No One Teaches You This

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Michel Peen

Understanding your feelings and making room for your own life

We are born to live,
but too often life takes over.

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The practical examples in this book are fictional. Personal views are clearly presented as views. Verifiable information is supported by references in the text and a list of sources at the back.

This book offers general information and questions for everyday life. An individual medical, psychological or legal assessment requires an appropriate professional. In an emergency, getting help comes first.

More about Michel Peen's books

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Foreword

When did you last stop to think about what you wanted?

I mean an ordinary choice. An evening when you would rather have stayed home. A conversation in which you wanted to say something. A request you wanted to think about before saying yes again. Perhaps you knew exactly what you wanted but could not act on it. Perhaps even the question is difficult. When everyone needs something from you, you can lose touch with your own voice for a while.

That is what this book is about.

We learn a lot. We learn to write, keep commitments and use good manners. We learn what matters to other people. Sometimes we mainly learn how to cause as little trouble as possible. You can become quite good at that. You get up, do what is asked, keep everything running and wonder at the end of the day why you are so tired. Your calendar knows exactly where you should be. You would like to know where you have gone.

My starting point is simple: your own life deserves your attention. What you feel, what you need, what you enjoy and what you can manage should all count in your choices. Even when you work, care for someone or deal with an organization. You can consider other people while taking yourself seriously too.

I write from my own perspective on life. I find peace at home, with my cats and on CB radio, among other places. There we talk and listen. Our channel feels like a living room. When someone wants to add something, they say 'break' to ask for a turn. That small word expresses something I like: I want to join the conversation, and the other person gets a chance to listen. We can talk about equipment, personal matters, a court case or simply everyday life. When someone is ill, there is support too.

I wish more people could experience that kind of connection. You do not need an impressive job title to deserve a hearing. With or without a diploma, we are equal in worth. Our knowledge and responsibilities may differ; human worth comes without a ranking.

In this book I explore how you can make more room for yourself. We begin with feelings, uncertainty, self-respect and the habits that sometimes make you overlook your own needs. Then we look at your day: screens, rest, work, money and food. Relationships and raising children have their own place. Later we turn to organizations, appropriate help, oppression, abuse and the pain you carry. Finally, you make a plan that fits your circumstances.

You do not need to have that plan perfected in advance. A person is not a device with instructions on the underside. If only we were; then we could occasionally turn each other over and read where the reset button was. In reality, we learn while life goes on. We try something, notice what it does and adjust.

I hope that as you read, you find words for things you have felt for a long time. That you dare to ask a question, change an arrangement or seek help that moves you forward. You might take a smaller step: one meal without your phone, a reply that gives you time to think, a conversation in which you can finally say that you do not understand something. Steps like these can make a noticeable difference to everyday life.

To me, life is one great lesson. Each of us has our own path. You are free to explore what you want to take from these pages. My words may raise questions too. The aim is to give your own thinking more room.

And there is room for laughter. Humor can create space in a busy mind and a difficult conversation. I let that humor grow out of familiar situations: the phone getting more attention than the person beside you, the calendar in which even relaxing has become a duty, the special offer that makes you buy something you did not need yesterday. When it comes to violence, despair and pain, I give priority to the seriousness of what someone is experiencing.

I want this book to be useful to you. That is why each chapter ends with an exercise or a step you can try. You can write your answers, say them aloud or keep a few words to yourself. You never have to phrase things beautifully.

Start where you are.

Michel Peen

How to use this book

You can read the book from beginning to end or start with something that matters to you now. The five parts help you find your way. You can go straight to the chapters on safety and immediate help whenever the situation calls for them.

The situations involving invented people are fictional examples. They show how things can unfold in everyday life; they are not accounts from the files of people who have approached me. When I write about myself, I draw on experiences I have shared myself. An example offers possibilities; your circumstances may call for a different approach.

Four questions recur in different forms: what do I notice, what do I know, what do I need and what step fits? You do not need to answer all four every time. If you have little room to spare, choose one question.

You may stop an exercise. You may skip a subject, choose a shorter version or ask for support. Nowhere does this book ask you to relive painful memories on your own. When there are threats, violence or severe despair, the next step belongs with safety and appropriate help.

The factual explanations and support information were checked against the sources listed at the back. Unless a source or example says otherwise, this book describes the situation in the Netherlands. Laws, contact details and personal circumstances can change. For a specific legal, medical or financial decision, also consult current information and, where necessary, professional advice. Readers outside the Netherlands should use the laws, services and emergency or crisis numbers that apply in their own country.

