card, and talk to a doctor or counselor if worry keeps getting in the way of sleep, school or play.

“My teenager rolls their eyes.” Of course they do. Put the card on the fridge anyway. Offer the Talk box and let them decline it. A teen who knows the door is open will often walk through it later, usually on a day you’ve forgotten about.

“I’m the one who’s angry.” It happens to every parent. Say your number, take your minute, and come back. Then, if you raised your voice, say so and say you’re sorry. A child learns as much from a repair as from a calm day. If your own anger or sadness feels bigger than a minute can hold, you have a doctor too.

“I can’t feel anything.” Some people go flat when they’ve been through a hard time. If the flatness lasts, mention it to a doctor. It is not a character flaw, and it isn’t a reason to push a practice.

“Nothing is helping.” If weeks have passed and the heavy feeling hasn’t moved, that’s the signal in the standing box. The right door is a person.

Tools, including AI

No app, chatbot or website is a counselor. Don’t use one in place of a person for grief, anxiety or any thought of self-harm; a tool can’t tell whether a child is safe, and it can’t sit beside anyone.

Keep a child's grief, diagnosis, worries and family details out of every tool, and keep the notebooks on paper, in a drawer, away from any shared device. If someone is struggling, the tools are a doctor, a counselor, a trusted person and, in the US, 988. Chapter 8 has the rules for using AI to practice a discussion, which is a different and much safer job.

What "done enough" looks like

Done enough doesn't mean no hard days. It means that when a hard day comes, there's a name for the feeling, a next step for the worry, and a person to tell. You've read the standing box once, and you know where the help card is. If a loss has happened, nobody has been told to be strong, and nobody has been told it was a lesson.

- **Ages 5–10:** The child can name their weather, knows one thing on their thermometer that helps, and knows who to tell.
- **Ages 11–14:** The young person has a notebook that's theirs, a help card they helped write, and one way to answer a wrong without copying it.
- **Ages 15–18:** The teen can say what they'd say to a grieving friend, and they know that a friend in danger is never theirs to carry alone.
- **Adult:** You have an honest page about a hard feeling, one worry sorted by whether it has a next step, and a name on a card you can find at night.

Next comes the gentler work of thinking together, the habit of asking good questions out loud, in Chapter 8. That's Chapter 8.

Chapter 8 — Thinking Together: Running a Short Discussion



Why this matters

The middle step of the Philosophy Hour is called Think It Through, and it’s the step most families skip when they’re short on time. They read the line, nod, and move on to the practice. That’s understandable. It’s also a loss, because the thinking step is where an idea stops being a saying on an index card and turns into something a person has actually weighed.

The school this book is about was a place for talking before it was a set of books. Zeno taught at a painted porch in Athens, and people came to listen and to argue. Epictetus taught aloud, and his students wrote down what he said. When you sit at your own table and ask a good question and let everyone try an answer, you're doing something quite close to what the school did, and you don't need training to do it.

This chapter teaches a short discussion, 10 to 30 minutes, that a parent can run with one child or with three, and that an adult can run with a friend or alone on paper. You'll get a home shape with six moves, a handful of things to say when the talk stalls, a way to treat your own "I don't know" as a gift, and a plain account of what the research on this kind of teaching does and doesn't show. You'll get notes on reading levels, because the old translations are not written for children. And you'll get the book's one place for rules about AI, because tools can be a useful sparring partner for older learners and a poor teacher for anyone.

A short promise and a short warning. The promise is that a good discussion is its own reward. People listen better, say what they mean more clearly, and find out that a hard question isn't dangerous. The warning is that this chapter will not tell you philosophy raises test scores or builds character, because the evidence doesn't say that, and it's no part of the reason to do it. We do it because a family that thinks together is a pleasant thing to be part of.

You don't need to be the expert in the room. You need to be the person who asks the next question, listens to the answer, and now and then says, "I'm not sure. Let's keep thinking."

Understand it yourself

What a short discussion is

A discussion in this book is a small, structured conversation about a question that has more than one reasonable answer. It's not a quiz, and it's not a lecture with pauses. Nobody is trying to arrive at the answer the parent already holds. The Stoics' own sayings aren't the answer key either; they're a starting point, and a person can disagree with Epictetus and still be taking him seriously.

The method has a long ancestry. In the classroom movement called Philosophy for Children, a group looks at a short stimulus, raises questions, chooses one, and talks it over while an adult keeps the group thinking without telling it what to think. The groups that train teachers in this way include Thoughtful (formerly SAPERE), a charity in the United Kingdom.[1] This book doesn't claim to teach their method or any official sequence of steps; what follows is a plain home version, in our own words, that you can run at a kitchen table. If it interests you, Thoughtful and similar groups can teach it properly.

The home shape: six moves

1. **A stimulus.** Something short to look at together: one line read aloud, a very short story, a picture, or a small case about a real choice. Three or four sentences is plenty.
2. **One question each.** Everyone says or writes one "I wonder…" question. Younger children can draw theirs. Nobody's question is silly.

3. **Choose one.** The group picks a question to talk about. A vote, a draw from a jar or a parent's decision all work.
4. **A rule of talk.** One voice at a time. Add a "because" to what you say. Say "I changed my mind" out loud when you do, and treat it as a good thing to say.
5. **A quiet minute.** Before anyone answers, everyone thinks silently for 60 seconds. This one move improves most discussions.
6. **One thing each.** To close, each person says one thing they're taking away. It can be a view, a doubt or a new question.

That's the whole shape. On an ordinary day it takes about 10 minutes for the youngest and about 20 for older learners, and on a family discussion night it can run an hour.

Choosing a good stimulus

A good stimulus is short, has one idea in it, and doesn't have an answer the parent already holds. It comes from the learner's world as often as from a book: a puzzle from the playground, a rule at school, a scene from a story you've read together. It isn't too heavy. If a stimulus makes a child anxious, it's the wrong stimulus for today, and you can put it back on the shelf. For the Stoic material in this book, the best stimuli are the questions that the school itself argued about: what's up to us and what isn't, whether a feeling is a judgment, what we owe the people beside us. Those make good Thursday questions for any age, with the wording adjusted.

The parent as co-thinker

In this method, the grown-up sits beside the learner and not above. You don't hold the answer. You hold the questions. Five of them will carry most conversations:

- "What makes you say that?"
- "What would someone who disagrees say?"
- "Is that always true, or only sometimes?"
- "What would change your mind?"
- "I'm not sure. Let's keep thinking."

The last one deserves a practice of its own. A parent who can say "I don't know" without embarrassment gives a child permission to say it too, and a child who can say it is a child who can learn. Once in a while, show your own change of mind: "I thought one thing, and then you said something, and now I think a bit differently." It costs nothing, and it's the best teaching you'll do all week.

What the research says, in plain words

Two big studies of this kind of teaching were run by the Education Endowment Foundation in England, and they point in different directions. In the first, with pupils in Years 4 and 5 (ages 8 to 10), children who did philosophy sessions made about two months' additional progress in reading and maths, and teachers and pupils said they were more confident speaking and better at listening.[2] A second, much larger trial, later, found no evidence that the sessions changed reading for

pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, or reading or maths for pupils overall, and no significant improvement on a two-question pupil survey of social and communication skills. Its security rating was the highest the foundation gives, 5 out of 5. Teachers were still positive about the sessions. The trial found no harm, and the foundation said that schools who want the approach for reasons other than test results should not be discouraged.[3]

So what do we do with that? We're honest about it. Talking things through with children is pleasant, doesn't hurt, and teachers like the listening it brings. It isn't a way to raise scores or to build character, and nothing in this book says it is. Both trials were in classrooms with a trained teacher, and a family at home is a different thing, so we make no claim for either outcome. We do it because good talk is a good thing to have at your table.

