

Navigating Relationships with Very Different Opinions

Exploring Rupture–Repair in Close Relationships Facing
Recurring Lifestyle and Value Conflicts

Part 2: Documentation & Reflection

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MA Research Thesis

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We Have Issues: Between Rupture & Repair

This section documents the prototyping and development process of the design thesis project *Navigating Relationships with Very Different Opinions: Exploring Rupture–Repair in Close Relationships Facing Recurring Lifestyle and Value Conflicts*. It focuses on how the project moved from early conversation infrastructure into increasingly specific rupture-and-repair tools, and reflects on what the iterative process revealed about designing for emotionally loaded relational situations.

Part 2 is intended to complement Part 1 of the thesis by documenting the prototyping phase, discussing the outcomes of practical implementation, and reflecting on the impact, limits, and learning generated through the design process.

Note on testing, ethics, and anonymity

Because this project deals with intimate conflict, emotional vulnerability, and close relationships, prototype testing had to be handled with particular care. Friends who tested the tools either tried them with their romantic partners, families, or with close friends in their own private settings. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, testers did not consent to sharing personal information or copies of their written entries, and no identifying details are included in this documentation. They were, however, comfortable with anonymous quotations from their verbal feedback being included here.

This means the documentation focuses on the tools, the contexts of use, the patterns in feedback, and the design changes that emerged from testing, rather than on participants' personal stories. This was important not only ethically, but also methodologically: protecting privacy was necessary in order to receive honest feedback on tools intended for delicate, real-life relational moments.

Framing the design process

The broader thesis asked how lightweight, reusable tools could support people in ongoing close relationships as they navigate recurring lifestyle- and value-based conflicts across the rupture–repair cycle, while protecting both connection and self-respect. Field research and literature showed a recurring gap between abstract advice such as “communicate better,” “set boundaries,” or “repair after conflict,” and the lack of practical, small-scale supports people can actually use in everyday life.

The design process therefore focused on creating tangible tools that could scaffold different phases of the rupture–repair cycle. Rather than trying to produce one universal solution, the project evolved through a

modular ecosystem: early conversation and method cards, more focused card-based and sheet-based toolkit iterations, an unsuccessful attempt to gamify the process through a TRPG direction, and finally a journal-based version that brought the tools together into a softer, more coherent format called *We Have Issues: Between Rupture & Repair*.

Conversation & method cards

The first prototype family functioned as navigation infrastructure: a set of Conversation Cards and Method Cards designed to help people initiate difficult discussions, listen more intentionally, reset tense interactions, and move through disagreement with more structure. These prototypes responded directly to research findings showing that people often avoided difficult conversations, escalated quickly once they began, or simply lacked language and structure for staying in dialogue when value differences became emotionally charged.

The Conversation Cards were organised around themes such as foundations, experiences, listening, respect, boundaries, disagreement, curiosity, and moving forward, and to scope, the example of religious disagreements was taken. The Method Cards translated high-level communication advice into short, usable actions such as taking turns summarising, pausing for breath, reframing blame into observation, identifying one's goal for a conversation, or agreeing to a temporary timeout.

Initial feedback suggested that these cards were useful as entry points because they reduced the pressure of "having the whole conversation correctly." Testers described them as helpful when they wanted a way into a difficult topic without immediately becoming defensive. One participant noted that "the cards made it easier to start, because I didn't have to invent the right words from scratch." Another said that "it felt less like confronting someone and more like being guided through something together." These reactions supported the idea that small prompts could lower the threshold for engagement, especially in relationships where people cared about each other but had become cautious around recurring differences.

At the same time, the cards remained relatively broad. They created a conversational framework, but they did not yet sufficiently differentiate between the phases of rupture, pause, regulation, repair, and longer-term reflection. In testing and reflection, this limitation became increasingly visible: people did not only need prompts for talking, they needed tools tailored to *when* in the cycle they were and *what kind of support* they needed at that moment. This insight led to the next, more specific prototype layers.

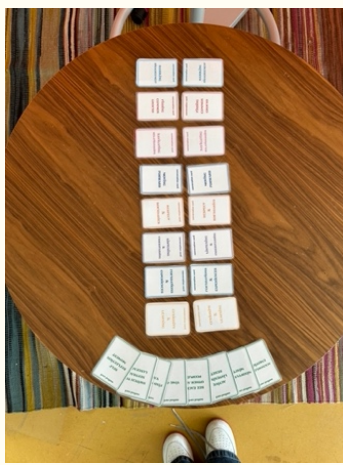
conversation card FOUNDATIONS & EXPERIENCES	conversation card LISTENING & UNDERSTANDING	conversation card RESPECT & BOUNDARIES	conversation card HANDLING DISAGREEMENT
conversation card FINDING COMMON GROUND	conversation card CURIOSITY & LEARNING	conversation card NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS	conversation card MOVING FORWARD

what is one experience that shaped your core beliefs about religion or spirituality?	what's something you wish people with different beliefs would ask you about your faith (or lack thereof)?	what does respect look like to you when discussing deeply held beliefs?	how do you feel when someone strongly disagrees with your beliefs? what helps you stay open in those moments?
when did you first realize your views were different from those of people close to you?	can you share a religious practice or tradition that is meaningful to you, and why?	are there any topics or phrases that feel off-limits or disrespectful to you in these conversations? how can we avoid crossing those lines?	can you recall a time when a disagreement about religion led to better understanding or growth? what made that possible?

