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Same Team: Running a Home Together Without the Fights

A short guide for parents of young kids: share the load, talk it through without fighting, and make up after.



Worksheets inside

Who owns what, a weekly check-in agenda, a thank-you tracker

Who is this for?

For husbands and wives who are both tired. Maybe you both work, the kids are small, the in-laws live nearby, and something slips every week. The fights are rarely about big things. Usually it is the rubbish, the tadika fees, or who should get up at night. This is not about who is wrong. It is about working as one team.

How to use it

- Read one chapter a week. Each one is short and ends with one small action.
- Fill in the worksheets together, or separately first and then compare.
- Print the check-in agenda page and use it every week.

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The ideas here are inspired by Gottman and Silver's book (see page 18), rewritten for Malaysian families. This is not therapy. If there is violence or fear at home, read page 17 first.



The invisible list

Every home has two kinds of work. The visible kind: cooking, sweeping, washing. And the invisible kind: noticing, remembering and planning.

The invisible work is a long list inside one person's head:

- The baby's vaccine next month, and where the pink health book is
- Tadika fees not paid yet, the trip form not signed
- School uniform too small, sports shoes torn
- A gift for a cousin's wedding on Saturday
- Balik kampung tickets to buy before prices go up
- Nappies and milk running low

Whoever carries this list is tired even when they seem to "do less". Their mind never clocks off. When they ask for help, their partner feels ordered around like an employee.

A list in one head cannot be shared. A written list can. The first step is not splitting the work. It is getting the list out of one head.

This week: fill in the worksheet on the next page, each of you on your own.

Empty your head

Write down everything you are keeping in mind for the family this week and this month. Do not filter. Small things count.

In my head

In my partner's head

When you are done, compare. What was your partner carrying that you did not even know about? Circle it. That is the invisible work in your home.



Own it, don't "help"

"What can I help with?" sounds kind. But it quietly says the home is one person's job and the other is the helper.

Gottman and Silver argue that what matters most in housework is not an exact fifty-fifty split, but whether both of you feel the load is fair, and whether your partner acts without being asked.

Owning a task means four things

- 1 **Notice.** You spot that the milk is nearly gone, not your partner.
- 2 **Plan.** You decide when and how.
- 3 **Do.** You get it done, or make sure it is done.
- 4 **Follow through.** You check it is really finished, and remember next time.

When a task is fully owned, your partner can forget about it. That is real rest.

The owner's way may not be your way. If it is safe and it gets done, let it be. Correcting every method makes the owner hand the task straight back.

Who owns what (1/2)

M me **P** partner **B** both **O** others: grandparents, helper, babysitter

Task

Now

Fair?

New owner

Kids

Bath and dress the kids in the morning

Drop-off and pick-up at taska, tadika or school

Pack the bag, water bottle and lunchbox

Get up at night when a child wakes

Clinic visits, medicine and vaccines

Fees, forms and the class WhatsApp group

Bedtime and the bedtime story

Food and kitchen

Plan the week's meals

Write the list and buy groceries

Cook dinner

Wash up and clear the kitchen

Home

Wash, hang and bring in the laundry

Fold and iron, school uniforms too

Sweep, mop and clean the bathroom

Take out the rubbish and sort recycling

Call a repairman when something breaks

Who owns what (2/2)

Task	Now	Fair?	New owner
Money and papers			
Electricity, water and internet bills			
Assessment tax, quit rent and insurance			
Road tax, car insurance and servicing			
Monthly budget and kids' savings			
MyKad, birth certificates and passports			
Extended family and social			
Call and visit parents and in-laws			
Plan balik kampung and school holidays			
Kenduri, gifts and duit raya			
Kids' birthdays and parties			
Getting ready for Raya and festivals			
Domestic helper or babysitter			
Daily instructions and task list			
Pay, leave and rest days			
Permit, documents and the agency			
Other task: _____			
Other task: _____			

No domestic helper? Skip that part. Fair column: tick yes or no, each of you honestly.

