A FREE WORKBOOK FOR GROWN-UPS

The Gede Parent Workbook

Your nervous system, your child's, and how the two meet

Most of what goes wrong between a grown-up and a child at six in the evening is not a discipline problem. It is two nervous systems, both out of room, trying to have a conversation neither of them can have yet.

This workbook is about that moment. What your body does under stress, what your child's body does, and what actually helps when they collide. It borrows from nervous-system science, from Internal Family Systems, and from body-based work — but it stays practical, because you are reading it between other things.

Work through it in order or open the part you need tonight. Write in it. The answers you type are kept on this device only, and the printed version has lines for a pen.

PLEASE READ

This is education for everyday family life, not therapy, diagnosis or treatment. If you or your child are living with trauma, ongoing fear, self-harm or anything that frightens you, please bring it to a doctor or a qualified therapist — this workbook sits beside that kind of help, never in place of it.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. Your nervous system in plain language · 2. Your own map · 3. Your child's map · 4. When you meet in activation · 5. When they freeze · 6. Parts, gently — IFS at home · 7. Support through touch · 8. Emotion by emotion

Plus: one page for the fridge, a repair page, and seven days of one small thing a day.

PART 1

Your nervous system in plain language

Three states, no jargon: revved up, shut down, and the settled middle.

Underneath every mood there is a body doing arithmetic it never tells you about: am I safe, is anyone with me, do I have enough room. It answers hundreds of times a day, faster than thought, and the answer shows up as a state rather than an opinion.

There are three worth knowing. Settled: breathing low and slow, face soft, curiosity available, able to hear another person. Activated: heart up, jaw tight, voice louder or faster, everything urgent — the body has decided something must be dealt with now. Shut down: heavy, far away, flat voice, nothing to say, sometimes a strange calm — the body has decided that nothing can be dealt with, so it powers down instead.

None of these is bad behaviour. Activation is protection with the volume up; freeze is protection with the volume off. Both are trying to keep somebody alive, and both come with a temporary loss of the things you most want in that moment: patience, words, perspective.

The practical consequence is simple and slightly annoying: you cannot reason with a state. You can only change the conditions the state is reading. Slower breath, less light, fewer words, more warmth, a bit of movement, one safe face. Teach that to your body first, because your child's nervous system is reading yours before it reads your sentences.

What each state looks like

	In you	In your child
Settled	Breath low, shoulders down, you can be interrupted without irritation	Plays, chats, negotiates, accepts a no without collapse
Activated	Jaw and hands tight, faster talking, urge to fix or to win the point	Loud, wriggly, defiant, silly at the wrong moment, hits or slams doors
Shut down	Flat, foggy, scrolling, snappy in a tired way, nothing left to give	Goes quiet, hides, shrugs, “I don't know”, sleepy, blank face

SIXTY SECONDS OF NOTICING

1. Sit down. Feet on the floor, hands anywhere comfortable.
2. Ask once: where am I on the three states right now?
3. Find the evidence in the body, not in the story — jaw, shoulders, belly, breath.
4. Name it silently: revved up, shut down, or settled.
5. Do nothing else. Naming is the whole exercise.

WRITE IT DOWN

When I picture a good evening at home, my body feels…

The last time I was properly activated, the first thing my body did was…

The last time I was shut down, the people around me probably saw…

THIS WEEK

Name your own state out loud once a day, in front of your child: “I'm a bit revved up, I'm going to breathe first.”

PART 2

Your own map

Where you go first under stress, and what brings you back.

Everyone has a default. Some people go up under pressure — faster, louder, tidying furiously, needing it sorted now. Others go down — quiet, foggy, suddenly very interested in a phone. Neither is a character flaw and neither is a choice; it is the strategy your body settled on a long time ago, usually for good reasons.

What makes the difference is not changing your default. It is knowing your early signals, the small ones that arrive before the shouting or the disappearing, while you still have choices. For most people there are two or three, and they are physical: a tightening across the chest, heat in the face, a particular tone that creeps into your voice, the urge to leave the room.

Then there is the return trip. Everybody has things that genuinely settle them and things that only look like they do. Ten minutes outside settles most people. Twenty minutes of news does not. It is worth being honest about the difference, on paper, once.