what values do you think we might share, even if our beliefs are different?	what's one question you've always wanted to ask someone with a different religious perspective?	how do you balance staying true to your beliefs while being open to others' perspectives?	how can we support each other in having honest, respectful conversations about our differences?
is there a story, teaching, or value from your background that you think could resonate with anyone, regardless of belief?	what's something you admire or find interesting about a belief system other than your own?	what's one thing you wish more people understood about navigating relationships with different beliefs?	what would make you feel safe and valued in this conversation, even if we never agree?

method card ACTIVE LISTENING RESET	method card ACKNOWLEDGE EMOTIONS	method card SWITCH TO NEUTRAL LANGUAGE	method card SELF REFLECTION MOMENT
method card SEE EACH OTHER AS PEOPLE	method card MINDFULNESS MINUTE	method card TIME OUT	method card FIND SHARED VALUES

take turns summarizing what the other person just said, using your own words. no debating-just show you understand.	pause to name the feelings in the room. say something like, "i notice we're both feeling strongly about this, and that's okay."	if the conversation feels heated, focus on using neutral words. try, "let's step back and talk about what matters most to us right now."	each person silently considers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "what is my goal in this conversation?" "am i listening to understand?" share your answer if you feel comfortable.
remind yourselves: "we're not opponents- we're two people trying to understand each other."	pause for one minute of silence. focus on your breath and let thoughts pass without judgment.	anyone can call a "time-out." take a 5-10 minute break, then return when you're both ready.	shift focus: "what's something we both care about, even if we see it differently?" discuss your answers.



Card-based rupture & repair toolkit

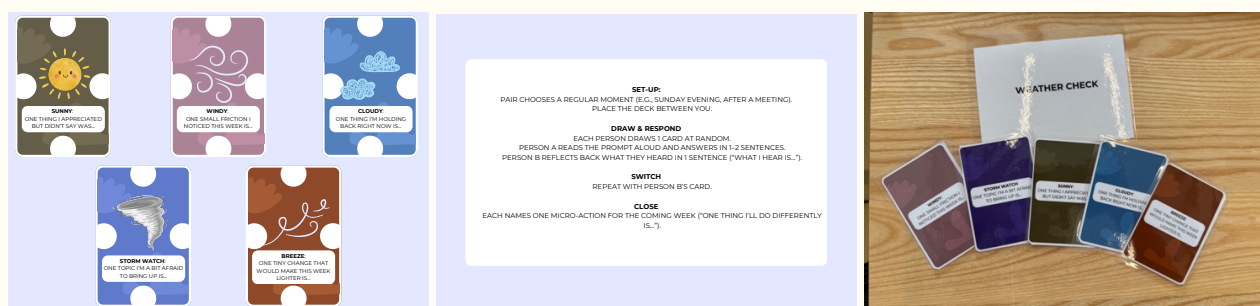
The next stage translated the broader infrastructure into a more focused **card-based rupture & repair toolkit**. This toolkit consisted of **Weather Check**, **The Pause**, **Two-Path “Regulate First”**, **PACER**, and **Staying or Stepping Back?** These prototypes retained the portability and low-threshold quality of cards, but each one addressed a more distinct phase or task in the rupture–repair cycle.

Weather Check

Weather Check used a weather metaphor to invite small, low-stakes relational check-ins before tension became a rupture. The tone was intentionally softer and slightly humorous, offering prompts framed more like emotional weather reports than conflict intervention.

Feedback on this tool was especially clear. Testers liked the softness and humour of the weather metaphor because it felt less threatening than a direct invitation such as “let’s talk about our relationship.” One person commented that it “felt gentle enough to actually leave out on the table,” while another said that it “opened the door without making it feel like something was already wrong.” Testers also found that it worked best when the prompts stayed very small and concrete, such as one appreciation and one friction; if it became too expansive, it quickly turned into a heavy conversation.

This feedback clarified an important design principle: early-signal tools should not try to do repair work too early. Their value lies in making small tensions visible in a light-touch way. The visibility of the deck in shared domestic space also mattered, suggesting that some tools work partly as ambient reminders rather than only as active exercises.



The Pause

The Pause was designed to normalise pausing as an act of care rather than abandonment. It combined a card with a shared script and, in some versions, a physical token to signal the need for a break.

Testers responded positively to the idea of a shared pause language. Several said it felt more caring and less ambiguous than simply walking away mid-conflict. One tester explained that “having words for the pause made it feel like a relationship move, not a punishment,” and another said that the token reduced the secondary argument about whether someone was “allowed” to stop the conversation.

