


# 5. Stories for your family

Document 5 of 5



Picture made with AI image generation (OpenAI)

Your selected stories, with their notes and sources.

## 3D · Divert · Discomfort → Delight

HDI rests on one simple idea: 3D. Three words, easy to keep in mind on a hard day.

3D is the umbrella over every model, and it runs through each one. 3D is also a way back to three dimensions: up and down, forward and back, left and right. Smells, sounds, colours and the freedom of open space. The screen is flat; the world your body and senses know best is not.

Divert. When the pull toward the screen comes, willpower alone rarely wins. Turn toward something that does you more good. The things you can turn to are your copers.

Discomfort. The first days of any change feel awkward. That is not a sign it is failing. What carries you through are your energizers: they give you the energy to keep going.

Delight. Repeat the new step, and what took effort becomes familiar, then something you enjoy and choose for yourself.

Each model below is three words: two ways, and where they lead. Remember the letter, and the words come back. Each one is grounded in published research on coping and motivation.

### Energizers

Energizers give you the energy to get through the Discomfort.

**3M · Meaning · Momentum → Mastery**
Meaning — know why it matters to you; Momentum — keep going, and start again kindly after a slip; Mastery — setbacks stop deciding for you

**3E · Environment · Energize → Empower**
Environment — arrange your space so the good choice is the easy one; Energize — act first; the feeling follows; Empower — the change becomes yours

## Copers

Copers are what you can Divert to instead of the screen.

**3O · Others · Outdoors → Outstanding**
Others — people, face to face; Outdoors — time outside, in nature; Outstanding — feeling fully alive

**3A · Awe · Alertness → Achievement**
Awe — something bigger than you; Alertness — attention out, here and now; Achievement — doing something that means something to you

**3B · Basics · Body → Balance**
Basics — sleep, meals and rest without a screen; Body — move in your free time; Balance — a body that can switch off and recover

**3S · Separation · Solitude → Success**
Separation — distance from the phone; Solitude — time alone, without distraction; Success — you steer your day again

**3F · Filter · Focus → Flow**
Filter — let in only what matters; Focus — one task at a time; Flow — deep absorption in something worth doing

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# One Thing Each

**Helps with: Talking about online experiences**

Try 1 in the document “Six weeks, one step at a time” comes from this story.



Maja, this one reached you through talking about what is watched. Here is a story about Daniel, whose questions at dinner about screens were always questions for his daughter.

Daniel and his wife eat dinner with Zora most evenings, at the round table in the kitchen. Zora is ten. Daniel asks her questions, because that is what dinner is for. What did you do at school. What did you watch. Who was in it.

Zora answers the school ones. The screen ones she answers with "Stuff," or "A video," or nothing. Daniel does not push it. But the questions only ever go one way. Nobody asks him what he watched.

So one Sunday he suggests something at dinner. "On Tuesdays, everyone tells one thing they saw on a screen that day. Grown-ups first. And anyone can pass."

His wife looks up. "Me too?"

"You first."

On Tuesday his wife goes first and tells them about a video of a man restoring an old boat, which took her most of her lunch break to watch. Daniel tells them about a news story about the weather on the river. Zora passes.

The next Tuesday Zora tells them about a video of a cat that opens doors. It is not very interesting. Daniel asks how it opens them, and she explains, at length, with her hands. His wife says she wants a cat. Zora says the cat in the video is called Biscuit.

Some Tuesdays it goes like that. Some Tuesdays all three of them pass, and they talk about something else. One week Daniel has nothing to tell, because the only thing he looked at was work email, and he passes too, and Zora looks pleased about it.

He hears about things he would not have chosen. A boy who makes slime. A game where you run a pizza shop. A song he finds annoying and now cannot stop humming. Zora hears about the boat for three weeks running, until the man in the video finishes it.

Zora still watches the boy who makes slime. Daniel knows the boy's name now.

On Saturday the three of them walk along the river path, and Zora says the cat in the video could open their door too, easily, if they had one.