For more detailed work on organizing letters and case files, I refer in a few places to my book Van paniek naar papier (From Panic to Paper). You can use the steps in this book independently. You do not have to read another book first.

Keep a notebook beside you if it helps. Keep things simple. Write the date, a subject and one sentence you want to remember. Do not turn getting to know yourself into another administrative chore you dread each evening.

When safety comes first

If a life is in immediate danger, call 112 in the Netherlands. Outside the Netherlands, call your local emergency number.

If you are thinking about suicide or are worried about someone, in the Netherlands you can call 113 free of charge or chat at 113.nl, day or night. Your GP, an out-of-hours GP service and a professional already treating you can help with urgent mental distress. Chapter 27 discusses this in more detail. Outside the Netherlands, use a local suicide prevention or crisis service. [37, 38]

For domestic violence or child abuse in the Netherlands, you can contact Veilig Thuis on 0800 2000. The service is free and anonymous, day and night. If your calls or searches are monitored, use a safe device if possible or ask someone you trust to help you think through your options. Chapter 25 covers seeking support safely.

Children do not have to solve adult problems. In the Netherlands, De Kindertelefoon supports children and young people aged 8 to 18 through 0800 0432 and the chat at kindertelefoon.nl. Jeugdstem can support children, young people and parents with questions about youth care. Current contact options are listed in the support resources at the back.

Part I Getting to know yourself

1 Life as a lesson

Janne has a free Saturday. At least, that is what she thought on Friday afternoon. Her sister asks her to babysit. A neighbor needs help with a cabinet. Someone in her group of friends asks who can organize something for a birthday. Janne says yes three times. That evening she sits on the couch. She has done a lot, yet hardly feels the day was her own.

'Everyone always needs something,' she says.

That may be true. At the same time, she has not yet told anyone what she needed. She wanted to sleep in, go shopping quietly and work on something she enjoys for an hour. That hour now exists only in the category of good intentions. It is very busy there.

This fictional example shows how a life can be filled up without someone giving one big order. A question here, a habit there, an expectation you assume someone else has. Taken together, they take up space. It may even happen that no one knows it's getting too much for you. You say yes, and the other person assumes you can manage it.

I use the phrase 'We are born to live, but too often life takes over' to draw attention to this. All sorts of things pull at you: work, family, advertising, rules, money worries and your own ideas about how things should be. If you only react, you lose sight of your own direction.

A first step is to look at how this happens in your life. You do not need to reclaim your entire Saturday or surprise your family with a resignation letter. You can pause before answering the next request.

What an experience can teach you

When I call life a big lesson, I mean that we can explore what experiences make visible. A pleasant encounter can show which people you relax with. An arrangement that falls through can tell you that you need clearer confirmation. A day when you're exhausted may give you reason to look at your planning.

You don't have to find a life lesson in every event. Sometimes something is sad, unfair or just difficult. You may first acknowledge that. The word lesson should never become an excuse for the behavior of someone who hurts you. Whoever commits violence remains responsible for the violence. You decide for yourself what to take from an experience later.

Learning can be small. Maybe you'll find that you need rest before you have an important conversation. Maybe you'll notice that spoken explanations are hard to remember and written explanations work better. You can also learn that a solution that suits someone else asks too much of you.

We often talk about insight as if suddenly a lamp turns on. Sometimes a lamp goes on. Sometimes you first look for the socket. It helps to make your expectation more modest. If you notice one recurring pattern earlier, you have already learned something.

Janne can look back on her Saturday without calling herself names. What was asked? What did she think before she said yes? Was she afraid that her sister would be disappointed? Did she want to be helpful? Did she not realize how much time everything would take? Every answer points to another step.

If she underestimated the time involved, she can first consult her calendar. If she is afraid of disappointment, she can practice setting a kind but clear boundary. If she really likes to help but has promised too much, she can discuss sharing the tasks. The word "boundaries"

solves little as long as you don't know what your limit is in that situation.

Your path is shaped by your circumstances

The idea that everyone has their own path sounds appealing. In everyday life, that path has to do with health, income, care for others and the place where you live. A person with a large income has different options than someone who has to carefully consider every bill. A single parent cannot just walk away for an afternoon when a child needs guidance. Someone who feels very afraid may need more support to take a step that someone else finds easy.

These differences deserve attention. They help explain why you sometimes know what you want, but not yet how it can be done. The question then becomes: what space is really there, and what should be arranged first?