The main limitation was trust. If one person regularly called a pause but did not return, the tool could quickly start to feel like avoidance rather than care. This showed that the pause mechanism could not stand alone; it had to be paired with explicit commitments about returning and with regulation support during the break.



Two-Path “Regulate First”

Two-Path “Regulate First” responded to the observation that “taking space” means very different things for different nervous-system states. Instead of generic advice to calm down, it distinguished between

feeling overwhelmed and feeling shut down, and suggested more concrete, body-based actions for each pathway.

Users appreciated this differentiation. Many recognised themselves clearly in one path or the other, and several noted that body-based suggestions felt more helpful than abstract emotional advice. One tester said, "I knew immediately which side was me," while another noted that "it helped because the actions were specific enough to actually do." Some users wanted room to add their own actions, which suggested that future versions should be semi-blank and more customizable.

This prototype marked an important shift in the project: from communication as primarily verbal skill to conflict navigation as embodied, relational, and state-dependent. It also showed that regulation tools benefit from being concise and actionable rather than interpretive.



PACER

PACER offered a structured sequence for a repair conversation: Pause, Accountability, Collaboration, Experiment, and Reset. It functioned like a card-based conversational path, helping people know where they were in the process and what kind of contribution was needed at each step.

Testers found the structure reassuring. They liked knowing “where we are” in the conversation, and several responded especially well to the “Experiment” step, because it shifted the discussion from apology alone toward one small, testable change. One tester said, “The experiment part made it feel like we were trying something, not just circling the same apology.” Another said that the sequence kept the repair talk from becoming vague or repetitive.

At the same time, some found all five steps too long for minor issues and naturally shortened the sequence in practice. This suggested that *PACER* was stronger as a flexible scaffold than as a rigid formula. It also pointed toward a later preference for lighter, more integrated formats that preserved the logic of repair without always requiring a card-by-card process.

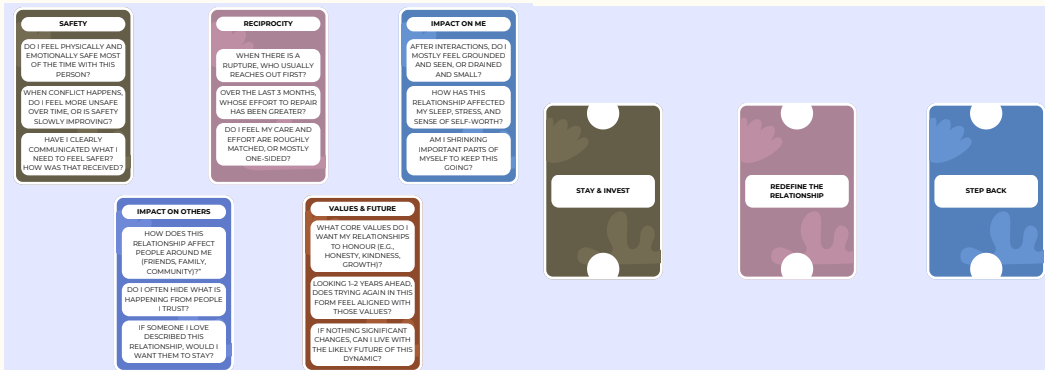


Staying or Stepping Back?

The final part of the card-based toolkit, *Staying or Stepping Back?*, addressed a phase often ignored by communication tools: discernment. Instead of assuming that all conflict should end in reconnection, these cards helped users think through safety, reciprocity, personal impact, and whether to stay, redefine the relationship, or step back.

Users found it relieving that “redefine the relationship” appeared as a named option between staying exactly as things were and fully cutting someone off. The cards helped separate safety and reciprocity from guilt or obligation. One tester said that “seeing ‘redefine’ written down made me realise there are more options than just endure it or end it.” Another noted that the cards would be especially useful alongside additional support from a therapist or trusted friend in very heavy situations.

This tool expanded the ethical range of the project. It reinforced that the toolkit should not implicitly promise that all relationships can or should be repaired. Instead, it should support clearer, more dignified decisions across a spectrum of outcomes.



SET-UP
CHOOSE ONE RELATIONSHIP OR RECURRING CONFLICT PATTERN YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT AND WRITE A SHORT TITLE ON THE TOP OF A SHEET (E.G., "ME & X - ONGOING POLITICAL FIGHTS").

THEME CARDS
GO THROUGH THE CARDS ONE BY ONE (SAFETY-RECIPROCITY-IMPACT ON ME-IMPACT ON OTHERS-VALUES & FUTURE).

FOR EACH CARD, READ THE QUESTIONS AND JOT A FEW BULLETS IN RESPONSE (E.G., "DO I FEEL EMOTIONALLY SAFE MOST OF THE TIME?", "IS EFFORT ROUGHLY SHARED?").

MINI-SYNTHESIS
AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SHEET, ANSWER TWO PROMPTS:
"THREE THINGS I AM LEARNING ABOUT THIS RELATIONSHIP."
"ONE OR TWO NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITIONS/BOUNDARIES I WOULD NEED FOR STAYING ENGAGED."