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**A note from us.** At the table, questions about screens can feel like questions for the child only. One way is to agree on one evening a week when everyone at the table, adults first, tells one thing they saw on a screen that day. It costs hearing about a video you would not have chosen, and telling one of your own.

**Where this comes from:** In a review of family studies, using media together went with fewer media-related problems, as rules did — seven studies, the links tiny. Whether one way did better was not tested. Of the seven studies behind it, one was of children. Most were of teenagers. Another found watching together went with more media time and aggression. In a European survey, parents who guided their children's internet use reported more kinds of activity online, and more risks. Chen and Shi, 2018; Livingstone and colleagues, 2017; Collier and colleagues, 2016.

Families were studied as they live, not tested: links at one moment, not showing what came first.

This is not a way to change how long your child is on a screen, or what they meet there.

**Not for everyone:** not as a check-up; anyone may pass, your child too. If you are worried about something real, that is a different situation, and talking with someone who can help comes first.

# The Margin

**Helps with: Knowing what is used, openly**

Try 2 in the document “Six weeks, one step at a time” comes from this story.



Maja, this one reached you through knowing what is used, and openly. Here is a story about Nate, who has his son with him for half of each week.

Most mornings Nate buys a paper newspaper at Ray's stand, under the green awning. In the evening he reads it at the table with a pen in his hand, because a man has to have something to do with his hands.

Ollie is eleven. He lives at Nate's apartment for the second half of each week. The apartment has one table. Nate's computer stands at one end of it, where Nate works. At the other end there is a placemat with a burn on it. Between the two ends there is room for a newspaper, and for an argument about a newspaper.

In February it is dark by the time Ollie comes in. He sits down at the computer end and plays a game online with other players. He wears a headset, earphones with a microphone, so that he can talk to them. For the first while he keeps his coat on. Nate reads at the other end. It is a good arrangement, and both of them know it.

Ollie says a name out loud. It is the name of one of the other players, who has just done something remarkable with a vehicle in the game. Nate has heard this name several evenings in a row. Tonight it very nearly fits into his crossword, the word puzzle in the paper. He has the pen in his hand anyway.

So he moves. He carries the paper and his coffee down to the burnt placemat, at Ollie's shoulder. He asks what things in the game are called. He writes the names in a column, in pen, in the margin of page four, under the crossword.

"Why are you writing that down?" Ollie says.

"Because I can't keep it in my head," Nate says. "And the settings on this computer are mine, the limits I put on it. You know the ones I mean."

"I know the ones you mean."

It costs Nate the newspaper, which he does not finish. It also costs him a full account of the vehicle, which he has to hear to the end. Some evenings he will take his coffee back to his own end of the table. That is how a week goes.

Ollie plays on, in the same chair, with the same headset. In the margin of page four there is a column of words in Nate's handwriting. They mean nothing to anybody else. By March they will mean nothing to Nate either. He has them anyway.

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**A note from us.** Knowing what your child uses is one thing, and being in the room is another. A week split between two homes makes both harder. One way is to sit at the same table while your child plays, and to ask what things are called. Say plainly which settings you have put on the device. What matters is that your child has heard you say it. It costs whatever else you would have done while they played.

**Where this comes from:** a study that followed American children in the middle grades through one school year. Where parents set more limits on how much and which media their children used, and talked with them about it, children used less media and less violent media, and those children later slept more, had better marks, and were more helpful and less aggressive. The links were small. Sitting at the same table and asking the names of things was not tested. Gentile and colleagues, 2014.

Families were followed over time, not tested: the order of events is clearer, the cause is not.