You can distinguish three kinds of influence. There are things you decide about, such as which notifications you turn off or what words you prepare. There are things you have to arrange together, such as a division of care tasks. And there are circumstances that you have little direct influence on, such as the price of a home or the length of a waiting list.

By seeing these differences, you can choose your actions more precisely. A conversation about the distribution of care tasks needs someone else at the table. A waiting list may make interim support necessary. A habit of responding to everything immediately may change today, as long as people who need to reach you still can.

This is where self-reliance gains meaning for me. You learn what you can do, what you need to understand and who can help. Receiving support can be part of it. A person doesn't have to have a complete town hall, treatment practice and household in their head at the same time.

Keeping sight of our equal worth

With or without a degree, we're equal. I think it's important to say that out loud, because many people diminish themselves when someone else has a professional role. They think their experience is less important or that a question will sound stupid.

Knowledge matters. If I want to know something about a medical treatment, I need knowledge that I may not have myself. An expert can help assess what is sensible. At the same time I know what I feel, what I notice and what explanation I understand or don't understand. That information is part of the conversation.

You can respect knowledge and ask for a comprehensible explanation. 'Can you tell me what this means for my situation?' is an ordinary question. So is 'Which part do I need to do now?' If you don't know a word, you ask what it means. Using a complicated word does not make an answer useful.

Equal worth works both ways. The employee or care professional is a person too. You don't have to belittle someone to keep your own position. You can be firm about a mistake, a missing answer or a limit and yet stay on the subject.

Suppose Janne gets a schedule at work that overloads her. She can say: "I can't complete all these tasks within my working hours. Which task gets priority and which can be postponed?" That gives them a concrete problem to discuss. She explains what the schedule means in practice. That is information the person responsible needs to address.

Your worth as a person doesn't depend on how smoothly you manage a conversation like this. Some people need more time, take notes or ask someone to come along, which may be part of their approach.

The rules in your own mind

Part of the pressure comes from statements you once came to believe. I must always be useful. I must not make mistakes. I must remain

strong. I must not disappoint anyone. The sentences can be so familiar that they sound like facts.

Choose one and examine it. Who says this? Is it an existing agreement, a legal obligation or an expectation? What happens if you don't follow that rule for a while? What part of the fear is really based on previous events?

Sometimes a rule turns out to have been a way of avoiding hassle. That can be understandable. You don't have to reject yourself. You can see if the same rule still fits today's situation.

For example, I have to keep everyone happy. You can replace it with a practical starting point: I want to treat people with care and tell them honestly what I can do. Such a starting point gives you something to do. You ask what is needed, you consider what room you have and then reply. Another person's disappointment remains possible. You can recognize that response without giving up your entire calendar.

Be careful with new rules that pose as freedom. From now on, I must always follow my feelings. That can leave you feeling trapped too. Feelings change and circumstances count. A choice of your own often requires you to examine what you feel, what you know and what consequences the step has.

You can also be satisfied with an existing part of your life. Self-examination doesn't have to end in a big move, a new job or another personality. Maybe you'll discover that you want to keep more than change. That's useful information.

Practicing your own direction

Janne starts with one change. When a new request comes, she says: 'I'll look at my plans for Saturday and let you know this evening.' Her sister can still ask her to babysit. Janne has time to decide whether it fits. She sees that a morning is manageable, while the whole day would be too much.

She says: 'I can do nine until twelve. After that I have my own plans.' Her sister finds someone else for the afternoon. Perhaps she is disappointed for a moment. That does not have to ruin the conversation. Janne has offered a specific option and kept the rest of her day.

A week later it turns out that she skipped the hour for her hobby anyway. She was tired and chose the couch. She can look at that too. Did she really want to work on her hobby or did she especially need rest? A plan may change as soon as you see what fits better.

That look back makes your own path less rigid. You don't have to provide proof that you always make good choices from now on. You practice. You look at the consequences and take account of yourself and others.

This can start with small things: answering a message at another time, asking a question during a conversation or adjusting an appointment so that you can keep it. If the situation is unsafe, you first opt for support and protection. The later chapters can help you with that.

Exercise for an ordinary day

Choose a recent day. Draw two columns on paper. On the left, write what you did; on the right, what led you to do it. A wish, an agreement, someone's request, habit, a lack of money or fear of a reaction: all of these can appear there.