ACTION-DIRECTION CARD
LAY OUT THE THREE DIRECTION CARDS ("STAY & INVEST", "REDEFINE THE RELATIONSHIP", "STEP BACK") AND CHOOSE THE ONE THAT BEST MATCHES WHAT THEIR NOTES POINT TOWARD, KNOWING IT IS PROVISIONAL RATHER THAN FINAL.

ON THE SHEET, WRITE: "IF I HONOUR THIS DIRECTION FOR THE NEXT 3 MONTHS, WHAT WOULD THAT CONCRETELY LOOK LIKE?" (E.G., SPECIFIC BOUNDARIES, SEEKING SUPPORT, REDUCING CONTACT).



Sheet-based rupture & repair toolkit

Alongside and after the card-based prototypes, the project also developed a more structured **sheet-based rupture & repair toolkit**. This toolkit consisted of **Rate Your Tension**, **Rupture Mapping Placemat**, **Gentle Time-Out Contract Sheet**, **Repair Script for Asymmetry**, and **“What This Taught Us” Micro-Journal**. Compared with the cards, these prototypes asked for slightly more time and intention, but offered greater depth, clearer writing space, and more visible documentation of a process.

Rate Your Tension

Rate Your Tension externalised invisible tension through a visual scale across recurring topics such as money, boundaries, shared tasks, or politics. It functioned best not as a conflict tool in the middle of a fight, but as a preventative check-in before conflict escalated.

Users often found the sheet surprisingly revealing. Seeing different scores next to the same topic made background tension visible in a concrete way. One tester said, “I didn’t realise that topic had already become that charged for them,” while another described it as “helpful because it showed we weren’t in the same place at all.”

However, the tool could also trigger defensiveness if used too late, especially in the middle of active conflict. Several testers wanted to customise the listed topics, which pointed to the value of flexibility and adaptation to specific relationships. The feedback made clear that the sheet worked best as an early-warning tool rather than as a repair mechanism.

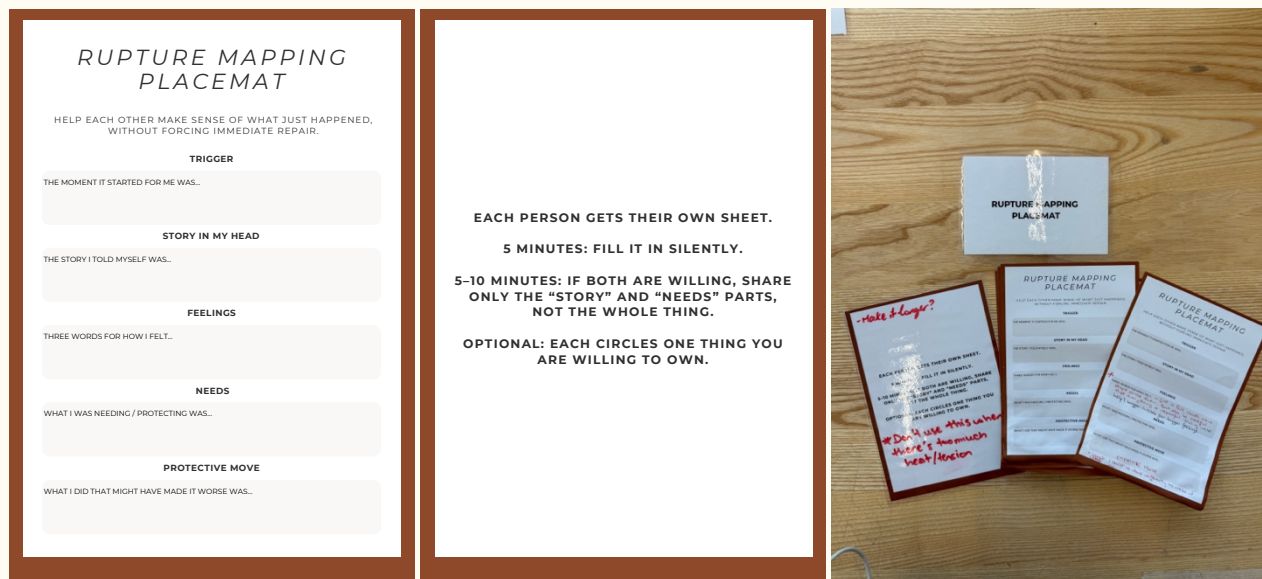


Rupture Mapping Placemat

The *Rupture Mapping Placemat* helped people place the conflict “outside of themselves” by mapping triggers, story, feelings, needs, and protective moves on paper. This externalisation was one of its strongest qualities.

Testers appreciated how the sheet slowed them down and reduced reactivity. One person noted that “having it on paper stopped the story from just spinning in my head,” and another said that it made the conflict feel “less like me versus you and more like something we could look at.” The most effective use happened when both people were willing to own at least one protective move that had made the situation worse.