Reading levels and quotes

The older English translations the book draws on, Carter's *Enchiridion*, Long's *Discourses* and *Meditations*, and Gummere's Seneca, are from the 18th to the early 20th century, and they aren't written at a child's reading level. That's an editorial rule rather than a measured fact: for ages 5–14 this book uses its own plain paraphrases, always labeled "in my words," and never puts them in quotation marks as if the ancient teacher had said them. For ages 15–18 and adults, it quotes the translator, short and verbatim, with the edition named.

A line read three ways: a worked example

Here is the card called "one line, three readings" in action, using the first sentence of Epictetus's *Enchiridion*, the line Chapter 2 is built on and quotes in full, in Elizabeth Carter's translation.[4]

First reading, for the words. Read it aloud slowly. Which words stand out? "Some." "Others not." Notice that the line doesn't say *nothing* is in our control, or that *everything* is.

Second reading, for the meaning. In your own words, what's the line saying? Perhaps: "There's a split between things I can steer and things I can't."

Third reading, for what you'd change. Would you change a word? A teenager might say, " 'Control' feels too strong. I don't control my grades. I influence them." That's a real objection, and a good one, and it takes you straight back to Chapter 2's "mine, partly mine, not mine." Nobody has to agree. The line has done its job when it makes someone think.

Cases for teens: the Ethics Bowl idea

Ethics Bowl is a team discussion format built around case studies, and it has a hub for teachers and students.[5] This book borrows only the flavor: a short, concrete case about a real choice, two or more sides worth taking, and adds one rule of its own: you must be able to state the other side's best point. Eligibility and formats are best learned from the organizers. You don't need a team to try the habit at home.

How to try it this week

Take one stimulus for the whole household, and let the tracks ride in the same circle. An 8-year-old and a 14-year-old can share Think It Through if the 8-year-old gets the first turn and the 14-year-old gets the hard follow-up. Read each person's subsection as a menu, not a list to finish.

Ages 5–10

To the grown-up beside the child: Make talk feel like a game, and go slowly. Children this age often need a quiet minute, a drawing or a pause before an answer arrives, so give it to them.

The "I wonder" jar (10 minutes · a jar, slips of paper · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Put a jar and some slips of paper where everyone can reach them. Whenever someone wonders something, write it on a slip, or have the child draw it. "I wonder why we cry when we're happy." "I wonder if animals have rules." Draw one slip at the start of the Hour. The jar teaches children that a question is a treasure and not a nuisance. A kitchen table with a jar of "I wonder" slips is about the most philosophical object a house can contain.

Because chain (10 minutes · none · no screen · Think It Through)

Say a view, then add "because." The next person adds a different because, or an example that doesn't fit. Start with something with no stakes: "The best day of the week is Saturday, because…" The child learns that a view has a reason under it, and that reasons can be compared. If the chain gets silly, enjoy it; silly is how children learn to hold ideas loosely.

Circle of five (30 minutes · a stimulus: a short line, a story, a picture · no screen · Think It Through)

Share the stimulus. Each person asks one "I wonder." Choose one and talk about it, one voice at a time. End with a quiet minute and one takeaway each. For the youngest, five minutes of talk is plenty; the rest can be drawing. *Dolores, a mother of two, read her daughters a short story about a girl whose kite blew away in a gust. Her younger one, age 6, asked, "Was the wind the girl's fault?" Her older one said, "No, but she could have held on tighter." "Could she?" said the six-year-old. That was the whole discussion, and it took nine minutes. This is an illustration.*

In my words, for the child: A long time ago, some teachers liked to sit and talk about big questions, and anyone could ask one. You're asking one now.

A few things make the circle easier with small children. Keep the stimulus tiny: a picture of a bridge with one person on it, or one sentence such as "A boy found a wallet on the sidewalk." Make the quiet minute 30 seconds, and let a drawing count as an answer. A smooth stone passed hand to hand can mark whose turn it is to speak, and it makes "one voice at a time" feel like a game and not a rule. If a child says something heavy in the middle of the talk, such as a sad memory or a fear, stop the game, listen, and thank them. The discussion can wait; the child can't. Chapter 7 has the plain words to use.

Listen for: A child who gives a reason, even a funny one, who waits while someone else talks, and who asks a question you hadn't thought of.

Ages 11–14

To the grown-up beside the young person: Treat this age as the start of real argument. Ask for their view first, thank them for disagreeing, and show your own willingness to change your mind. If they'd rather write than talk, let them.

Both sides (30 minutes · a question both sides can answer · no screen · Think It Through)

Pick a question that two reasonable people could answer differently: "Is it ever fair to tell a friend a hard truth they didn't ask for?" Argue for one answer for five minutes, then the other. Then say what was strongest on each side. Don't pick sides by which one you believe. The skill is hearing the best version of an answer you'd reject. A good Both Sides ends with someone saying, "I hadn't thought of that."

Disagree kindly (20 minutes · sentence strips · no screen · Think It Through)

Write a few starters on strips of paper: "I see it differently because…" "What would change your mind?" "I agree with the first part, but…" Practice them in a short talk. The point is not politeness for its own sake; it's that a clear disagreement is easier to hear when it doesn't come as an attack. Put the strips on the table for a week and see which ones get used.

Here is how a Both Sides round sounds when it goes well, offered as an illustration. The question is whether it's fair to tell a friend a hard truth they didn't ask for. The first speaker says, "Yes, because if they find out later they'll wonder why nobody said anything." The second says, "I'd say no, because they might not be ready, and the truth isn't always yours to hand out." Then they swap sides. The swap is the lesson: each of them has to find a better reason than the one they already had, and often the second half of the round is the more thoughtful one.

Who changed my mind? (10 minutes · none · no screen · Look Back)

At the end, each person names one thing someone else said that changed or sharpened their view. It can be small. The question trains a habit that adults often lose: crediting other people for our ideas.

Stimulus ideas for this age: a short dilemma with no villain ("A teammate is struggling and you're ahead. Do you slow down?"), a picture, or a saying in your own words. One that works well comes from Epictetus, a teacher who had once been a slave: *in my words,* what upsets us is often not what happened but what we tell ourselves about it. Ask: "Is that ever true? Is it ever *not* true?" *Kwame, 12, said it was true about a bad grade and not true about a broken arm. His sister, 15, said a broken arm still gives you a story to tell yourself, and the two of them argued happily until supper. This is an illustration.* Neither won, and that was a fine result.

In my words: The old teachers of this school thought that a good life includes thinking well with other people. You're practicing that.

Listen for: A young person who can state the other side fairly, who uses "because," and who names, at least once, something they learned from someone who disagreed.

Ages 15–18

To the grown-up beside the teen, and to the teen: You're ready for real cases and real texts. Argue honestly, and let yourself lose an argument now and then. It's one of the quickest ways to learn.

Case of the week (40 minutes · a short case · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Read a short case about a real choice, two paragraphs at most. Each person gives a view, hears the other, and then changes it or keeps it for a stated reason. Here's an example of the kind of case that works, offered as an illustration. A friend asks you to say you were together on a night you weren't, so their parents won't find out where they were. Nothing dangerous happened. Is there a version of loyalty that includes saying no? Take ten minutes to each argue the case for helping, then ten to argue against. Then ask: what does *justice*, one of the four virtues you met in Chapter 4, have to say, and what does *courage*? *Ingrid, 16, found she'd argued for the opposite of what she believed, and said the "against" speech was better. This is an illustration.*

A second case, for a day when you want something lighter: "A club you belong to has a rule that seems unfair to a new member, but it's always been the rule. Do you speak up, and when?" Pair it with the quiet minute and let each person write two sentences before anyone talks. Writing first protects the quieter people from the louder ones, and it gives every voice a chance to arrive. After the talk, jot one line in the discussion log you'll meet in Chapter 9: the question, one view that surfaced, one thing that changed or stayed.