THE TWO-MINUTE RESET YOU WILL ACTUALLY DO

1. Pick one thing from your “brings me back” list that takes under two minutes and needs nothing you don't already own.
2. Decide where it happens — a doorway, the kitchen sink, the bottom stair.
3. Do it once today while you are calm, so the body learns the route.
4. Use it tomorrow at the first early signal, not at the shouting.

WRITE IT DOWN

Under stress I usually go (up / down / both, depending on…):

My earliest physical signal is…

Three things that reliably tip me over:

Three things that reliably bring me back:

The time of day this is hardest is… and what would help then is…

THIS WEEK

Put your reset somewhere you'll trip over it: a note on the kettle, a hand on the doorframe before you walk in.

PART 3

Your child's map

The same page, filled in for each child in your house.

Children broadcast state long before they can describe it, and the broadcast is easy to misread. Silliness at bedtime is usually activation, not disobedience. “I don't know” repeated four times is usually a shutdown, not stubbornness. A tantrum in the supermarket is often the fourth thing, not the first — the first three were small and nobody caught them.

So the useful work is spotting the run-up. Most children have a reliable sequence: a change in voice, a change in body, then the storm. If you can name the first two you can meet them there, and the third often never arrives.

Fill this in for one child at a time. Siblings rarely share a map, and the same child's map changes with age, sleep and school terms — expect to redo it twice a year.

Their run-up

Stage	What I see	What helps here
First signal		
Second signal		
Full state		

WATCH ONE DAY, WRITE NOTHING CLEVER

1. Pick one ordinary day.
2. Three times — morning, after school, bedtime — note one word for their state.
3. Note what happened in the twenty minutes before it, no interpretation.
4. At the end of the day look for the pattern. It is usually hunger, transition, noise or an unfinished thing.

WRITE IT DOWN

This page is about (child's name):

When they are settled, they…

When they are revved up, they…

When they are shut down, they…

Their reliable warning sign, the one I keep missing, is…

What has actually worked before, at least twice:

THIS WEEK

Tell them their map, kindly, when everyone is calm: “I've noticed you get wriggly before you get upset. Shall we make that our signal?”

PART 4

When you meet in activation

Two lit-up nervous systems in one small room.

The hardest moments are not when your child is dysregulated. They are when your child is dysregulated and so are you — and both bodies are now reading each other as the threat.

There is an order that works, and it is almost never the order we reach for. Regulate first: get your own body down one notch, out loud if you can. Connect second: get low, get near, fewer words, warm face. Talk third, and much later than feels natural — the lesson, the consequence, the conversation about the broken thing all land better tomorrow morning.

Talking first is the great parenting trap. Words go into a body that cannot process them, so you repeat yourself, the repetition reads as pressure, and the volume climbs on both sides. Lowering your voice does more than any sentence in it.

Consequences still exist. They are just delivered from a settled body, briefly, once, when both of you can hear. A calm consequence given tomorrow morning teaches far more than a loud one given tonight.

Instead of / try

Moment	Instead of	Try
Shouting match	Matching the volume	Halving your volume and slowing your words by half
Refusal at the door	“We are going NOW”	“I can see this is hard. Two minutes, then shoes. I'll wait here.”
Sibling storm	Finding out who started it	Separating bodies first, hearing both stories after tea
You have lost it	Pretending you didn't	“I got too loud. That was mine, not yours. I'm going to breathe.”

REGULATE, CONNECT, TALK

1. Out loud: “Give me a moment.” Then one long out-breath, longer than the in-breath.
2. Lower yourself physically — kneel, sit, lean on the wall. Height reads as threat.
3. Say one short warm sentence and then stop talking. Count ten in your head.
4. Stay near. Offer touch if it is wanted (Part 7). Let the storm finish.
5. Handle the content later — after food, or the next morning.

WRITE IT DOWN

The moment that repeats in our house most is…

In that moment my body does…

The one sentence I want to have ready is…

Where I will go for thirty seconds to drop a notch:

THIS WEEK

Agree a family pause word when nobody is upset. Anyone may call it, including the children, and it means everyone stops talking for one minute.

PART 5

When they freeze

Why “use your words” does not work in a shutdown.

A shutdown looks like defiance from the outside and feels like fog from the inside. The child is not withholding an answer. The part of them that makes answers has gone offline, along with appetite, expression and often the sense of time.