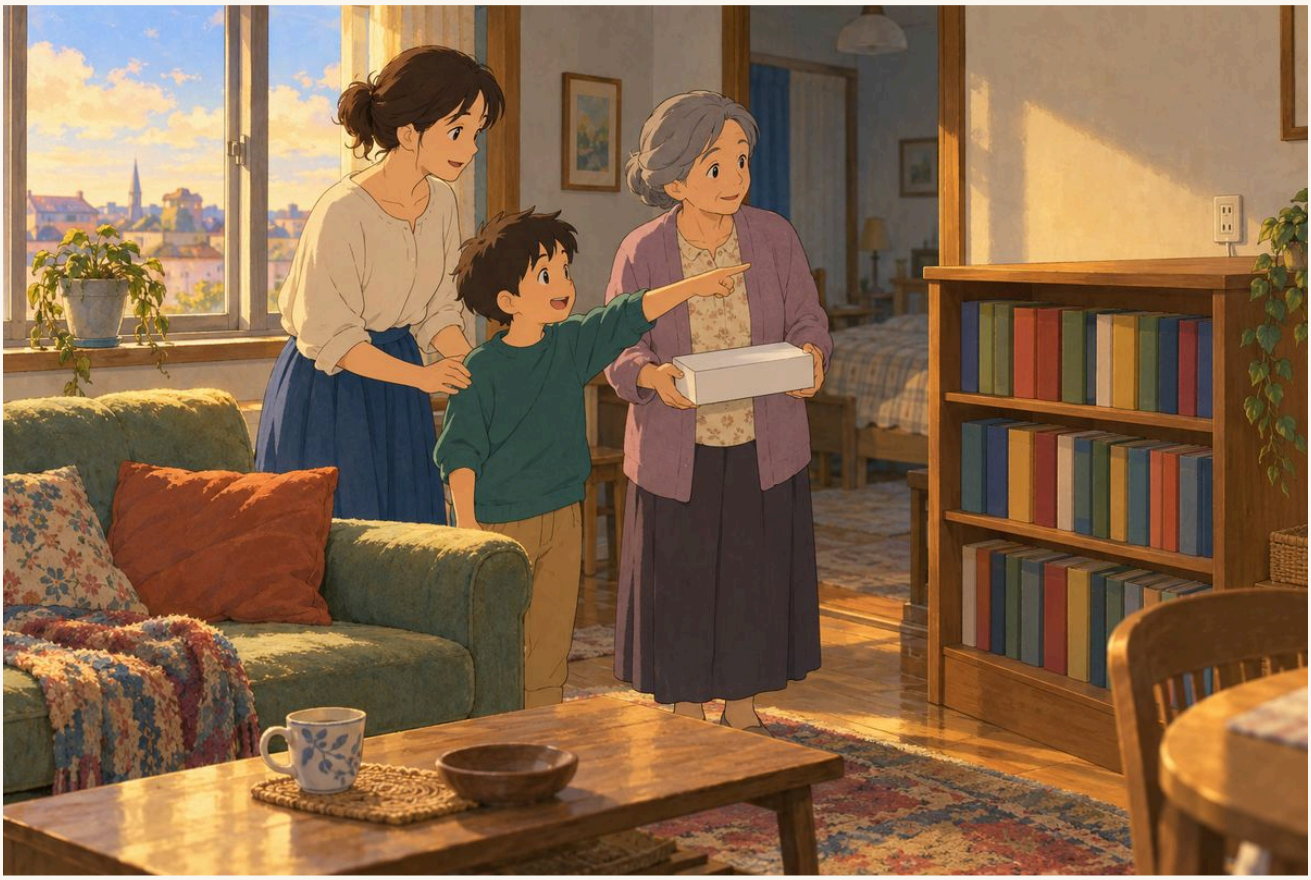
This does not tell you what you cannot see, or promise you will be told more.

**Not for everyone:** if your child also lives in another home with other settings, say only which are on in yours. Not for when you fear something real is happening to your child; that is a different situation, and talking with someone who can help comes first.

# Before It Goes On

**Helps with: Access without an adult**

Try 3 in the document “Six weeks, one step at a time” comes from this story.