How to rebalance without a fight

- 1 **Compare the Now column.** If you marked things differently, do not defend. Your partner's view is information, not an attack.
- 2 **Start with daily repeating tasks.** Lunchboxes, dishes, bath time. Everyday tasks feel unfair fastest.
- 3 **Hand over the whole task, not half.** "You own the tadika fees" beats "you pay when I remind you".
- 4 **Go by strengths, then by time.** Whoever gets home early owns the evening jobs. Whoever works shifts owns the weekend ones.
- 5 **Review it at the check-in.** The split is not a lifetime contract. Change it when work, kids or seasons change.



Do it in UrusFamily: Family tasks and Family spending

Add the grown-up tasks too, not just the kids' ones, and give each to its owner. Repeating tasks come back on their own every week, so nobody has to remind anybody.

Turn on Family spending in settings to record who paid for what, and who shares it, without keeping score in your head.



A weekly 20-minute check-in

Most household fights happen at the worst possible moment: the school run, a traffic jam, a crying child. A check-in gives those issues one calm place to go.

Gottman and Silver suggest a weekly conversation about the relationship that starts with what went well. We cut it to 20 minutes for parents of young kids.

- **When:** a fixed time, like Sunday night after the kids sleep.
- **Where:** sit side by side, phones face down.
- **Rules:** one issue only, start with thanks, stop on time.
- **Too tired?** Move it to tomorrow. Do not cancel it.

Many Muslim families see a talk like this as a small musyawarah at home. Use that framing if it fits your family.



Do it in UrusFamily: Calendar, To buy and Notice board

Open the Calendar during the check-in and add next week's dates straight away: tuition, kenduri, balik kampung.

Anything you mention goes into To buy, the same list on both phones. Pin what you agreed on the Notice board.

Check-in agenda

Date: _____ Start: _____ End: _____

1 What went well this week?

5 min

Thank you for...

2 What is coming up next week?

5 min

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

3 Who owns what this week?

5 min

4 One thing, said gently

4 min

I feel... about... I need...

5 What is one thing I can do so you feel supported?

1 min



Complain gently

Complaining is healthy. What does the damage is how it starts.

Gottman and Silver write that the way a conversation begins strongly shapes the way it ends. A harsh start usually ends harshly.

The gentle start formula

"I feel (feeling) **about** (one specific thing). **I need** (a clear request)."

Add one line owning your part, like "I forgot to remind you this morning too".

Harsh	Gentle
"You never remember the tadika fees."	"I'm worried the tadika fees will be late again. Could you own the fees from this month?"
"It's always me getting up at night."	"I'm exhausted this week. Can we take turns, you on Monday, Wednesday and Friday?"
"You just don't care about this house."	"I feel stressed when the kitchen is a mess in the morning. I need the dishes done before bed."

Rewrite three complaints

Pick three complaints that keep coming back. Rewrite each with the formula before you say it.

Complaint 1

Complaint 2

Complaint 3

Four patterns that make fights worse

Gottman and Silver name four patterns that, according to their research, make conflict worse. Try the swap beside each:

- **Criticism** (attacking the person): talk about the thing, not their character.
- **Contempt** (sarcasm, mocking, eye-rolling): recall one thing you respect about them.
- **Defensiveness**: accept even a small part of the complaint.
- **Stonewalling**: ask for a break out loud, do not disappear.



Pause first, then make up

There is a moment in an argument when your body takes over. Your heart races, your voice rises, and everything your partner says sounds like an attack.

Gottman and Silver call this flooding. They suggest a break of at least 20 minutes, doing something calming, and avoiding "I'm right, they're wrong" thoughts during the break.

A break that works

- 1 **Agree a signal word** now, while calm. For example "pause" or "water".
- 2 **Announce the break**, do not just walk out: "I'm too heated. Let's continue after Isyak."
- 3 **Take turns with the kids**. One takes the kids to the park or the bath, the other calms down.
- 4 **Come back and finish**. A break with no return is not a break, it is running away.