Questions make it worse. Every question is a demand for output from a system that has stopped producing output, and the failure to answer confirms to the child that they are the problem. So you do the opposite of the instinct: fewer words, no questions, no eye contact demanded, no deadline.

What brings a child back up out of freeze is slow, sensory and shared. Warmth. Weight. Rhythm. Someone breathing calmly nearby who is clearly not going anywhere and clearly not upset with them. Small movement helps once they are ready — walking, rocking, carrying something, a hand in warm water.

It can take much longer than you think, and it works better if you are visibly busy with something ordinary rather than watching them. Being watched is pressure. Being accompanied is not.

Two different emergencies

	Revved up	Shut down
What they need	Boundary, safety, discharge	Warmth, time, no demand
Words	Few and short	Fewer still, and no questions
Touch	Firm, steady, only if wanted	Slow, warm, heavy, only if wanted
Movement	Big — stamp, push, run, shake	Tiny — sway, walk, stretch fingers
Your job	Be the wall	Be the fire

SITTING ALONGSIDE

1. Come to their level and sit at an angle, not face-on.
2. Say one sentence: “I'm here. Nothing to answer.” Then stop.
3. Breathe slowly and audibly enough to be borrowed.
4. Offer, don't apply: “Would a blanket help? Would a hand on your back help?” Accept a no.
5. When colour and voice return, still don't interrogate. Offer food or water and let the story come later, or not at all.

WRITE IT DOWN

My child's shutdown looks like...

What I usually do in that moment is...

What I could do instead, that asks nothing of them:

Something ordinary I can do nearby while they come back:

THIS WEEK

After school, protect twenty wordless minutes: food, quiet, no questions about the day. Most homework battles start in an unnoticed shutdown.

PART 6

Parts, gently — IFS at home

The one who yells, the one who hides, and the soft one underneath.

Internal Family Systems starts from an idea most parents recognise: a person is not one voice. There is a part of your child that wants to go to the party and a part that would rather die than go, and they are both entirely sincere.

The parts that cause trouble are almost always protectors. Some are loud — the one who shouts, argues, slams, refuses. Some are quiet — the one who hides, goes along with everything, gets ill on Sunday nights. Both are doing a job: keeping something tender from being touched. Underneath them there is usually a young, wordless hurt that once had nobody with it.

The move that changes everything is small. Stop talking to the behaviour and start talking to the part, out loud, with respect. “Something in you really did not want to go in there today.” The protector relaxes when it is seen doing its job, and it does not relax when it is argued with — argument is proof it is still needed.

This works on you as well, and that is the harder half. The reaction that surprises you with its size — the flare when they whine, the ice when they are rude — is usually a part of you that is much younger than you are. You do not have to heal it in the kitchen. You only have to notice it is there, so you can act as the adult rather than as the eight-year-old.

Common protectors

Looks like	Its job	What it needs to hear
The shouter	Push the danger back before it lands	“You've got a lot of force in you. Something needed protecting.”
The hider	Never be visible enough to be rejected	“It makes sense to go quiet. I'm not going anywhere.”
The perfect one	Earn safety by never getting it wrong	“You don't have to do it right for me to want you here.”
The joker	Get in front of the shame before anyone else does	“You're funny. You're also allowed to be serious with me.”

SPEAK TO THE PART, NOT THE BEHAVIOUR

1. Pick a repeating behaviour, and pick a calm moment — never mid-storm.
2. Say what you see, without a verdict: “I notice that when homework comes out, something in you wants to disappear.”
3. Guess the job out loud, lightly, and be happy to be wrong: “I wonder if it's protecting you from feeling stupid.”
4. Say the thing the part is not expecting: “It makes sense. I'm glad it looks after you.”
5. Stop there. No fix, no plan, no deal. Let it sit for a day.

WRITE IT DOWN

A part of my child I keep arguing with is…

If it could speak, the job it thinks it's doing is…

The reaction in me that is bigger than the situation is...

How old does that reaction feel?

One respectful sentence I can say to their part this week:

THIS WEEK

When your own flare arrives, say silently: “Hello, I know you. You're young and you're trying to help.” Then choose the adult move.

PART 7

Support through touch

Consent first, then the touch that matches the state.

Touch is the oldest regulating tool we have, and the easiest to get wrong. It settles a nervous system faster than any sentence — and if it arrives uninvited, it is one more thing happening to a body that already has too much happening to it.