Maja, this one reached you through what can be switched on without asking. Here is a story about Ema, whose home has a new tablet in it, still in its box.

Ema works nights at a care home on the Northside, some nights each week. On those nights her mother comes over and sleeps on the sofa, and Ema comes home in the morning on the first Four over the bridge. Her flat has one bedroom, which is her son's, and a living room with a kitchen along one wall, which is everyone's. Ema sleeps there too, on a bed that spends the day pretending to be a sofa. Her son is eleven.

For his birthday her mother gives him a tablet. It is the first device that has been his own, and it comes in a white box with a bow on it. Her mother has saved for it. Nobody in the flat is going to pretend this is a small thing.

He has the bow off before the cake is cut. His thumb is on the edge of the lid. And Ema, who has been thinking all morning that in a small flat every new thing has to be fitted in somewhere, says, "Before it goes on. Let's decide where it lives."

He looks at her as if she had said they should decide where the cake lives.

So they do it with the box still shut. They walk round the flat, the three of them. They look for a socket in a room the family shares. There is one behind the fridge, which is no good. There is one by the window, which belongs to the kettle. There is one by the bookshelf, half hidden by a plant that has been dying slowly for years and will not finish. They move the plant.

"Here," her son says. "It lives on top of the bookshelf, and it charges here."

He says it, not Ema. She agrees. Her mother agrees with her mouth full.

Then the box is opened, and setting the tablet up takes the rest of the evening. Most of the first-day excitement goes into passwords. Her son types them with one finger while the cake goes stale on the plate.

For a week the tablet lives on the bookshelf and charges by the place where the plant was. On Ema's night shifts she does not know where it is, and she does not ask her mother to keep an eye on it, because that was not part of what they decided. On the second Saturday it is on the sofa, under a cushion. On the Sunday it is back on the bookshelf, charging. Her son put it there, or her mother did, or it walked. Nobody says, and Ema does not ask.

The plant, moved to the windowsill, carries on dying slowly in its new place. Ema waters it on her way to bed, in the morning, with the Four going back over the bridge without her.

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**A note from us.** When a new tablet or console arrives, its place in the home tends to be settled in the first few days, usually by chance. One way is to decide with your child, before it is switched on for the first time, where it will live and where it charges, in a room the family shares. It costs a little of the first-day excitement.

**Where this comes from:** a survey of families with children from three to ten in Portugal, done in 2009 and 2010, where having game equipment in the home went with more time on games and computers, as the parents reported it; all of it measured at one moment. A questionnaire developed with parents of six- to ten-year-olds, which asks where the household's screens are and what the habits around them are, was checked for whether parents answer it the same way twice. Neither tested giving a device a fixed place in the home. Jago and colleagues, 2012; Klakk and colleagues, 2020.

A survey at one moment and a questionnaire checked twice, partly with children younger than yours: a link, not a test, and no practice was tried.

This says nothing about what your child would do with more or less within reach.

**Not for everyone:** not for a device your child needs for school or for health in their own room. Then it stays where it is needed.

Three D's: turn away, hang on, enjoy.

# The Moth

For about seven to ten, to read alone or together.

On Thursdays Gran comes for dinner, and Dora sets four plates instead of three. Dad makes rice with peppers, because Gran once said she liked it, years ago, and now it is what Thursday tastes like.

The little television on the kitchen counter is on, the way it always is at dinner. Dad likes to see the weather. The sound is low, and a man in a suit is pointing at a cloud.

Gran sits down, puts her bag on her knee and takes out a small brown notebook.

"I have a new one," she says. "Ready?"

Dora's little brother puts down his fork. He has not guessed one yet, but he always gets ready.

"The more you take, the more you leave behind. What am I?"

"Cake," says her brother.

"If you take cake, you leave less cake," says Dora.

"Not if it's a big cake."

Dora thinks about taking. She thinks about leaving. She looks down at the floor, at the muddy marks by the door where Dad came in from the rain.

"Footsteps," she says.