The same card, taller: Both sides. Take the Ages 11–14 card and add one rule: before you answer, restate the previous speaker's point so well that they'd say, "Yes, that's it." It's a hard rule, and it's the heart of the habit.

Ask a tool to argue back (25 minutes · a device you control · screen · Think It Through)

Safety: Read the vendor's current terms; keep any child's grief and private details out; check every quote against the text.

Write your own view first, on paper. Then ask a tool to argue the other side. If it gives you a quote, check it against the Carter, Long or Gummere page before using it. The tool is a sparring partner, never the proof. If you're a teenager, a parent decides whether and how you use any tool, and this chapter's sixth section has the rules.

A short note on tools for this age, since many teens will be tempted. *Ingrid (the same illustration) wrote her own view first: that Epictetus's idea that the body is outside our control was too harsh for anyone who was ill. She then asked a tool to argue the other side. It gave her a good argument and also a line it said was from Marcus, which she couldn't find in Long's Meditations. She wrote "not found" in the margin and kept the argument, not the quote.* That's the whole discipline, in one margin note.

Listen for: A teen who can state the other side's best point, who has changed their mind at least once on a good reason, and who treats a tool's answer as a draft to check, not an answer to trust.

Adult learner (and the parent beside you)

To you: You may be the only adult at the table, or you may be reading alone. Either way, practice the one skill the whole chapter depends on: saying, honestly, "I'm not sure. Let's keep thinking."

"I don't know" (5 minutes · none · no screen · Think It Through)

Practice saying "I'm not sure. Let's keep thinking," then try it once this week with your child or a friend. It's harder than it sounds, because most of us were taught that an adult's job is to know. *Bram, a father of three, noticed that he'd said "because I said so" four times in a day, and tried "I'm not sure" at dinner instead. His son, 12, stared at him. "Really?" Then the boy started talking. This is an illustration.* Notice what the words give back.

The same card, taller: Disagree kindly and Who changed my mind? Choose one conversation this week where you disagree with someone you respect, such as a coworker, a relative or a friend. Use one starter from the strips ("What would change your mind?") and, afterward, write one line: what did they say that sharpened your view? You're modeling the habit for anyone watching.

The same card, taller: Both sides. Take a question you've already decided, perhaps a political or family one, and argue the other side on paper for five minutes. You aren't changing your mind. You're finding out whether you can describe the opposing view well enough that the person who holds it would agree. *Winifred tried it on a question about her town's school board and wrote, "I couldn't make their case without my own sneer in it. That was the finding." This is an illustration.*

The same card, taller: Ask a tool to argue back. With your own view written down first, ask a tool to argue the other side, then check every quote it hands you. See the sixth section for the rules, and keep private details out.

For an adult reader of Epictetus, a good stimulus is a passage from the *Discourses* in Long's translation. Chapter 2 quotes one in full, the passage in *Discourses* 1.1 about the rational faculty, the one thing in us that examines itself.[6] Go back to it as a stimulus, and read it three ways. Ask whether the faculty that does the examining can be trusted to examine itself. That's a question you can enjoy for an evening.

Listen for: A fair statement of the other side, a changed mind or a sharpened one, and at least one "I'm not sure" that went well.

Talk box

"*What question did we leave open — and what did someone else say that changed how I saw it?*"

- **Because:** What was the best "because" you heard this week?
- **Changed:** Where did you change your mind, even a little?
- **Strongest:** What would someone who disagrees say, and what's the strongest version of it?
- **Not sure:** What do you still not know?
- **Next:** What question should go in the jar for next time?

What to do with the answer: Write the open question on a slip and put it in the jar; it can be Thursday's stimulus. Don't close it early.

Ages 5–10, in my words: "What was the best question anybody asked this week? Did anyone say something that made you think, 'Oh!'?"

Ages 11–14, in my words: "What did we leave unfinished, and who said something that made you see it differently?"

Practice that actually builds it

A discussion habit grows the way a garden does, slowly and a little each week. Two short talks and one longer family night is a good rhythm for a household with children. For an adult practicing alone, two paper discussions a week is plenty. Here are the repeatable practices and the deeper card, with each one's tracks in the name line.

The quiet minute — all four tracks (3 minutes · a timer · no screen · Think It Through)

Before the group answers, everyone thinks silently for one minute. That's the whole card, and it's worth more than it looks. People who'd have answered first have to think a second time. People who need more time get it. And the question gets a moment of respect. For the youngest, make it 30 seconds and let them draw. Run this card every time, for every track, and you'll hear the difference within a week.

One line, three readings — all four tracks (10 minutes · one printed line · no screen · Read a Little)

Read a line aloud slowly three times: once for the words, once for the meaning, once for what you'd change. The worked example earlier in this chapter shows how. Younger children hear a paraphrase in your voice, labeled "in my words," and learn the same three moves. For ages 15 and up and adults, print the line from the translator's page and keep the edition's name beside it. Never trust a line from memory or from a poster; check it against the page.

Family discussion night — all four tracks (60 minutes · snacks, a stimulus, a timer · no screen · Think It Through)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Once a week, hold a full circle for everyone. Rotate who brings the question, so that a ten-year-old sometimes runs the evening. Keep it short for the youngest and let the older ones push. A workable shape is: five minutes to settle with snacks, a stimulus read aloud, one "I wonder" each, a vote, a first quiet minute, 20 minutes of talk, a second quiet minute, then one takeaway each. Let the youngest leave when they're done, and keep going with whoever wants to stay. Some families find it becomes the best hour of the week, and others need a month for it to feel natural. Both are fine.

To see how the pieces fit, picture a Thursday at *Dolores's* table, with her 6-year-old and her 9-year-old together. She reads a single sentence aloud: "Mira dropped the glass, and it broke." Each girl asks one "I wonder," and they pick the older one's: "I wonder if it matters that it was an accident." A quiet minute, 30 seconds, with crayons. The 6-year-old draws a glass. The 9-year-old says it matters because Mira didn't mean it. The 6-year-old says Mira should still help clean up. Dolores asks, "Is that always true, or only sometimes?" They talk for eight minutes. Each says one thing to take away, and Dolores writes one line in the log. The whole thing, with the jar, takes 15 minutes, and the dishes still got done. *This is an illustration.*

A shelf of starting points

Keep a list of stimuli somewhere you can find it. These are examples of the kind that work, written fresh for this book, and each is a starting point for the circle and not an answer key.

- **Ages 5–10:** a picture of a bridge with one person on it; "A girl's kite blew away. What was hers to do?"; "Is it okay to be happy when your friend is sad?"
- **Ages 11–14:** "Is it ever fair to tell a friend a hard truth they didn't ask for?"; "If everyone on the team gets the same praise, does it still mean something?"; one saying in your own words.
- **Ages 15–18:** a two-paragraph case about a real choice; a short passage from a primary text with the translator named; "Where does your duty to a friend end?"
- **Adult:** a passage from the *Discourses* or Seneca's letters; a question from your own week; a disagreement you've been avoiding.

On the younger tracks, keep every stimulus gentle: nothing about death, and nothing that asks a child to imagine losing someone they love.