So it is always offered, never applied. Ask, wait, accept the answer, and mean it. A child who is allowed to say no to a hug learns that their no works, which is the same skill that will keep them safe elsewhere. If the answer is no, stay near and offer something else: your presence, a blanket, a cushion pressed against them by their own arms, sitting back to back.

Match the touch to the state. Activation wants firm, steady, predictable contact with a clear edge — pressure rather than stroking, which can feel like static when everything is already too much. Freeze wants warmth, weight and slowness, applied for longer than feels necessary. Speed reads as urgency in both directions, so go slower than you think.

And the last thing: your own hands transmit your state. A hand placed by a tense adult tells the child there is something to be tense about. Breathe out before you touch.

A menu of touch

Touch	Good for	How
Hand on the upper back	Both states, first offer	Flat, still, warm, no rubbing. Leave it long enough to be felt.
Weight and pressure	Activation	A firm hug held still, a heavy blanket, their own arms squeezed by yours.
Held feet	Freeze, bedtime, endless nights	Sit at the end of the bed, one hand on each foot, no talking.
Side by side	Older children, teenagers	Shoulders touching on a sofa or in a car. No face-to-face, no eye contact.
Rocking or swaying	Freeze and grief	Slow, boring rhythm, slower than a heartbeat. Hum if it's welcome.
The long slow hug	The end of a storm	Hold until you feel their body sigh, then hold three seconds more. Let them let go first.

ASK, WAIT, HOLD

1. Breathe out fully before you move towards them.
2. Ask: “Would a hand on your back help, or would you rather I just sit here?”
3. Wait for a real answer, including a shrug — treat a shrug as a no and stay near.
4. If yes: place, don't rub. Still and warm.
5. Stay longer than feels natural, and let them end it.

WRITE IT DOWN

Touch my child usually welcomes:

Touch they refuse (and that is information, not rejection):

How I will ask, in words they can say no to:

What I can offer instead when the answer is no:

THIS WEEK

Practise consent when nothing is wrong: “Hug or high five?” at bedtime, every night, and honour the answer.

PART 8

Emotion by emotion

Sixteen feelings from the story, with what the body needs and where to go next.

This is the reference half of the workbook: every feeling Gede meets in the book, what is usually underneath it, what helps in the body, and the chapter and practice that go with it.

Use it as a lookup rather than a read. When something is happening tonight, find the row, do the body thing first, and read the chapter together another day — the story does the talking for you when the direct conversation is too much.

Feeling	Usually underneath	What the body needs	Where to go
Small	A young part that once got compared to someone bigger and decided it was safer to shrink. It is not low confidence — it is a part protecting the child from being measured and found wanting.	For the moment a child feels small next to somebody bigger.	Gede the Gecko · Big feet
Unseen	A part that has given up asking. Being overlooked hurt, so it made invisibility the plan — you cannot be rejected if you were never in the room.	Tell one person one true thing about your day.	The Golden-Eyed Guardian
Lonely	An exile — the tender part that holds “I am on the outside”. Protectors often cover it with boredom, clinginess or “I don’t care about them anyway”.	Draw someone you’d like to sit beside tomorrow.	A New Friend
Nervous	A firefighter part scanning for danger. The flutter is mobilised energy with nowhere to go — the body preparing, not malfunctioning.	The one to reach for when a child is nervous, wound up, or cannot sit still.	Putri · The long way out
Hiding something	A manager part holding a secret to prevent shame. It is loyal, not deceitful — it believes the relationship survives only if nobody knows.	Whisper it to a toy first, then to a grown-up.	Gede's Secret
Unsure	A part that has been let down and now wants a guarantee before it moves. Hesitation is a risk assessment, not stubbornness.	Name one thing that has held you before.	The Dance of Trust
Quiet inside	A protector that learned speaking up costs something. The silence is a door being held shut from the inside, not an absence of thought.	For a child who has stopped saying what is actually going on.	Finding His Voice · One true sentence
Pushed	A boundary part waking up. Often mislabelled defiance — it is the first healthy “no” of a child who has been going along with things.	For anger, frustration, or a body that has been sitting still far too long.	Standing Strong · Shake it out
Playful	This is Self, not a part — the settled, curious, connected state everything else is trying to protect. Worth naming so children can find their way back to it.	Do the silliest movement you can for 10 seconds.	The Courage to Play
Impatient	A part that finds waiting unbearable because waiting once meant being forgotten. The urgency is about uncertainty, not the queue.	Count ten slow breaths and watch something move.	The Strength in Patience