The main constraint was timing. When people were highly activated, the sheet felt too demanding. This showed that mapping is not a heat-of-the-moment tool; it belongs in a slightly cooled-down phase, after enough regulation has happened for reflection to be possible.

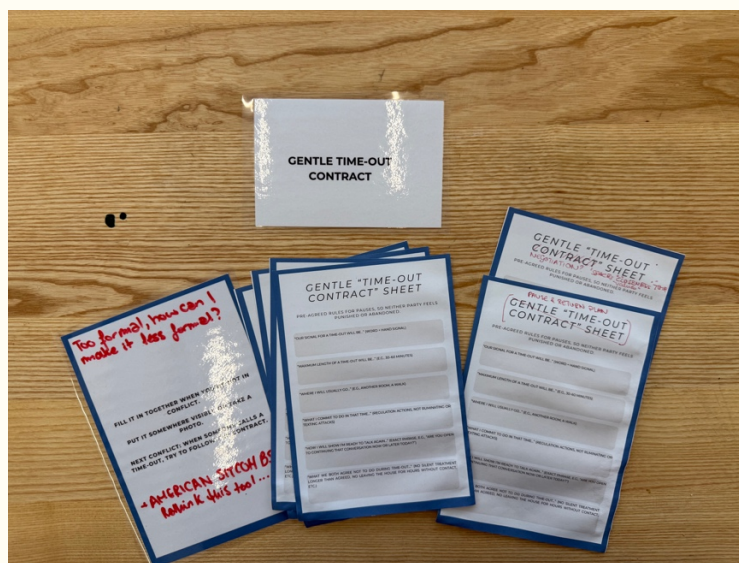
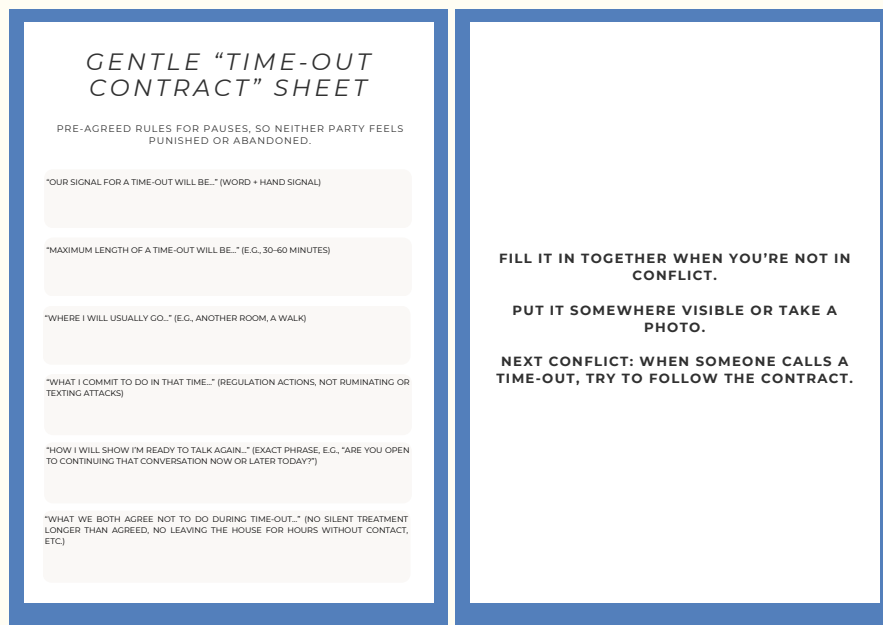


Gentle Time-Out Contract Sheet

The *Gentle Time-Out Contract Sheet* took the logic of *The Pause* and translated it into a more explicit written agreement. It asked users to define signals, maximum duration, what they would do during the pause, how they would return, and what they agreed not to do.

Testers said that writing these agreements down in advance reduced anxiety around calling a break. Couples especially appreciated agreeing on “what we will not do,” such as not rehashing the fight with third parties or disappearing without contact. One tester described the sheet as “reassuring because we had already decided the rules before we were upset.”

At the same time, some participants experienced it as too formal, especially in relationships where goodwill was already low or fragile. This tension was important: clarity and explicitness can feel containing in one context and bureaucratic in another. The sheet therefore clarified that some users prefer a formalised co-created pause plan, while others need a softer or more minimal version.