If it isn't clicking

Nobody talks. Shrink the stimulus, extend the quiet minute, and let people write or draw first. Ask the youngest to go first. Silence is not failure; it's thinking.

One person talks over the rest. Bring out the stone, or "one voice at a time" on a card. Thank them for their ideas and say, "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet."

It turns into a lecture. Count your own sentences. If you've said more than the learner, ask a question and stop talking. The five parent questions are there for exactly this.

The talk gets heated. Say, "Let's take a quiet minute." Then try one of the "Disagree kindly" starters. If it's a real fight between people, set the question aside; the discussion was never the point.

A child asks about God, or about what happens after death. Those are your family's own questions, and this book doesn't answer them. Tell the child what your family believes, or say, "I'm not sure, and here's who we could ask." The school is a way of thinking, not a faith, and it never asks a child to give up their family's beliefs. If a child is frightened by a death, go to Chapter 7.

It keeps drifting. The stimulus may be too big. Try a smaller one, with one idea in it, and write the question on a card where everyone can see it.

A teenager says it's pointless. Take it seriously. Ask what would make it worth their time, then give them a real say in the stimulus, such as a case from their own world. A teen who picks the question usually shows up for it.

You notice you have a view, and you're pushing it. Everyone does. Say so out loud: "I notice I'm pulling you toward my answer. Tell me where I'm wrong." It's a better demonstration than any quiet one.

The old English is too hard. It's meant to be hard for the young. Paraphrase it for ages 5–14 and label it "in my words." For teens and adults, read it aloud twice, slowly, and let the second reading do the work.

Tools, including AI

This is the book's one place for the rules about AI. Other chapters point here.

Try first, ask after. Everyone, child or adult, writes or says their own answer before any tool is opened. A tool is a practice partner for a discussion: "argue the other side," "ask me a hard question." It's never the source of a quote, and it's never the proof that someone learned anything.

Check every quote. Tools make up and paraphrase quotations, and many popular "ancient quotes" on the internet are not in the books at all. Before anyone uses a line a tool gave them, they check it against the translator's page (Carter, Long or Gummere). If the line isn't on the page, it doesn't go in the notebook.

Keep private details out. No child's grief, diagnosis, family situation or school details go into any tool. Journals stay on paper, away from shared devices.

Read the current terms; a parent decides. This book names no age floor of its own for any tool, and it calls no product safe for children. Two companies' own rules are worth knowing, because they show what to look for. OpenAI's terms of use, effective 1 January 2026, say users must be at least 13 or the minimum age in their country, that anyone under 18 needs a parent's or guardian's permission, that users can opt out of having their content used for training, and that output may not be accurate and is not a substitute for professional advice.[7] Google's help pages for Gemini say that with Keep Activity off, chats are kept for 72 hours, that chats reviewed by human reviewers are kept for up to three years and are not deleted when you delete your activity, and that personal and school accounts require users to be 13 or the local minimum, while work accounts require 18.[8,9] Rules like these change, so read the current page before you decide.

Types of tools, by job. A chat assistant can argue the other side. A reading aid that speaks a text aloud can help a learner who finds old English hard, though it's no substitute for reading it once yourself. A library catalog or a printed translation never invents a quote. Use the simplest tool that does the job.

Never use AI as a counselor. Not for grief, worry or any thought of self-harm. See Chapter 7 for people, and 988 in the US.

What "done enough" looks like

Done enough is a household that has had a few good talks. There's a jar with questions in it, a rule of talk the youngest can say, and a quiet minute that has become a habit. A parent has said "I'm not sure" out loud and survived it. Any tool use has started with the learner's own answer.

- **Ages 5–10:** The child asks a question, gives a "because," and waits for a turn.
- **Ages 11–14:** The young person can state the other side fairly and name one thing someone said that changed their view.
- **Ages 15–18:** The teen has held a view for a stated reason, changed one, and checked any tool-supplied quote against the text.
- **Adult:** You've said "I'm not sure. Let's keep thinking" to someone, argued the other side on paper, and kept a short log of what you learned.

Next comes the keeping of honest records, in Chapter 9. That's Chapter 9.

Chapter 9 — Records and Reflection



Keeping an honest record

Most families keep some kind of record of what their children learn. Some do it because a state or a school asks for it. Some do it because a grandparent wants to see. And some do it because, on a gray February day, it's cheering to open a folder and find out that you did in fact read a good deal this fall. All of those are good reasons, and this chapter serves all of them.

The idea is simple. A record is a few honest facts, kept as you go, that you can show to anyone

who asks. It isn't a performance. It doesn't inflate a quiet month into a busy one, and it doesn't claim a certificate that doesn't exist. A record that's modest and true is worth more than a glossy one, because anyone who reads it, whether a school, a college or the learner at 30, can trust every line.

It helps to decide who the record is for. There are three possible readers. The first is the family: a record for the pleasure of looking back. The second is the learner, who may in a few years want to know what they actually did. The third is someone outside, such as a co-op, a state office or a college. Keep the record for the first two and it will almost always satisfy the third. Keep it only for the third, and it tends to become a chore that nobody enjoys.

You need only three things for the whole book: a **reading list with hours**, a **discussion log**, and **a few dated writings**. Everything else in this chapter is a way to keep those three cheaply and well.

Reading list and hours — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (10 minutes · a folder · no screen · Look Back)

Keep a dated list of what you read and how long each Hour lasted. One line is plenty: "Oct. 6 — Chapter 2, the Hour, 40 minutes." That's all a reading list needs. If you want an easy total for a term, use plain arithmetic: a 40-minute Hour, twice a week, for 18 weeks is $40 \times 2 \times 18 = 1{,}440$ minutes, which is 24 hours. Show the arithmetic if anyone asks. If a week was skipped, the list says so, and that's fine.

Practice strip — all four tracks (3 minutes · a calendar · no screen · Look Back)

A strip of calendar squares works for every age. One line a day: the date, the minutes, and what you did. Don't write more. A child can stick on a star or color a square. A teenager can use a pencil tick. An adult can write "evening three, 5 min." The strip is not a streak to defend. If a week has a gap, you leave it blank and carry on, because a blank square is a truthful square.

For the youngest, the strip belongs to the child, with a grown-up's help: "Today we named the weather." For the grown-up, the strip is also how you notice, around week three, that the Hour has become a habit.

Keeping the record, track by track

Ages 5–10. The grown-up keeps the record, and the child makes it theirs. A drawing of the weather card, a photograph of the "I wonder" jar, a line you wrote down in the child's own words: these are the record. Read it back once a month, at a snack. A small child doesn't need to know it's a record. They need to hear that what they said was worth writing down.

Ages 11–14. The learner starts to hold the pen. Let them keep the practice strip and write their own discussion-log lines, with you checking in once a week. This is the age at which a record can start to feel like surveillance, so keep it light and keep the journal private (see below). If the strip becomes a source of nagging, put it away for a month. A record that damages the practice defeats its purpose.

Ages 15–18. The learner keeps their own records, and you look only when asked. A teen who is applying anywhere will want these in order, and a short, honest folder is a good habit to have

learned.

Adult learner. Keep whatever helps and nothing else. An adult doesn't need the strip or the log; some like a single line at the end of each Hour. If you're the parent beside the learner, keep your own line too. It helps you see what you did and not only what you meant to do.

What a record can and can't show

A record shows that the Hour happened, how often, and what was said and written. It can't show that anyone became wiser or calmer, and this book doesn't promise that. Where there's research on teaching philosophy to children, it's from classrooms with trained teachers, and it's mixed (Chapter 8 gives the details). Your folder is evidence of effort and of attention, and that's what it should claim.

