WHEN LIFE BECOMES TOO HEAVY

A Structural Capacity Self-Assessment for Couples and Families

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Structural Capacity Framework

STOP • POSTPONE • SIMPLIFY • SHARE • GET HELP • RESTORE

When life becomes too heavy, our instinct is often to try harder. But if a marriage or family is already carrying more than the people inside it can sustainably manage, trying harder can consume even more of the capacity that remains.

This exercise asks a different question: What could change about what we are carrying? Work through all six areas. The examples are there to help you notice demands that may have become so normal that you no longer think of them as load. Not every example will apply to you, and you will probably identify others that are unique to your family.

Load is everything your marriage and family are being required to absorb, coordinate, or carry. **Capacity** is how much you can actually carry under present conditions while continuing to function and maintain connection. **Margin** is what remains after current demands draw on that capacity.

The goal is not to build a perfectly efficient household. The goal is to create enough capacity for the people and relationships within the family to function, recover, and connect.

Use this worksheet slowly. Circle, underline, or highlight examples that sound like your life, then write your own assessment beneath each section.

1. STOP

What doesn't actually need to be carried?

Examples to consider

Optional commitments, unnecessary social obligations, volunteering for a season, activities nobody really enjoys anymore, perfectionistic housekeeping standards, hosting, unnecessary travel, projects undertaken from guilt, habitual favors for extended family, or maintaining traditions simply because "we always do it."

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What are we carrying that may no longer need to be carried?

_____

_____

_____

What could we stop for this season?

_____

_____

2. POSTPONE

What matters, but doesn't have to happen now?

Postponing isn't abandoning something. Sometimes it is simply saying, "This is a good thing in the wrong season."

> **Examples to consider**
>
> Renovations, major purchases, career changes that aren't urgent, elaborate holidays, nonessential home projects, additional children's activities, entertaining, ambitious fitness goals, elective projects, starting a business, further study, or decisions that can safely wait until the family has more capacity.

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What matters to us, but could safely wait?

_____

_____

_____

What could we postpone until we have more capacity?

_____

_____

3. SIMPLIFY

What still needs doing, but could require less of us?

A surprising amount of family load comes not from what must be done but from the standard at which we've decided it must be done.

Examples to consider

Easier meals, grocery delivery, fewer children's activities, simpler birthdays and holidays, less elaborate Christmas expectations, automated bills, consolidated errands, lower housekeeping standards for a season, repeating meals, buying rather than making something, saying no to unnecessary meetings, shortening visits, reducing travel, or choosing "good enough" instead of optimal.

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What still needs to happen, but could be done more simply?

Where are our standards adding load that we could reduce?

4. SHARE

What is one person carrying that doesn't have to belong to that person alone?

The question isn't necessarily "Is this 50/50?" but "Does the distribution still make sense given each person's present capacity?"

Examples to consider

Cooking, school runs, bedtime, laundry, appointments, finances, communication with extended family, caring for aging parents, emotional labor, planning holidays, children's activities, shopping, household administration, dealing with tradespeople, remembering birthdays, or being the person who notices everything that needs doing.

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What is one person carrying that could be shared differently?

_____

_____

_____

Given our present capacities, what distribution would make more sense?

_____

_____

5. GET HELP

What shouldn't the couple be trying to carry alone?

Examples to consider

Childcare, respite care, cleaning, meals, gardening, transportation, tutoring, disability support, elder care, financial advice, medical treatment, mental-health care, pastoral or community support, marriage counseling, help from grandparents or friends, workplace flexibility, government or community services, or simply telling trusted people, "We're having a difficult season and could use some help."

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What are we trying to carry entirely inside our household that could be supported from outside it?

Who or what could realistically help?

What is one request for help we could make this week?

6. RESTORE

What replenishes capacity that has already been depleted?

Reducing load and restoring capacity are not the same thing. Taking two children's activities off the calendar reduces load. Getting several nights of adequate sleep may restore capacity. A couple may need both.

Examples to consider

Sleep. Exercise. Medical care. Nutrition. Time alone. Time together. Friendship. Prayer and worship for people of faith. Recreation. Sex and affection when mutually wanted. Quiet. Time outdoors. A day without obligations. Whatever genuinely restores rather than becoming another self-improvement assignment.

Circle, underline, or highlight anything that sounds like your life. Add what is missing.

What genuinely restores each of us?

_____

_____

_____

What has been missing that we need to restore?

_____

_____

What is one realistic restoration step we can protect this week?

_____

_____

NOW LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE

Don't try to change everything you identified. The purpose of this exercise is to see your situation more clearly and identify a few changes that could make a meaningful difference.

The three things consuming the most capacity in our life right now are:

_____
_____
_____

The changes most likely to reduce our load are:

_____
_____

The things most likely to restore some of our capacity are:

_____
_____

The help we need but have not been asking for is:

_____
_____

WHAT ABOUT US?

Creating margin is not the same thing as creating connection. Reducing load may give a couple more room, but the couple still has to decide what they want to do with that room.

If we recovered some capacity, what would we like to have more room for in our marriage? Conversation? Affection? Sex? Friendship? Fun? Resting together? Shared interests? Spiritual life? Time without children? Dating? Simply enjoying one another again?

_____
_____

What is one change we can make now that would make our life a little more sustainable and give our relationship a little more room to breathe?

_____
_____

When life becomes too heavy, don't immediately ask how you can try harder. Look at the whole load, not just the problem that finally got your attention.

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