Look at one moment when you experienced little space of your own. Describe the situation in a few sentences. Use words that make sense to you. You don't have to make a formal diagnosis.

Then answer four questions:

- What did I want at the time?
- What responsibility or limitation do I need to take into account?
- What small choice could have fit into those circumstances?
- What information or support do I need?

Choose a similar moment in the next few days and try one other action. Ask for time to think, prepare a question or make a manageable arrangement. Write down what happened afterwards. Also note the other person's response and something that remained difficult.

If you don't know what you want, start smaller. Write down what you notice at the time: tired, tense, curious, need for silence. From there you can search further.

Your next step doesn't have to determine the rest of your life. It can show you what you need to understand the next part of your path.

2 What you feel

It's okay.

It is a useful answer. You can use it when things are going well, when they are going less well and when you have absolutely no desire to explain yourself in a parking lot. The phrase is about as versatile as a roll of duct tape.

Sometimes you choose it deliberately. You don't want to have a conversation at the time. Sometimes you say it out of habit, while you yourself don't know what's going on inside. You feel overwhelmed, but you can't name it. You become quiet, irritable or restless and only later notice that there was sadness underneath it.

Recognizing feelings starts with attention. You don't have to find the right words right away or know where everything comes from. You can first notice that something is going on. Then you can explore what kind of feeling it is and what you want to do with it.

Naming a feeling

Take Amir, a fictional reader who comes home after a long working day. His roommate asks if he has done the grocery shopping. Amir answers briefly. When the roommate asks more questions, he gets angry. He feels attacked. The question was about milk; the conversation now seems to concern his entire character.

When Amir stops, he notices more. He's tired. At work an arrangement has changed without consultation. He hasn't eaten. When he hears the question about groceries, he thinks: I'm getting it wrong here too.

That thought helps explain why the question hit him hard. The roommate did not know what had happened at work. Amir can better

understand his response as soon as he distinguishes between the question, his thought and what he felt.

A name does not have to be perfect. 'I feel tense and disappointed' says more than 'I'm angry about everything.' Grief, fear, anger, shame, guilt, disappointment and emptiness are different words. Enjoyment, pride, relief and confidence belong here too.

You can also have multiple feelings at once. You can be relieved that a relationship has ended and sad about what you're missing. You can be proud of a choice and afraid of the consequences. Conflicting feelings complicate your experience, but there is room for them.

When you cannot find a word yet, you describe what you notice. Do you sit still? Do you want to go away? Do you raise your voice? Do you tend to immediately grab your phone? These observations give you a starting point. Physical signals can have several causes. An exercise about feelings does not determine a medical cause; with new, severe or persistent physical complaints you ask for appropriate medical help.

What happened and what you made of it

A feeling is your experience, and you can still examine the explanation you give for it.

Suppose you send a message and get no reply for hours. You feel left out. You think the other person is angry. What you know at that point is that there is no reply yet. You do not know what the other person means. They might be working, sleeping, have lost their phone or need time to answer.

You do not have to reason your feelings away. You can say: 'I feel uncertain when I don't get a reply.' At the same time, you can acknowledge that the conclusion 'the other person doesn't like me' has not been established. That distinction leaves room for a question.

One practical way is to write down four lines. Event: I sent a message yesterday and have not received an answer yet. Feeling: uncertain and disappointed. Thought: maybe the other person doesn't want to stay in touch. Need: clarity about our appointment.

Those four lines can help you act with more focus. If you have plans together tonight, you can ask for confirmation by a certain time and say that you will otherwise make your own plans. If it is a routine question that is not urgent, you can wait longer. If the contact is consistently one-sided, you can discuss the pattern later.

Your reaction doesn't have to be as big as your feeling. You can experience a lot of tension and still choose one short question. Sometimes you need support to take that step first.

Giving space at your own pace

'You have to feel it.' Sometimes that sounds as though feelings can be turned on like a faucet. After difficult experiences, it does not work that way for everyone. Some feelings are unclear, come slowly or become too much. You can start with a small moment when you wonder what's going on right now.

Sit somewhere where you're reasonably comfortable. Take a look around. Ask yourself which word roughly fits. You don't have to go back to the most painful event of your life. An ordinary disappointment or a small pleasant moment is enough to practice.

Maybe you don't notice anything. You can also write that down: I don't know yet. Maybe you feel more anxious because you don't have a distraction for a while. Then you can bring your attention to your surroundings and do an everyday thing. Make a cup of tea, feel your feet on the floor or talk to someone if that suits you better at that moment.