It also shouldn't record everything. Don't write down a child's bad day as if it were a mark against them. Don't photograph a tearful moment for the portfolio. If a child has been through something hard, as Chapter 7 describes, leave it out of the record entirely unless they say otherwise. And keep photographs and scans of a child's work in your family's own storage, not in a chat window; Chapter 8 explains why.

The discussion log

Discussion log — all four tracks (15 minutes · a notebook · no screen · Look Back)

After each talk, write one line: the question, one view that came up, and one thing that changed or stayed the same. That's the whole log. A line takes a minute; the notebook can sit next to the jar of "I wonder" slips from Chapter 8.

Lorenzo, a father of two, wrote this under the date: "Q: Is it kind to tell a friend a hard truth? A: Jun said yes, if you say it gently and soon. I said it depends on the friend. Jun's 'gently and soon' changed my mind a little." It took him a minute. In three months he had a notebook of two dozen conversations he'd otherwise have forgotten. This is an illustration.

Three habits make the log more useful.

- **Write what changed.** The most valuable line in any entry is the one that says what someone thought differently by the end, even slightly. It's evidence that the talk did something.
- **Let the child dictate.** For ages 5–10, a parent writes the line, using the child's words as exactly as possible. Children love to hear their own sentences read back, and it teaches them that what they say is worth keeping.
- **Keep it separate from the private notebook.** The log is a family record of talks. A learner's private journal, described next, is theirs alone.

Journals are private

Journals are private — all four tracks (5 minutes · a drawer or box · no screen · Settle the Mind)

Agree, once, that notebooks are private. A parent reads a child's journal only if the child invites it. Store journals somewhere away from any shared device, such as in a drawer, a box or a bag, so that nobody stumbles on one by accident. Say it aloud at the start: "This is yours. I won't read it unless you ask me to."

There's one exception, and it's the one from Chapter 7: if a child tells you they want to hurt themselves or to die, safety comes first, and you stay close and bring in help. Other than that, the notebook is the learner's, and a learner who knows it's safe will write something true.

The privacy rule also protects the portfolio. A learner can choose to put a journal page in the portfolio, and nobody else decides which. Nothing from a private notebook goes into a record, a tool or an application unless its writer chooses it, and a writer is allowed to change their mind.

A transcript line

For a student in the ninth grade or above, a family may want something to put on a transcript, a plain list of courses with a name and a year. If you do, here's an honest line that many families find workable: **Philosophy: Stoic Ethics (elective)**, with the reading list and a few writing samples attached.

An honest transcript line — Ages 15–18 and adult learner (30 minutes · a transcript template · no screen · Look Back)

Write the line in the same style as your other electives. Attach the reading list with hours and two or three dated writings. If you give a credit figure, it's your call within your state's rules and your receiving school's. This book doesn't set one, and it doesn't claim any outside body has approved the course. Don't name an AP or CLEP credit for it, for reasons that follow. Don't give a grade you wouldn't be comfortable explaining. If a college or a state agency asks how you arrived at the line, you'll have the folder to show.

Two cautions. First, requirements for home education differ from one state to the next, and this book can't tell you yours, so ask your state's education agency or a home-education association you trust. Second, the line describes your family's course. It's not a credential, and the book is not a credentialed course.

For an adult learner, a transcript line is optional, and you may prefer to keep the folder for yourself, as a record of a year well spent.

Tests and credit

What credit can and cannot be — Ages 15–18 and adult learner (30 minutes · a computer, a call to a college · no screen · Think It Through)

Families often ask whether this work can earn college credit by exam. Here are the facts, as of 27 October 2026.

- **AP.** The College Board's AP course list has 43 subjects, and none of them is philosophy.[1] AP Seminar and AP Research are on the list, but they aren't philosophy courses. There's no AP exam for this work.
- **CLEP.** The College Board's CLEP list has no philosophy exam. It does have a general Humanities exam, which tests general knowledge of literature, art, music and the other performing arts. That isn't a philosophy exam either.[2]
- **DSST.** DSST offers an Ethics in America exam. It carries a recommendation of 3 semester hours at the baccalaureate level, with a minimum score of 400. Its content is applied ethics: ethical traditions and analysis in various relationships, and a set of weighty current questions. It is not a Stoic course, and it's more suitable for a 15–18 learner or an adult than for a younger one.[3]

When you call, a few plain questions go a long way:

- Does the college grant credit for any of these exams, and for which course?
- What score does it require, and does the score expire?
- Does it accept credit from home-educated students on the same terms as anyone else?
- Is there a limit on how many credits can come from exams?

Write the answers down with the date and the name of the person you spoke to. Those answers can change, and a note of who said what will save you an argument later.

None of this tells you what a college will accept. Credit for any exam is each college's own policy, and the answer can differ from one school to the next. The way to find out is to ask the college: call the registrar or the testing office, and say exactly what you've done. Treat the exams as an example of how a college may grant credit for ethics, and don't treat them as something the Hour prepares for. If an adult learner wants college credit for its own sake, the same call to the registrar applies.

The honest summary is short. This book has no test, and nothing in it prepares anyone for one. If you have a reason to take an ethics exam, you may. If you don't, you've lost nothing.

The monthly look-back

Once a month, take an hour to look at what you've collected. It's the Hour's Look Back step at a larger scale, and it's the part of the record that does the most good for the learner.

Ages 5–10

There's no page here. Once a month, spread the month's drawings and "I wonder" slips on the table and look at them together. Ask two questions: "What's your favorite thing we did?" and "What would you like to do more of?" Write the answers on the back of a drawing and put it in the folder. That's the whole look-back. A child that age is reading their own month as a story, and the most useful thing you can do is listen to which part they tell first.

Ages 11–14

Monthly look-back page — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (40 minutes · journal pages, a pen · no screen · Look Back)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Once a month, reread your notes. Write three short things: what has stayed true, what has changed, and one thing you want to try next. It's fine to write only one line under each. For a young person, the grown-up's job is to be nearby and not to read it, unless invited. A snack helps.

Before-and-after pause — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (30 minutes · your first Chapter 3 thought-record page · no screen · Look Back)

Reread your first thought-record page from Chapter 3, the camera-and-story page. Write how you'd read it now. Many people are surprised at how much they've shifted, or at how little, and either answer is useful. *Beatrix, 15, reread a page from September in which she'd written, "She did it to embarrass me." In October she wrote beneath it, "Maybe. Or maybe she was nervous too." She wasn't sure. She wrote down that she wasn't sure. This is an illustration.*

Ages 15–18 and Adult

The monthly page is the same, and the habit behind it is old. Chapter 6 gave you the nightly version, and Seneca describes it in *On Anger*: the teacher Sextius would ask himself, in Stewart's translation, "What bad habit of yours have you cured to-day? what vice have you checked? in what respect are you better?" Seneca then adds, "how sweet is the sleep which follows this self-examination?"[4] The review is meant to be kind. It's an honest look, and it's supposed to help you sleep, not to hammer you. A monthly page is the same look from further back.

For your monthly page, borrow the spirit and soften the wording: *What did I do well? What did I let slide? What will I look at next month?* Write it, close the notebook, and put it away. *Samir, 41, kept a monthly page for six months. His entries were short. By the fourth month he noticed that nearly every "let slide" was the same: he'd stopped the morning card. He didn't scold himself; he put the card back on the mirror. This is an illustration.*

The monthly look-back is not therapy and does not cure anything. It's a way of keeping an eye on your own practice, so that you can adjust it.

Your portfolio

A portfolio is a small, honest collection of the best evidence of what a learner did. For a child, it can be a folder. For a teen, it might be a binder. For an adult, it can be a single sheet kept in a drawer. Its job is to be easy to show.

