

Your Possible Home

Building Meaningful, Enduring Family Bonds in the Age of AI



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SEW: Becoming Understandable

Twenty-five years in, Mark and I still arrive at small relational crossroads most weeks, where we can either start a fight or figure out how to work with each other. The tool that has helped us more than almost anything else is SEW — Sensations, Emotions, Wants — a way of describing your own experience before making a claim about the other person's behavior, because blame hardens a conversation exactly where responsibility would soften it. This worksheet has three parts: translate a real grievance, build your pause plan, and design the rhythm that keeps you connected before distance builds. Do Part One alone first; Parts Two and Three are better together.

Part One — *The translation table.* Bring a real, current frustration — something alive enough to matter, not so raw you can't think. Write the blame version first, the one that's been rehearsing itself in your head, "you always," "you never," "why can't you just": _____

Now translate it:

Sensations — what's happening in your body, observable, no interpretations. Tight shoulders, pressure in the chest, restlessness, heaviness, fog: _____

Emotions — your internal weather, named plainly. Irritation, sadness, anxiety, disappointment, loneliness, overwhelm: _____

Wants — where the conversation turns forward. Not what they should stop doing — what would actually help. Reassurance? A quick plan so you can relax? An agreed boundary? Not circling this same conversation for three more days?: _____



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Assemble it into something you could say out loud with a steady voice: "_____ [sensation].
I'm _____ [emotion] because _____. What I want is _____."

Read your blame version and your SEW version side by side. The first one demands a defense. The second one is answerable. That's the whole difference, and it took us years to learn what this page teaches in twenty minutes.

The flip side, for when you're on the receiving end of someone else's storm — three questions that turn an argument into a conversation: *What's happening in your body right now? What are you feeling? What do you need?* Write them somewhere you'll find them mid-conflict, because you will not remember them from memory: _____

Part Two — *The pause plan.* When either person floods — raised voices, contempt, shutdown — continuing rarely helps, and a pause protects the relationship rather than abandoning it. Design yours now, while you're calm, together if possible:

Our signal that one of us needs to stop (a word, a phrase, a hand signal — ours has to be usable mid-argument without escalating it): _____

What the pause sounds like, in words that ask for a break without slamming a door — something like *"I want to stay connected, but I'm too overwhelmed to do this well right now. Can we come back in an hour?"* Write your version: _____

How long, and where each of us goes: _____



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What I do during the pause to release pressure rather than build my case — journal, walk, talk it through with AI before I'm ready to speak: _____

And the part trust is actually built on: how we make sure we come back when we said we would:

Part Three — *Choosing each other on purpose.* Repair matters, but so does the part of the relationship that has nothing to do with fixing anything. Don't wait until something is wrong to give it your attention.

Our weekly rhythm — what's realistic in this season, knowing that some weeks it's dinner out and some weeks it's the couch after the kids are down, and both count: _____

Our version of Sunday mornings — a recurring time to talk through the week before things calcify:

One thing we've stopped doing that we miss, and the smallest version of it we could restart this month:

Optional AI prompt: I'm preparing for a conversation with my spouse about [topic]. Here's my SEW translation: [paste it]. Check whether my "wants" are actually wants or accusations in disguise, tell me where I might still sound blaming despite the format, and help me anticipate how this might land if my spouse is already feeling criticized.