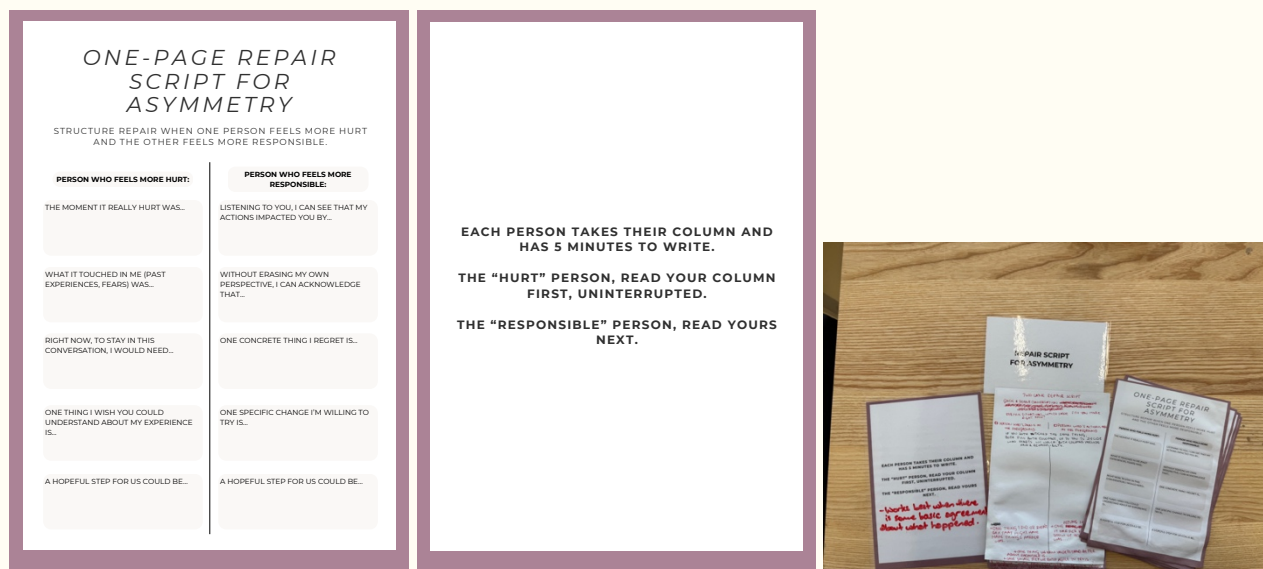


Repair Script for Asymmetry

The *Repair Script for Asymmetry* responded to a crucial insight from both research and testing: not all conflicts are symmetrical. Sometimes one person feels more hurt, while the other feels more responsible, and equalising the situation too quickly can erase important differences in experience and accountability.

Users appreciated having differentiated scripts rather than pretending each side had the same role. Several described the reading-aloud format as powerful because it created a sense of ceremony and slowness. One tester said, "It felt intense, but in a good way, because it stopped us from interrupting." Another noted that "it was the first time a tool acknowledged that we were not in the same place in the conflict."

Still, the intensity of the format also limited when and how it could be used. Some found it moving; others found it almost too ceremonial. It also worked best when there was at least some basic agreement about what had happened. Where reality itself was highly contested, the script could not carry the full weight of the conflict. This pointed toward the need for careful framing, clear conditions of use, and a softer overall system that did not rely on one emotionally heavy tool to do too much. For one of the testing couples, having a column for the person who was more hurt and another for the one who was more responsible actually caused more issues, and made things more heated as both parties felt hurt.

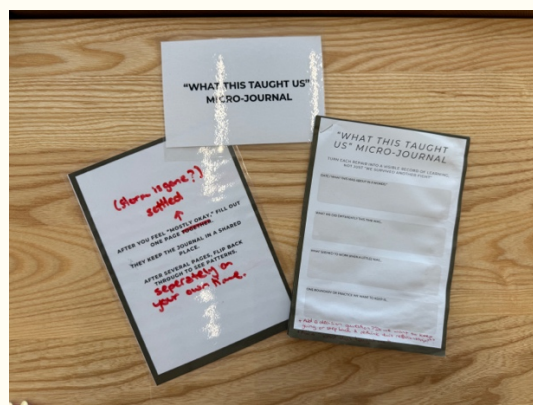
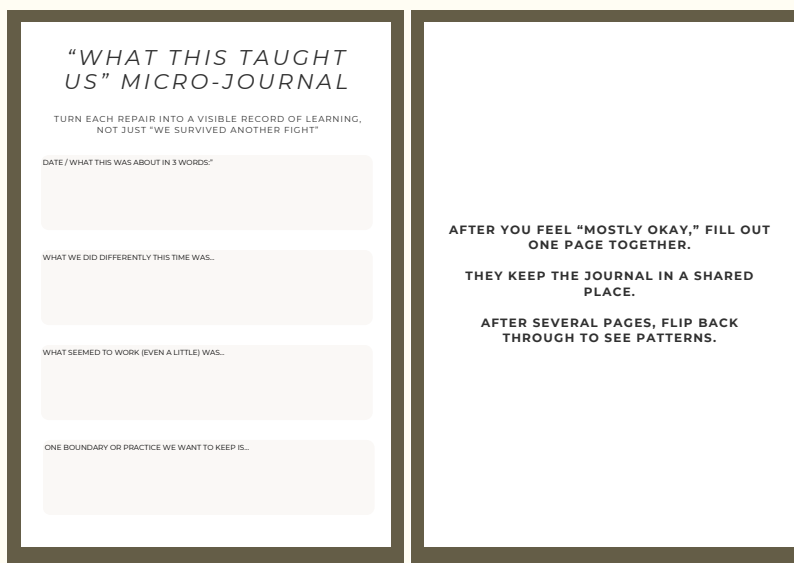


“What This Taught Us” Micro-Journal

The “What This Taught Us” Micro-Journal became one of the most promising sheet-based directions. Rather than focusing on a single rupture alone, it turned repair into a visible learning process over time.