Three writings — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (45 minutes · paper · no screen · Look Back)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Over a term, collect three short writings: a reflection (what I noticed), an argument (what I think and why), and a letter (to someone I respect, or to myself in a year). Date each one. Keep copies. They don't have to be long; a page each is plenty. At the end of the term you have three samples that show three kinds of thinking.

One honest portfolio page — Ages 15–18 and adult learner (40 minutes · one sheet · no screen · Look Back)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Write one page: what you read, what you discussed and what you practiced, each with a dated example. Be specific. "Read Chapters 1 through 6 of the book and selections from the *Enchiridion* in Carter's translation" is better than "studied Stoicism." "Led four family discussions, including one on whether it's fair to tell a friend a hard truth" is better than "practiced thinking." Don't list certificates that don't exist. A page that says exactly what happened is more persuasive than any seal.

What goes in the portfolio is the learner's choice, for any age that can choose. The discussion log, the reading list and the three writings are the usual core. Private journal pages are in only if their writer says so.

For younger children, the portfolio is a keepsake. Drawings of the thermometer from Chapter 7, a photograph of the "I wonder" jar, the practice strip from a good month: put them in a folder and take it out once a year. Seeing how much they've done can be a quiet encouragement.

A term in one folder

Beatrix, 15, finished a fall term with a folder that held four things: a reading list of twelve dated lines, with a total of 21 hours worked out by arithmetic at the bottom; the discussion log, with fifteen entries she'd typed up herself; three writings (a reflection on the pause, an argument that anger can sometimes be useful, and a letter to her grandfather); and one portfolio page of about 150 words. It came to six sheets of paper. When a homeschool co-op asked what she'd done for philosophy, she handed over the page and said that the rest was behind it. Nobody asked for more. This is an illustration.

Her page read, in part: "I read Chapters 1 through 7 of the course book and the first chapter of the *Enchiridion* in Carter's translation. I led three family discussions. Between September and December I practiced a daily pause (strip attached) and wrote one argument that I later changed my mind about, which is also attached." It claims nothing that isn't in the folder.

If someone asks to see it

A grandparent, a co-op or a reviewer may ask what you've been doing. Offer the portfolio page first. If they want more, open the folder. If you're ever asked for something the record can't support, such as a grade for a course with no tests, say what you have: dated lists, a log and samples of the learner's own work. You don't have to defend the course or invent anything. Honest, specific and modest is a record anyone can read.

If the question comes from a state or school requirement, go to the source. Rules vary from one state to the next, so ask your state's education agency or a home-education association you trust what they require, and keep what they ask for. This book can't tell you.

You try this week

Pick two from this list, and leave the rest.

1. **Start the practice strip.** Pin a calendar where everyone can see it. Add one line a day for a week: date, minutes, what.
2. **Agree on privacy.** Say, out loud, that notebooks are private. Choose a place to keep them.
3. **Write one discussion-log line** after your next talk: the question, one view, one thing that changed or stayed.
4. **Teens and adults:** Write your honest transcript line, or one honest portfolio page, even if you never show it to anyone.
5. **Before the month ends:** set aside 40 minutes for the monthly look-back. Write what stayed true, what changed, and one thing to try next.

If you take only one, take the first. A strip of squares is the cheapest and kindest record there is.

Next, Chapter 10 gathers the resources you can use, free first. That's Chapter 10.

Chapter 10 — Resources



How to choose

You don’t need much to teach this book. You need a text to read from, a place to talk, a notebook, and someone to call if a hard thing comes up. Everything else in this chapter is optional.

A word on how this chapter is arranged. It’s arranged by **fit**, and not by rank. You won’t find a “best” list here, because the best resource is whichever one a particular family will actually use. A ten-year-old who loves being read to may be well served by an audiobook, while a teenager who

wants to argue may do better with a discussion group. The order is **free first**: the library, then public-domain texts, then free groups, and only then anything that costs money. For most families, the first three are enough.

The chapter also names types more than brands. Where it names a specific site, the reason is that the site carries something the book depends on: a translation, a safety line, a company's own terms. Every site named here was reachable on 27 October 2026, though for several we read only the opening page, and websites change. If a link has moved, a search for the title will find it.

What a shelf looks like, by track

Ages 5–10. The shelf is mostly picture books, a notebook, and the jar from Chapter 8. The text for the grown-up is the *Enchiridion*'s first page, read once by you, in your own words to the child. The child's "audio" can simply be a story read aloud at bedtime. The "person" is you.

Ages 11–14. Add one translation, in print if possible, so that the learner can underline. A teen of this age does well with short passages that you choose and read together, a line at a time, and with a notebook of their own. A library audiobook can carry a car ride.

Ages 15–18. The learner can hold the text themselves. The *Enchiridion* is short, and a determined sixteen-year-old can read it in a week. Add a second translation of the same passage, an encyclopedia entry and, if there is one nearby, a discussion group or an Ethics Bowl team. The "person" may be a teacher, a coach or an older relative, someone who isn't a parent.

Adult learner. Start with the *Enchiridion*, then a few of Seneca's letters, then the *Meditations*, and stay with each as long as it holds you. Add one audio, one encyclopedia entry, and one friend who'll talk it over. If you're the parent beside a learner, keep your own shelf apart from theirs, so that you each have something that is yours.

Shelf of five — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (40 minutes · paper · no screen · Look Back)

This is a deeper card. Use it for a standard-length Hour or a long weekend.

Read this chapter once, then choose five things, one of each kind: **one text** you'll read from, **one audio** you'll try, **one discussion group** (even if it's just your own family on Thursdays), **one reference** for when you're curious, and **one person** you can talk to about the harder questions. Write the five on a sheet. Drop the rest. A shelf of five that you use is better than a shelf of fifty that you don't.

Gwen, 52, had spent a winter bookmarking sites on Stoicism. In the spring she did the shelf of five. Her text was a library copy of the Enchiridion; her audio was one chapter of the Meditations; her group was a monthly lunch with a friend; her reference was an encyclopedia entry she'd already read twice; and her person was her sister. She deleted the bookmarks. She said afterward that having five things made it feel like a habit, not a project. This is an illustration.

Free first

The library

Library walk — all four tracks (30 minutes · a library card · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Take the learner to the library, and bring the question with you: "What do you have by or about the Stoics?" Ask the librarian four things. Which translations of Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and Seneca does the library hold? Does it have audiobooks of any of them? Is there a book discussion group, or a philosophy or ethics group that meets nearby? And if the library doesn't own what you want, can it borrow it from another library? Many libraries can, though we didn't check yours, so ask. Borrow before you buy.

For a young child, the walk is the Hour. Let them choose a picture book about a feeling, a choice, a fair fight or a brave thing, and bring it home for the "I wonder" jar from Chapter 8. You don't need a Stoic picture book. You need a story with a question inside it.

For a teen, ask the librarian for two different translations of the same passage and read them side by side. Seeing the same sentence in two sets of words is the quickest way to learn that a translation is a choice.

Public-domain texts, online

The Stoic works that this book quotes were written long ago and are in the public domain, so you can read them free. The translations named here are the ones the book's quotations come from. If you use another, the wording will differ, and a quotation you find in one translation may not be in another. For that reason, check that the page you're looking at names its translator.

A free first month

If you want a plan and don't want to spend anything, here's one that uses only what this chapter has named.