Gran turns the notebook round to show her. Footsteps, written in pencil.

"One more," says Gran. "This one is very old."

Dad leans in. "Say it again? I can't hear you over the cloud." He finds the remote among the plates and switches the television off, and the kitchen goes quiet except for the rice.

"I ate words," says Gran slowly. "I ate a whole song in the dark, and I did not get any cleverer. What am I?"

Nobody knows. Dad guesses a dog, because a dog once ate his homework. Dora's brother guesses a dragon. Dora guesses a bin. Gran shakes her head at all of them, pleased.

"A moth," she says. "A little one that lives in old books and eats the pages."

"Does that really happen?"

"Some tiny insects really do it. Old books sometimes have little holes in them, like a path."

Her brother looks at his reading book on the windowsill with new respect.

After dinner Dad washes up, and Dora dries. Halfway through a plate, Dad stops, wipes one hand on his jeans and takes his phone out of his back pocket.

"I missed the weather," he says, and looks. "Rain again tomorrow."

"More footsteps," says Dora.

On the fridge there is a pad for the shopping. Under milk and bread, Dora writes a riddle of her own for next Thursday. She covers it with a magnet shaped like a fish, so nobody can read the answer.

**Where this comes from:** about a thousand years ago, someone in England copied nearly a hundred riddles in Old English into a book now called the Exeter Book. It is still kept in Exeter, in England. One of its riddles is about a moth that eats words.

# The Fan

For about seven to ten, to read alone or together.

On Sunday the cousins come, which means the big table. The leaf in the middle has to be pulled out, which takes Mum's partner and a lot of words under his breath.

Filip is in charge of napkins. There are nine, white, the ones that live at the back of the drawer and smell of the drawer.

Last week, in a library book, he found a page of napkin shapes. Most of them looked impossible. One of them did not.

He lays the first napkin flat on the counter. He folds a strip along the bottom edge, the width of two fingers, and turns the napkin over. He folds again and turns it over, back and forth, until the whole napkin is pleats, like a paper fan. Then he folds the pleats in half and stands them in a glass. The top opens out.

It looks like a fan. It also looks a bit like a bird's tail, if the bird is very pleased with itself.

The baby, in her high chair, watches every fold.

By the time the doorbell goes, there are nine glasses, nine fans, and one that fell over and has been folded twice.

The cousins come in loud. In the front room the match is on, and two of the uncles go straight to it and stand in front of the sofa with their coats still on. At the table, when everyone is sitting, the tallest uncle keeps his phone by his plate, face up, for the score.

"Who made these?" says Aunt, holding up her fan.

"Filip," says Mum.

The tallest uncle looks up from the score. He pulls his fan out of the glass, and it comes undone all at once, a plain white square on his knee.

"Ah," he says. "Can you show me?"

So between the soup and the chicken, Filip shows him. Strip, turn, strip, turn. The uncle's big fingers make the pleats too wide, then too narrow. His phone buzzes twice by his plate. He glances at it, says "Two-one," to nobody, and goes back to his strip.

His fan, when it is done, leans to one side and has a pleat that goes the wrong way.

"It's a fan with a limp," he says.

"It's fine," says Filip, and it is.

After lunch the uncles go back to the match. Mum and her partner wash up. The cousins fight about a board game in the hall. Filip collects the napkins from the table to put in the wash.

Eight of them are crumpled. The ninth, the one with the limp, is folded up small and gone, and so is the tallest uncle's coat.

**Where this comes from:** in 1629, in Padua, in Italy, Mattia Giegher published *Li tre trattati*, three books in one: on carving, on serving a meal, and on folding napkins. The third shows how to fold napkins into shapes, among them animals.

# The Little House

For about seven to ten, to read alone or together.

Tea's dad works from home, which means his laptop lives everywhere. In the morning it is on the kitchen table, next to the cereal. At lunchtime it is on the sofa. Once, on a Tuesday, Tea found it on her own bed, open, asleep, with a sock on it.