People liked its small size and manageable format. One page per incident felt possible, even for users who would never fill in a long workbook. Looking back across multiple pages made change, or the lack of change, newly visible. Some testers experienced this as encouraging relief; others as a difficult but useful confrontation with patterns. One participant reflected that “it helped me realise we were learning, even if we weren’t suddenly perfect,” while another observed that “seeing several pages together made it obvious what keeps repeating.”

This prototype introduced a different tone into the toolkit: less procedural, less corrective, and more reflective. That tonal shift turned out to be highly significant in the final stages of the project.

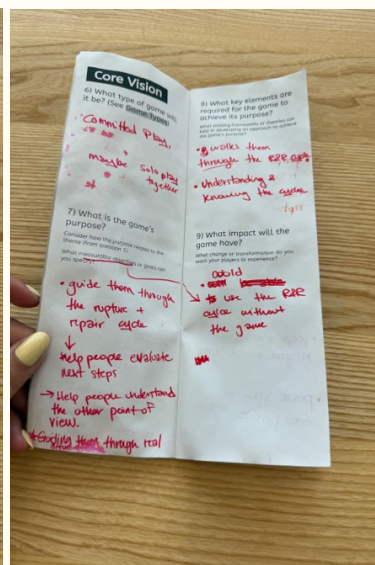
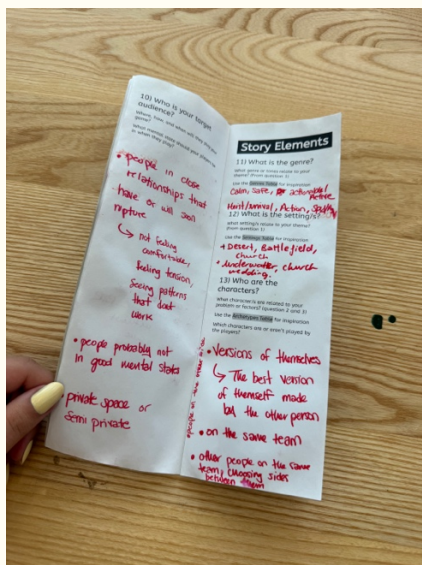


TRPG attempt

At one point, with the help of my colleague Sylvan McGowan, the project briefly explored a tabletop role-playing game (TRPG) direction as a way to gamify the rupture–repair process. This emerged from an interest in whether conflict navigation could become more approachable through play, character, scenario, and game logic. Experimenting in this phase showed attempts to frame users as “versions of themselves,” to consider the game’s purpose as guiding players through the rupture and repair cycle, and to imagine a shared structure for moving through conflict as if on the same team.

This direction was intellectually interesting, but in practice it did not work well enough for the project’s aims. The emotional stakes of real relational rupture made the game framing feel mismatched. While role-play can create distance and experimentation, here it also risked trivialising real pain, overcomplicating the use context, and demanding too much cognitive and emotional setup from people who were already stressed. The idea of “gamifying” conflict was more compelling in theory than in actual relational situations.

I learned through this reflective process that the more emotionally charged the situation, the less people would seem to want a layered fictional frame. What people would need was not a game-world abstraction, but a tool that feels calm, soft, dignified, and easy to pick up in ordinary life. The TRPG exploration was therefore valuable not because it succeeded, but because it showed a boundary for the project. It clarified that the most promising use of “play” in this context was not role-play mechanics, but lightness, softness, ritual, and gentle structure. In simple terms, if one would be in a rupture and be offered to play a game, they probably wouldn’t be accepting of that.



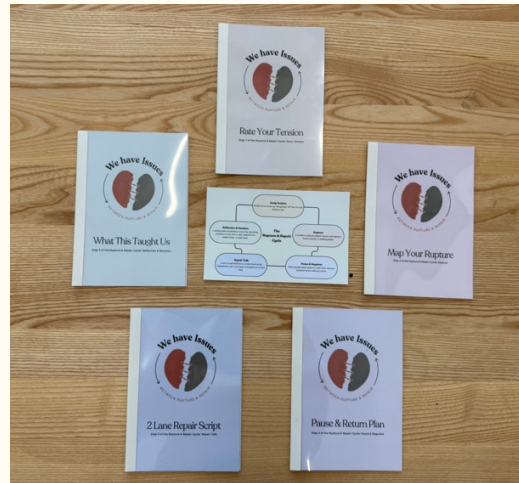
Final Toolkit: We Have Issues – Between Rupture & Repair

The final design outcome of the project was a modular paper-based journal toolkit titled *We Have Issues — Between Rupture & Repair*. Rather than offering one single conversation format, the toolkit was designed as a set of lightweight journals that support five recurring phases in close-relationship conflict: early tension, rupture, pause and regulation, repair conversation, and reflection/decision. The modular structure responds directly to the research finding that recurring conflict rarely unfolds as one clean conversation; instead, people move in and out of different states of tension, reactivity, distance, and attempted repair over time.