- **Week 1.** Make the help card, and take the library walk. Borrow one translation and one picture book.
- **Week 2.** Read the first page of the *Enchiridion* yourself, once, and try one chapter of audio with the page open. Decide whether audio fits your learner.
- **Week 3.** Hold one family discussion night from Chapter 8, using a line or a story from your borrowed books. Write one line in the discussion log from Chapter 9.
- **Week 4.** Do the shelf of five, and the monthly look-back. Drop everything that didn't earn a place.

Nothing in that month costs money, and nothing in it needs a screen except the audio. If a week goes sideways, skip it and pick up the next one. The plan is a suggestion and the Hour is yours.

Reading the old texts

Where to start. For an adult or a teen, the *Enchiridion* is the shortest way into Epictetus, and its first lines are the center of this book. After that, a few of Seneca's letters are easy company, and the *Meditations* is best taken a page at a time and not read straight through. For a child, you won't hand over any of these. You'll read them yourself and pass on what's useful in your own words, which is the method of the Ages 5–10 cards throughout the book.

Translations differ. The quotations in this book come from the translations named below, and each is a choice made by a translator. The same sentence of Epictetus can read quite differently in another translator's hands. When you find a line that matters to you, read it in a second translation too. If a quotation in a social-media post or a "famous quotes" site isn't in the translator's page, don't use it. Many popular lines attributed to Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus can't be found in the books at all, and checking is the only defense.

Print or screen. A print copy from the library costs nothing and is easier to underline. A screen copy is searchable, which helps when you're checking a quotation. Either is fine. For children, print has a clear advantage, because the page keeps still and a screen keeps offering something else.

Open texts

Epictetus. The *Enchiridion* in Elizabeth Carter's translation is on the MIT Internet Classics Archive, in a modernized text.[1] The *Discourses* in George Long's translation, starting with the first one on the things that are in our power, are on the same site.[2] Project Gutenberg also has a volume it describes as a selection from the *Discourses* with the *Encheiridion*, in Long's translation.[3]

Marcus Aurelius. *Meditations* in George Long's translation is on the MIT archive, where the text is unnumbered, so a reader finds a passage by book.[4] Standard Ebooks carries the same Long translation as a free ebook.[5] A caution: the free libraries hold several translations of the *Meditations*, and some are much older and harder to read. Look at the translator's name before you settle in.

Seneca. *Moral Letters to Lucilius* in Richard Gummere's translation is on Wikisource, one letter to a page, which makes it easy to read in short stretches.[6] *On Anger* in Stewart's translation is there too.[7] A good first letter for an adult or a teen is Letter 1 (on saving time), and a good second is Letter 13 (on groundless fears).

Zeno and the early school. The ancient accounts of the school's founder are in Diogenes Laertius, Book 7, in R. D. Hicks's translation, on the Perseus site.[8] It's a biographical collection, a mix of anecdote and report, and it's best read in small pieces by an adult or a teen who's curious.

Reference. Two free encyclopedias have entries worth knowing. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has entries on Stoicism, Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, written by scholars, and it's the better choice when you want to check a claim.[9,10,11,12] The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* has an entry on Stoicism by an author who is himself a Stoic practitioner, which is worth knowing as you read it, and an entry on Seneca.[13,14] Both are for older teens and adults, and

neither is bedtime reading. Wikipedia is not on this list. Use it for a first look, if you like, and then go to the entries above.

Try one chapter of audio — Ages 11–14, 15–18 and adult learner (10 minutes · earbuds or a speaker · screen · Read a Little)

Before you commit to a whole audiobook, listen to one chapter or one letter. Follow along with the page open. Listen for three things: Is the reader clear? Is the text the translation you meant? Does the learner stay with it? LibriVox is a free library of public-domain audiobooks, and Project Gutenberg is a free library of public-domain texts.[15,16] We haven't listened to any LibriVox recording, so we can't tell you which are good. Try one chapter, check what you hear against the written page, and keep it only if it serves.

Audio is a real help for many people: those who find old English hard, those who learn best by ear, and anyone who wants to listen in the car. It doesn't replace reading it once yourself.

Tobias, 14, found the Meditations "boring on paper" and did his first Hour in the car, listening to one book with his father. He disagreed with a line, which delighted both of them. His father then found the line on the page and they argued about it at dinner. The audio did its job. This is an illustration.

Groups and classes, by type

A group isn't required, but a thinking-together habit often grows faster beside others. Here are the types, with fit notes.

Your own household. A family discussion night (Chapter 8) is already a group. It's the best-fit first group for any child under 14.

A few families. Three to six families that meet every month or two, with a short text and one question, can make a wonderful circle. The parents take turns hosting. It's a good fit for homeschool co-ops and for neighbors. Keep it small enough that everyone speaks, and keep the group's rules the same as at home: no one has to share, and no one is mocked.

A library or community group. Ask the library, a community college's continuing-education office, a church or a civic center whether a philosophy, ethics or book discussion group meets nearby. This is the most likely place for an adult learner to find a live conversation.

An online community for adults. Modern Stoicism is an organization that runs Stoic Week and other courses and publishes a community site.[17] Check the site for what's offered now, because dates and terms change, and look at who runs it before you join. Its research page reports that people who finished the end-of-week survey (about a quarter of those who started, in the 2017 and 2018 weeks) described feeling better after a week. Those people chose to take part, and there was no comparison group, so the figures can't show that the week caused any change.[18] They're a reason for curiosity and not a promise. This is a resource for adults; the book doesn't point children or teenagers to online groups of strangers.

Programs for teaching thinking to children. Thoughtful, a charity formerly called SAPERE,

trains adults in a classroom method called Philosophy for Children and publishes resources and courses.[19] It's based in the UK, and we haven't checked what it offers to families elsewhere. Chapter 8 has the evidence for the method, which is mixed, and was gathered in classrooms with trained teachers.

Ethics Bowl. For teens, Ethics Bowl is a format in which teams discuss ethical cases. The hub site posts cases and study guides for the National High School Ethics Bowl.[20] Read a case before handing it over, because some cases touch heavy subjects. Whether a local team or a regional event is open to a home-educated student is something to ask the organizers; the hub is the place to start.

College classes. A local community college or university may offer an ethics or philosophy class. Dual enrollment for a high schooler depends on the college and on your state, so ask the college directly. Chapter 9 explains why a Stoic course won't earn credit by exam, and what to ask the registrar.

If you decide to spend money

You don't have to. The free resources above would cover the whole book several times over. But some families like a printed edition of a translation, a good notebook, or a paid course for the company it offers, and there's nothing wrong with any of those. A few questions will keep you from disappointment.

- **Who runs it, and what are they like?** Look for a named organization or person, and for a plain description of what happens in a session.
- **What does it promise?** A course that promises calm, confidence or a changed life is promising more than any evidence in this book supports. Chapter 8 and Chapter 9 explain what the research does and doesn't show. A course that says what you'll read, discuss and practice is more honest.
- **Can you try before you commit?** A free first session, a refund period or a sample chapter lets you decide with your own eyes.
- **Does it fit your learner's age?** Don't buy a program built for adults and hand it to a child. No age-matched booklet is promised by this book for any program, so ask the provider what age it's for.
- **What will you do with it next Thursday?** If you can't picture it in your own Hour, it's probably not the right purchase.

Before you spend a cent on a subscription, try the free version of the same job for two weeks.

Safety help

This section is a pointer. The full guidance, including when to get a person and what to say, is in Chapter 7, and this book is not therapy.

If you only do one thing from this chapter, do this one:

The help card — all four tracks (5 minutes · an index card · no screen · Try It on Real Life)

Take an index card. Write on it the name and number of **your family's doctor**, the name and number of **a counselor** you'd call if you needed one, and **988**. Put it where everyone in the house can see it, on the refrigerator or by the family computer, and tell every learner what it's for: "If something feels too big, this is who we call."

