The 4-Step Agreement

For Level 1 and Level 2 people sharing a home: partners, parents and adult children

1 Be the peace you wish to see in your relationships

Each of us agrees to:

- Take responsibility for my own emotions and nervous system, in ways that aren't destructive, and not make the other person responsible for my feelings.
- Not give advice or instructions unless they're asked for.
- Put safety first, and do my part to keep our home safe.

What often helps (choose what works for you):

Level 1 person: daily-discipline tools

Diet, sleep, exercise, meditation, lists and routines. Supportive Level 1 people. Mental health services (therapy, medication). Replacing harmful habits or addictions with safer, harm-reduction options.

Level 2 person: minimal-effort tools

Changes to your living or work environment. Supportive people who understand Level 2. Mental health services (medication, therapy). Treatments for treatment-resistant depression if needed (such as EMDR, somatic release, TMS or VNS), with a qualified provider. Replacing harmful habits or addictions with safer, harm-reduction options. A realistic survival plan, made with someone you trust, in case you ever need to live away from home.

2 See each other clearly and objectively, without judgment

We agree to these shifts in understanding:

- **A Level 1 nervous system:** emotions usually stay within a manageable range, so feelings and behavior can usually be handled through reasoning, pushing through and discipline. That's why daily-discipline tools tend to work.
- **A Level 2 nervous system:** emotions swing much wider and often go beyond a manageable range, so more often than not they can't be handled through reasoning, pushing through or discipline alone. That's why tools and treatments that don't depend on daily discipline are needed.
- **One nervous system, two people:** people steady each other to some degree. Usually the calmer Level 1 nervous system helps steady the Level 2 nervous system through a calm presence and practical help. Think of it as one nervous system shared by two people: considering the other person's stability helps your own.
- **Labels are a choice:** for the Level 2 person, understanding mental health frameworks (such as autism, ADHD or BPD) may be necessary, even life-saving. For the Level 1 person, that language may not be needed or useful. We each accept the other's choice.

3 Communicate from the peace

- Use Steps 1 and 2 at least 80% of the time when we talk and interact (the Gottman 80/20 rule: about 5 positive moments for every negative one).
- Speak honestly, from a place of peace, and keep seeing each other without judgment, criticism or opinion.
- When needed, set a regular day and time for short, respectful check-ins. When we disagree, we use needs-based language, such as Nonviolent Communication (Marshall Rosenberg). When we strongly disagree, we bring it to an outside mediator, coach or therapist we both feel comfortable with.

OPTIONAL: use only if you both want it **Sensitivity board.** Especially helpful for a Level 2 nervous system, where sudden, intense emotions can stay hidden by alexithymia (difficulty noticing your own feelings) until they explode. Each person may move a magnet on a simple scale: 🟢 **Green:** a good time to talk 🟡 **Yellow:** go gently, or ask first 🔴 **Red:** please wait for our check-in or until it's lower. Check it before raising something hard. If it stays red for days, that's a sign to reach out for support, not a reason to avoid every concern. The board is information, not a promise, and safety concerns never wait.

4 Set a boundary when you need one

A boundary is a **safe action you take to meet your own need.** It is not a request for the other person to change. Use it only after you've brought your concern to their attention several times using these steps and still can't live with a specific behavior.

> *"I love you and I respect you. The specific behavior of* _____ [the facts]*, which we've talked about several times, no longer works for me, because I need* _____ [respect, understanding, autonomy, safety…]*. So the next time it happens, I will* _____ [the action you'll take]*."*

Agreed: _____ Agreed: _____ Date: _____