"I had a call," said Dad. "Your room has the best light."

The phones are no better. Dad's phone turns up in the bathroom and the bread bin. Her brother's phone, which is old and was Dad's first, lives in his hoodie pocket, which is the one place nobody minds. The tablet is mostly under a cushion. Every evening somebody walks round the flat saying, "Has anyone seen the charger?"

On Saturday Tea finds a shoebox in the recycling. It is a good box, strong, with a lid.

She stands it on its side on the shelf in the hall, by the door. She cuts card to make two walls inside, so there are three rooms. She glues a bit of red felt on the floor of the two end rooms for a carpet. She makes a little sign with a pen and sticks it on the top: THE LITTLE HOUSE. Then she runs the charger cable in through a hole in the back, so it comes up through the floor of the middle room like a pipe.

The tablet goes in the left-hand room.

Dad comes out of the bathroom, looking for his phone. He finds it in his own pocket. Then he sees the box.

"What's this?"

"It's where they live," says Tea. "When they're not out."

Dad looks at it for a long time. Then he takes his phone out of his pocket and puts it in the middle room and plugs it in.

"Does it pay rent?"

"No," says Tea. "It's family."

Her brother, coming past with his hood up, puts his old phone in the right-hand room without a word, which for him is a speech.

In the morning, the three rooms are full.

The laptop is on the kitchen table again, open, next to the cereal. It is too big for any of the rooms. Tea looks at it, and then at the recycling, where there is a bigger box from Dad's new printer.

"That one," she says, "is going to need a garage."

**Where this comes from:** between about 1686 and 1710, Petronella Oortman, in Amsterdam, had a dolls' house made: a tall cabinet with rooms inside, and small things made for each room. It is now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

# The Cards

For about seven to ten, to read alone or together.

In Bruno's house there is one tablet for everybody, and it lives in the basket on the kitchen counter, next to the fruit. That is the idea, anyway.

On Monday it is not in the basket. On Tuesday it is not in the basket either. On Wednesday it turns up under the sofa cushion, flat, with a recipe for lentils still on the screen.

"Ah," says Mum. "That was me."

Bruno has three sisters, two older and one younger, and a mum and a dad. There is also a dog that is not allowed on the sofa and is always on the sofa. Things in his house go missing. The scissors. The big torch. The good umbrella. And the tablet, which goes missing most of all.

On Thursday after school Bruno's eldest sister takes him to the library, as usual, and he takes out two books. The woman at the desk stamps a card for each one with the day it is due back.

That evening Bruno cuts up a cereal box. He makes cards from the plain side, one for the tablet, one for the torch, one for the scissors, one for the good umbrella. On each card he writes the name of the thing at the top, and under it, three columns: WHO, WHAT FOR, BACK.

He tapes the tablet card to the basket.

The first one to borrow the tablet is Dad, for the football results. He reads the card, laughs, and writes DAD, SCORES, and then he stands there holding the pen. "Back when?"

"When you've finished," says Bruno.

Dad writes: SOON.

The second one is his eldest sister, who writes HOMEWORK, BEFORE DINNER. The third is the little one, who cannot write yet, so she draws a cat, which means the cat game.

By Saturday the tablet card is full and soft at the corners. The torch card has one line: MUM, DOG, BACK, with a tick. The good umbrella has been borrowed by Dad and written as BACK, but the umbrella itself is still on the bus.

Mum comes in from work and stands by the basket.

"Can I borrow my own phone back from my handbag?" she asks Bruno. "Or do I need a card?"

Bruno thinks about it.

"You can just take it," he says. "It's yours."

She takes the tablet card off the basket and looks at it, all the names, the drawn cat. Then she pins it to the fridge, where the school photos are, and Bruno starts a new one.

**Where this comes from:** in 1731, Benjamin Franklin and a group of friends in Philadelphia started the Library Company of Philadelphia, so that members could share books and borrow them. It is still there today.

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