You may need something practical during grief. Eating, moving an appointment or getting help with a task can support you even when the

feeling doesn't disappear. Acknowledging a feeling doesn't mean that you have to work on it all day.

When you feel afraid, you can explore what you fear. Is there a real danger? Is information missing? Do you expect an unpleasant reaction because it has happened before? Each calls for a different step. Danger calls for protection. Missing information calls for a question. Fear that keeps dominating your everyday life may call for professional support.

When you feel angry, you can ask which event affected you and what boundary or need is involved. You remain responsible for what you do. A raised voice, a threat or a blow does not get a free pass because your feeling is understandable. You can pause the conversation, take some distance and return later, when it is safe.

Distraction has a function

Watching a movie, listening to music or reading something can be nice. Sometimes you look for distractions to get through a difficult moment. That can be a conscious choice. It is worth exploring when you notice that, without distraction, you can hardly bear to sit with what you are experiencing.

Do you pick up your phone every time silence occurs? Do you always turn on something when you're alone? Ask yourself what you're looking for at the moment. Companionship, information, peace, a feeling of contact or no thoughts for a while? The answer helps you choose.

If you're looking for contact, a conversation with someone who really listens may suit you better than twenty short videos. If you're tired, you might need sleep or a simpler evening. If you're trying to avoid something difficult, you can discuss a small part of it with someone who gives support.

You don't have to completely remove distractions to learn something. Choose one moment and see what happens when you don't click immediately. Two minutes can be enough. Maybe you notice you're hungry. Maybe you miss someone. Maybe the silence simply feels pleasant.

A small experiment teaches you more when you look at the result honestly. If you get more restless, it requires attention. You can choose another exercise or ask for help. The goal is to understand what you need, not prove that you are a hero in silence.

Pleasant feelings deserve attention too

Many people do not notice anything until things go wrong. They investigate their unease, while calm passes unnoticed. They seek the cause of grief and forget to see what gave them pleasure.

Take a moment when something was pleasant. Maybe you were sitting outside, completed a task or spoke to someone without haste. What made it nice? Was there time? Could you be yourself? Was the area quiet? Could you choose something?

Such a look back gives clues. When you discover that a quiet conversation does you good, you can make time for it more often. If you enjoy making things, you can save a small project for a free evening. It doesn't need to become a new obligation.

For me, paying attention to my cats brings peace. My attention goes to an animal that is present and has its own preferences. That last part is quite clear: with one look, a cat can tell you that the meeting is over. I adapt my attention to what the animal likes. An animal is free to seek contact and to walk away.

You can have something else that does you good. It is not a competition. One person finds peace in gardening, another from a conversation or a hobby. Explore what you notice and what is possible in your circumstances.

Feeling good is not an assignment either. A pleasant day can turn around later. You can experience something valuable and carry sorrow at the same time. Make room for what is really there.

Talking with children about feelings

A child sometimes has few words for what they are experiencing. They may say that everything is stupid or become very quiet. You can listen and ask something simple: what happened? Would you like to tell me about it? Do you want me to stay with you?

Allow room for an answer different from what you expected. If you think the child is afraid and they say they are angry, explore it together. You can offer words without taking over the story. 'Were you sad, angry, something else, or do you not know yet?' allows different answers.

Keep the question small. A child does not have to give a full account of their inner world after school. A quiet activity side by side can give more space than a conversation in which the child is constantly looked at and questioned.

You can recognize feelings and limit behavior. I hear you're angry. I want you to stop hitting me. We're going to sit apart for a little while, and I'll help you. That gives words to the anger while keeping safety clear.

You can also discuss pleasant feelings. Ask which moment was enjoyable and why. Maybe the child says they finally got to choose something. That answer teaches you something about how much room they feel they have.

When a child talks about violence, threats or other unsafe situations, your role as an adult is to provide appropriate support. The child does not have to come up with a solution. Chapter 25 helps keep that responsibility in the right place.

Exercise with three questions

Choose an ordinary event today. Take a few minutes or a shorter time if that fits better. You can write or quietly say the answers.

- What do I feel about it?
- What do I need right now?
- What small step goes with that?

Write one factual line above: what happened? Keep assumptions separate. If you think someone is angry with you, write it down as a thought until you know for sure.

For Amir the exercise could yield: at work an arrangement changed without consultation. I feel tension and disappointment. I need rest and clarity. I first eat something and discuss with my colleague tomorrow how changes are passed on. I tell my roommate that I was abrupt and want to have the conversation again.