Feeling	Usually underneath	What the body needs	Where to go
Scared of change	A part guarding the known. Change costs energy the nervous system may not currently have — the resistance is a budget, not a preference.	Name one thing that stays the same no matter what.	The Courage to Change
Overwhelmed	The system has gone past capacity and a firefighter takes over — shutdown, tears or an explosion. Nothing said in this state is being stored.	Steadying, portable and invisible — usable in a classroom without anyone noticing.	The Gift of Stillness · The square
Proud	Self energy again — competence felt from the inside. Fragile at first, because parts are quick to swap it for “was it good enough?”.	Tell someone what the hard part was.	Inner Light
Rushed	Often a borrowed part — the household’s pace living inside the child. It hurries so that nobody gets annoyed with them.	For the child who does everything at a run and arrives everywhere already frustrated.	Moving Slow with Wisdom · Slow hands
Sad	An exile finally allowed through. Sadness that is witnessed completes; sadness that is interrupted goes back underground and returns as behaviour.	Before naming a feeling, find it in the body. Everything else stands on this one.	The Rain · Where is it sitting?
Safe	Parts have stepped back and Self is leading — curious, calm, connected. This is the state to name and map so a child can find the road back to it.	The last one of the day — for bedtime, or after something hard.	Coming Home · A hand on your own heart

ONE FEELING, ONE WEEK

1. Choose the feeling that shows up most.
2. Read its chapter together once, with no discussion afterwards.
3. Do its practice three times during the week, at a calm moment.
4. On day seven, ask one question: “Does that feeling visit you? What does it feel like inside?”

WRITE IT DOWN

The feeling that visits our house most often is…

What it usually needs, that we keep not giving it:

The chapter we will read this week:

THIS WEEK

Keep the table on the fridge and let the child point at the row instead of explaining themselves.

CUT THIS ONE OUT

One page for the fridge

THE SIGNALS

Revved up: loud, fast, wriggly, defiant, silly at the wrong moment.

Shut down: quiet, flat, hiding, “I don't know”, suddenly sleepy.

Settled: plays, negotiates, can hear a no.

THE THREE STEPS

Regulate — one long out-breath, longer out than in. Yours first.

Connect — get low, get near, warm face, fewer words.

Talk — later. Tomorrow morning is fine.

FIVE PHRASES

“I'm here. Nothing to answer.”

“Something in you really doesn't want this. That makes sense.”

“Would a hand on your back help, or shall I just sit here?”

“I got too loud. That was mine, not yours.”

“We'll sort it out after food.”

REPAIR

When it goes badly

Every family ruptures. Children are not harmed by the rupture; they are harmed by rupture with no repair. Repair is short, specific and does not require you to be a saint.

SIX STEPS

1. Wait until your own body is settled. Repair from an activated body is not repair.
2. Name your bit only: “I shouted. That wasn't okay.” No “but you…”.
3. Say what you'll do differently, small and true: “Next time I'll leave the room first.”
4. Ask one question and accept any answer: “What was that like for you?”
5. Do not ask for forgiveness or reassurance. That is the child's to give, not to owe.
6. Rejoin the ordinary — make toast, kick a ball. Ordinary is the proof that it's over.

What happened, and what I want to say:

SEVEN DAYS

One small thing a day

Nothing here takes more than a few minutes. Tick the box, write one line about how it went.

Day	The small thing	How it went
Day 1 — Notice yourself	Name your own state silently three times today. Change nothing.	
Day 2 — Find your early signal	Catch the first physical sign of activation once, and breathe out long.	
Day 3 — Watch their run-up	Write down the twenty minutes before their hardest moment today.	
Day 4 — Halve the volume	In the loud moment, speak at half your volume and half your speed.	
Day 5 — Sit alongside	In a quiet or sulky moment, sit near with no questions for five minutes.	
Day 6 — Speak to a part	Say one respectful sentence to a protector, at a calm moment.	
Day 7 — Offer touch, ask first	Ask before contact, accept the answer, hold longer than feels natural.	