In the United States, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is reached by calling, texting or chatting 988. It's free, confidential and open at all hours, and the site says that you do not have to be suicidal to contact it.[21,22] Chapter 7 has the rest: Spanish, veterans and videophone options. If you think someone is in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.

988 is a United States service. If you live elsewhere, find your country's crisis line and your local emergency number now, before you need them, and write them on the card. This book doesn't list numbers for countries outside the US, because it can't verify them for you, and a wrong number is worse than none.

Some families like a short, trusted reading list for hard subjects. The American Academy of Pediatrics' HealthyChildren pages on grief and on how children understand death are the ones the book relied on.[23,24] The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a page on traumatic grief and separation, and the National Institute of Mental Health has a page for families on finding help for child and adolescent mental health.[25,26] The last two are front doors, and we read their opening pages only. They aren't a substitute for a doctor or a counselor who knows your child.

AI tools, by type

Chapter 8 holds this book's rules about AI tools: try first and ask after, check every quote, keep private details out, read the current terms, and never use a tool as a counselor. They aren't repeated here. This section is only about what kinds of tool exist and which job each does.

- **A chat assistant** can play the other side of an argument, ask a hard question or suggest a case to think about. It can't tell you what a text says. Treat what it says about a quotation as a guess until you've found the line on the translator's page.
- **A text-to-speech reader** can read a text aloud to a learner who finds the old English hard. It is an aid to reading the text once yourself, not a substitute for it.
- **A search engine with summaries** is quick for background, but it can be wrong, so don't trust it for a quote or a date. The encyclopedias above are the safer first stop.
- **A note or flashcard maker** can turn the learner's own notes into practice cards. The notes should be the learner's own; those are the ones that are worth keeping.
- **A library catalog or a printed translation** never invents a quotation. It's still the best tool for the job.

No tool in this book is called safe for children, and the book names no minimum age of its own. A parent reads the current terms and decides. Keep at least one Hour a week that is paper and talk only.

You try this week

Choose one or two of these, and leave the rest.

1. **Do the library walk.** Ask the four questions, borrow one book, and write down what you were told.
2. **Try one chapter of audio**, with the page open. Decide in ten minutes whether to keep it.
3. **Make the help card.** Write the doctor, a counselor and 988 (or your country's line, if you live outside the US). Put it where everyone can see it, and tell each person what it's for.
4. **Make your shelf of five.** One text, one audio, one group, one reference and one person. Then drop everything else.

If you only have time for one, make the help card. It takes five minutes, and you'll be glad it's there on the one day you need it.

That's the end of the book. Come back to the Hour, and have a good one.

A Note on Sources

Every web page, study and old text named in the chapters appears in the Notes at the back, chapter by chapter, and again in the Bibliography. Note numbers start again at 1 in each chapter, so you can read one chapter and its notes without the rest. Each source was read on 27 October 2026. Web pages change; the Bibliography records them as they stood that day.

The old texts quoted here come from public-domain English translations, named in the Notes: Elizabeth Carter and George Long for Epictetus, George Long for Marcus Aurelius, Richard Mott Gummere for Seneca's letters, Aubrey Stewart for Seneca's *On Anger*, and R. D. Hicks for Diogenes Laertius. The quotations were checked word for word against those pages. Marcus Aurelius is cited by book only. The research on modern Stoic practice is young and small; read the sentences about it as "some early studies suggest," not as proof.

Here is what could not be confirmed, and what the book does about it:

- **Dates.** The sources differ on when Zeno and Seneca were born and died, so the book says "around" and keeps to what the encyclopedias and Hicks report.
- **Stories of Zeno.** They come from Diogenes Laertius, who wrote long after Zeno's day, so the book calls them reports.
- **Hierocles.** The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes his "circle of expanding affection." The particular rings used in Chapter 5 are this book's own version, not a quotation.
- **Ethics Bowl.** The book points you to EthicsBowl.org. Eligibility and cost for any one school or home program were not confirmed.
- **LibriVox.** The recordings are made by volunteers and were not listened to for this book. Quality varies.
- **AI tools.** OpenAI's terms and Google's Gemini pages were read on 27 October 2026. Google's pages are not consistent about how age rules apply, so the book prints no age rule for family accounts. Check the current terms before a child uses any AI tool.
- **Credit exams.** AP, CLEP and DSST pages were read on that date; their offerings change.
- **Bullying help.** StopBullying.gov could not be opened by the tools used for this book, so it is not cited. Chapter 5 points you to trusted adults and to Chapter 7.
- **Crisis help.** The book names one crisis line, 988, which is for the United States. It gives no numbers for other countries because none were verified; elsewhere, use your local emergency number.
- **Chapter 7.** The guidance on grief and hard feelings follows the pediatric, child-trauma and crisis-line pages cited there. No clinician has reviewed this book. Use it beside your doctor or counselor, never in place of one.

The people in the worked examples are illustrations, and each example says so. Nothing in this book is medical, legal or therapeutic advice.

Notes

Notes are numbered afresh in each chapter. Each is listed in the order it first appears in that chapter.

Welcome

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2. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Stoicism,” https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/ (accessed 27 October 2026).

If You Only Remember Five Things

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The Philosophy Hour

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2. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, “988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (home),” https://988lifeline.org/ (accessed 27 October 2026).

Chapter 1 — Meet the School: Five Voices and an Honest Word About “Stoic”

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Stoicism,” https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/ (accessed 27 October 2026).
2. Diogenes Laertius, “Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Book 7, Chapter 1 (Zeno),” trans. R. D. Hicks, Perseus Digital Library, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.0 (accessed 27 October 2026).
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7. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Marcus Aurelius,” https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marcus-aurelius/ (accessed 27 October 2026).
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9. Epictetus, “The Enchiridion,” trans. Elizabeth Carter, MIT Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html (accessed 27 October 2026).
10. Seneca, “Moral Letters to Lucilius, Letter 13: On groundless fears,” trans. Richard Mott Gummere, Wikisource, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral_letters_to_Lucilius/Letter_13 (accessed 27 October 2026).

Chapter 2 — What Is Yours, and What Isn’t

1. Epictetus, “The Enchiridion,” trans. Elizabeth Carter, MIT Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html (accessed 27 October 2026).
2. Epictetus, “The Discourses, Book 1, Chapter 1: Of the things which are in our power,” trans. George Long, MIT Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/discourses.1.one.html (accessed 27 October 2026).
3. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Stoicism,” https://iep.utm.edu/stoicism/ (accessed 27 October 2026).
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6. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Stoicism,” https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/stoicism/ (accessed 27 October 2026).

Chapter 3 — Between What Happens and What You Tell Yourself

1. Epictetus, “The Enchiridion,” trans. Elizabeth Carter, MIT Internet Classics Archive, https://classics.mit.edu/Epictetus/epicench.html (accessed 27 October 2026).
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5. Martha Nussbaum, “An Interview with Martha Nussbaum on Neo-Stoicism,” The History of Emotions Blog, Queen Mary University of London (2012), https://emotionsblog.history.qmul.ac.uk/2012/11 interview-with-martha-nussbaum-on-neo-stoicism/ (accessed 27 October 2026).
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Chapter 4 — One Good Thing: Virtue, Four Ways

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6. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Marcus Aurelius,” https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marcus-aurelius/ (accessed 27 October 2026).

Chapter 5 — The People Beside You

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Chapter 6 — Morning and Evening Practices

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Chapter 7 — Hard Feelings: Anger, Fear, Grief and the Rest

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