Our signal word

Making up after a fight

Every couple says the wrong thing. Gottman and Silver argue that what sets strong couples apart is whether a repair attempt, like a small joke or a sorry, is accepted by the other person.

Repair lines to try

Sorry, I went too far.

Can we start again?

You have a point.

We're on the same team, right?

I get why you're tired.

What do you need right now?

Let's have some tea first.

Our own repair lines

Young kids may see their parents raise their voices. In our view, let them also see you make up: "Mummy and Daddy are okay now. We said sorry."

This is our reading for families, not a specific finding of the book about children.



Small thanks every day

We are quick to notice what our partner forgot, and slow to notice what they did. A specific thank you fixes that balance: "Thanks for taking the baby to the clinic" means more than "thanks for everything".

Gottman and Silver also write about small bids, like a sigh or an ordinary question, that ask for attention. "Is the baby's milk finished?" answered with "I'll grab some later" is a small response that matters.

Monday	☐
Tuesday	☐
Wednesday	☐
Thursday	☐
Friday	☐
Saturday	☐
Sunday	☐



Do it in UrusFamily: Notice board

Pin one thank you for your partner on the family Notice board. Kids who can read learn that housework gets appreciated, not just assigned.



The bigger team

A Malaysian home rarely has only two adults. There are in-laws, a grandmother minding the kids, a domestic helper or a babysitter. The rule stays the same: the two of you are a team first.

Parents and in-laws

Talk it over together before answering a request from the wider family. Usually each of you speaks to your own parents. Standing with your spouse does not mean putting your parents down. Respect and care for them stay.

Balik kampung

Decide early at a check-in, for example whose kampung for the first day of Raya. Split the owners: one owns tickets, route and the car service, the other owns the bags and what the kids need.

Helper, babysitter or grandparents

Help changes who does the work, not who owns it. Pick one adult to give daily instructions so the helper never gets two different orders. The other can own pay, leave and documents.

When it is not about housework any more

This ebook is for ordinary friction at home. It is not for a relationship with violence, threats, control over money or movement, or fear of your partner.

Those are not things to bring to a check-in or to "sort out gently". Your safety and your children's safety come first.

Get help

- **Talian Kasih 15999**, the toll-free KPWKM line, 24 hours a day. WhatsApp: **019 261 5999**.
- **Immediate danger**: call **999**.
- **Lasting sadness after giving birth**, trouble sleeping even when the baby sleeps, or thoughts of self-harm: see a doctor or your nearest klinik kesihatan.
- **Conflict that feels stuck**: a qualified marriage counsellor can help.

This ebook is not therapy or treatment and does not replace professional help.

Helpline source: Talian Kasih page, kpwkm.gov.my, checked 28 October 2026.

Where these ideas come from

John M. Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, revised edition, Harmony Books, 2015.

Many ideas in this ebook are inspired by that book: everyday friendship, gentle start-ups, taking a break when flooded, repair attempts, turning toward small bids, a weekly meeting, and fairness in housework.

- Every sentence, example and worksheet was rewritten by the UrusFamily team for Malaysian families.
- Research findings mentioned are the authors' arguments, based on their studies in the United States. They are not our claims, and Malaysian family life is different.
- This ebook is not sponsored or endorsed by the authors or publisher.

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- Free printable chore charts: urusfamily.com/en/chore-chart
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One shared list, on both phones

Paper worksheets are a good start. UrusFamily keeps it all in one place that husband and wife can both see any time.

Family tasks	Grown-up and kids' tasks, with owners and repeats.
Calendar	School, kenduri, public holidays and balik kampung.
To buy	One shopping list on every phone.
Notice board	Check-in decisions and family reminders.
Family spending	Who paid for what, and who owes whom.



App Store

iPhone and iPad



Google Play

Android phones

Free to download. Scan with your phone camera, or tap the link if you are reading on your phone. urusfamily.com