These are two different responsibilities: Amir asks for clarity at work and makes amends for his behavior at home, while milk remains a practical issue.

Later, look at what the step changed. Are things clearer? Did you need more support? Did a question remain open? If your feeling becomes too overwhelming to handle alone, your next step may be a request for help.

You don't have to understand every feeling today. You can begin by listening to yourself a little more closely than you do when you say "I'm okay."

3 Self-love and uncertainty

Eva makes a mistake in a message. One wrong date. She corrects the date and sends a correction. The practical error has been corrected. Meanwhile, in her head, an extensive investigation begins into whether she can actually do anything.

She remembers a comment from last week, then something from last year. The wrong date appears to be a very active recruiter: within minutes it has recruited a whole team of old doubts.

What Eva needs in this fictional example is a clear distinction between the mistake and her judgment of herself. She wrote something wrong. She can find out how that happened and what helps from now on. The judgment that she is worthless tells her little about correcting the date.

Uncertainty can take up a lot of space when you immediately connect an event to your whole identity. A clumsy sentence becomes "I'm stupid." A rejection becomes "Nobody wants me." A difficult day becomes "I ruin everything." You can explore how your mind makes that leap and which words are more accurate.

How you talk to yourself

Listen to your own language after a setback. Would you talk to someone close to you like that? Some people use words for themselves that they would immediately find too harsh with others.

A friendly attitude to yourself can go hand in hand with honesty. If you've done something wrong, you can name it. You can make amends, make an agreement and practice a skill. You don't have to tear yourself down for that.

Compare two sentences. 'I'm hopeless with money' is broad and vague. 'Three direct debits are missing from my overview' gives you something to work on. You can look up the payments and update your overview. If there is a shortfall, you can seek appropriate help.

Language can make a difference after a conversation too. 'I ruin every interaction' tells you very little. 'Yesterday I interrupted someone while they were telling me something important' lets you examine how that affected the other person and have the conversation again.

A careful sentence contains enough truth to give direction and enough space to move on. Try writing it in your own words. If a sentence feels too sweet, you don't have to use it. You don't have to speak to yourself in front of the mirror as if you've won a prize that no one has yet awarded.

This was tricky and I can examine one next step. Or: I didn't know this yet; I'm going to ask for an explanation. Ordinary words can be enough.

What I mean by self-love

Self-love means to me that you give yourself attention, care and respect. You take your needs seriously, you seek support where it is needed and you let your own humanity count. You may be tired, not understand something and revisit a choice.

I sometimes use the thought "You can't give what you don't have." That's why I draw attention to what a person can manage. Someone who gives a great deal and receives little can get exhausted. If you don't have time to eat, rest or discuss a problem, caring for others becomes more difficult to sustain.

That thought has limits. People can give love while they are insecure or feel little appreciation for themselves. And everyone may receive love and help while learning to take care of themselves. You do not first have to pass a test of self-love. Children deserve care without conditions about their performance or their ability to like themselves.

So pay particular attention to what you do. Care for yourself can mean moving an appointment, arranging a meal, asking a question or having a conversation with someone who takes you seriously. It can also

mean stopping something that keeps harming you and seeking support to do it safely.

Some people call that selfish. Then examine what is really happening. Are you unexpectedly abandoning an agreed responsibility? You may need to make a different arrangement. Are you finally saying, after a long time, that you can manage less? That boundary deserves attention. One word from another person does not establish which of these situations applies.

Confidence grows through action

Waiting until you're confident can mean waiting a long time. A small act can give you information about what you can do and what you have to learn.

Eva wants to ask during a meeting what an assignment means. She fears that everyone else already understands it. She can write one sentence beforehand: 'Can you give an example of the result you expect?' She brings that sentence with her. When the subject comes up, she can read it from her notes if she needs to.

The colleague explains it. Maybe someone else had the same question. Maybe not. What Eva has learned is that she could request the information. She doesn't have to win the approval of everyone at the table for that step to count.

Choose an action small enough to practice. Express a preference, ask a shop clerk a question, answer a message only after considering what you can promise, or go through a bill with someone. The action should fit your circumstances and be safe for you.

If it doesn't work, you investigate why. Was the step too big? Was there really little room to talk? Did you need more explanation or support? The answer helps you modify a next attempt.

Look back in concrete terms. What did you do? What information did you get? What went differently than expected? A small success can easily disappear when you immediately look at a new problem.