The toolkit is intentionally low-threshold. It consists of small paper booklets that can be used together or separately, depending on what a relationship can currently hold. This was an important shift from earlier iterations. Instead of expecting users to commit to a large system all at once, the final version lets them begin with one concrete entry point, such as noticing tension early, pausing more safely, or reflecting after a difficult conversation.

The finished toolkit includes the general instructions on back of the box, the rupture & repair cycle card, and five individual journals, one for each phase in the cycle. The instructions frame the toolkit as appropriate for situations where basic physical and emotional safety is present, and makes clear that it is not intended for ongoing abuse or serious safety risk. It also introduces the overall logic of the system and invites users to adapt the language, respect “no-go” moments, and use the tools either together or alone.





General Instructions

The general instructions position the toolkit as a simple paper system to support people through five recurring phases of conflict in close relationships. Importantly, they emphasise that users do not need to follow every step every time and may choose only the journal that feels approachable in the moment. This flexibility reflects one of the strongest learnings of the prototyping process: people are more likely to engage with relational tools when they feel invited rather than managed.

The instructions also establish ethical and practical boundaries for use. They explicitly note that the toolkit is intended for contexts where basic emotional and physical safety are present, and that outside support is needed when there is ongoing abuse or serious safety concern. They encourage small beginnings, real examples, adaptable language, and the possibility of solo use when someone wants to make sense of their own experience before entering a shared conversation.

General Instructions

This toolkit offers simple paper journals to support people through five recurring phases of conflict in close relationships: early tension, rupture, pause, repair conversation, and reflection. You can use one journal or several, in any order that fits your situation.

Keep safety in mind. These tools are for situations where basic physical and emotional safety is present. If there is ongoing abuse or serious safety concern, outside support is needed.

If you or someone you know's safety is at risk, please reach out for support immediately. You are not alone, and help is available. [143.ch](https://www.143.ch) offers support in Switzerland from 6 to 11 pm, anonymously, it's personal and confidential.

When to use it

- When you notice ongoing tension in a close relationship.
- After a recent argument or rupture that still feels "in the air."
- When you want to press pause more safely instead of exploding or shutting down.
- When both people are at least somewhat willing to understand and repair, even if things still feel raw.

How to approach it together

- Start small. Choose one sheet that feels approachable today; you can always add more later.
- Use real examples. The toolkit works best when you think of an actual situation rather than speaking in general.
- Respect no-go's. Anyone can say "not now" or "this feels too much," and you can pause and return later.
- Adapt the words. You are invited to cross out language that doesn't sound like you and write your own phrases instead.

If you're using this alone

- You can still use the sheets on your own to:
 - make sense of your side of a conflict,
 - prepare for a conversation, or
 - see your own patterns over time.



General Instructions

How it works - 5 steps
You don't have to follow all of these every time, but they show the logic of the toolkit.

1. Early Tension

- Use the Rate Your Tension journal to map which topics feel calm, strained, or close to rupture.
- This helps you decide if something needs attention before it turns into a bigger conflict.

2. Rupture

- After a conflict, each person can use the Map Your Rupture journal to write about what happened from their own point of view: trigger, story in my head, feelings, needs, and protective move.
- Sharing is optional; you can keep it private or share only parts.

3. Pause & Requite

- Use the Pause & Return Plan to agree how you will call a time-out, how long it will roughly last, where you will go, what you will do to calm down, and how you will show you are ready to talk again.
- Fill this in during a calm moment and keep it somewhere visible.

4. Repair Talk

- Use the 2 Lane Repair Script when one person's hurt and the other's responsibility feel more in the foreground.
- Each person takes the lane that fits them best for this situation, writes first, then reads while the other listens.

5. Reflection & Decision

- After you feel mostly okay, fill out a page of the What This Taught Us journal: what you did differently, what seemed to help, and one boundary or practice you want to keep.
- Over time, the journal becomes a record of how you handle conflict and repair.



Rate Your Tension

Rate Your Tension supports the early-tension phase of the rupture-repair cycle. It invites users to identify which recurring topics in the relationship currently feel calm, strained, or close to rupture. The booklet asks each person to mark their own level of tension topic by topic, helping invisible friction become visible before it turns into a larger argument.

In testing, this tool was especially valued for making differences in perceived intensity visible. Several people said they were surprised to see that a topic they thought was minor felt highly charged for the other person. One tester described it as “a reality check without needing a whole fight first.” Another said, “Seeing the line where theirs was much higher than mine made me understand why they were already tense.” At the same time, feedback showed that the tool works best before escalation, not in the middle of a fight, because numerical comparison can otherwise trigger defensiveness. This insight reinforced the decision to position the tool clearly as an early check-in device rather than a repair tool.

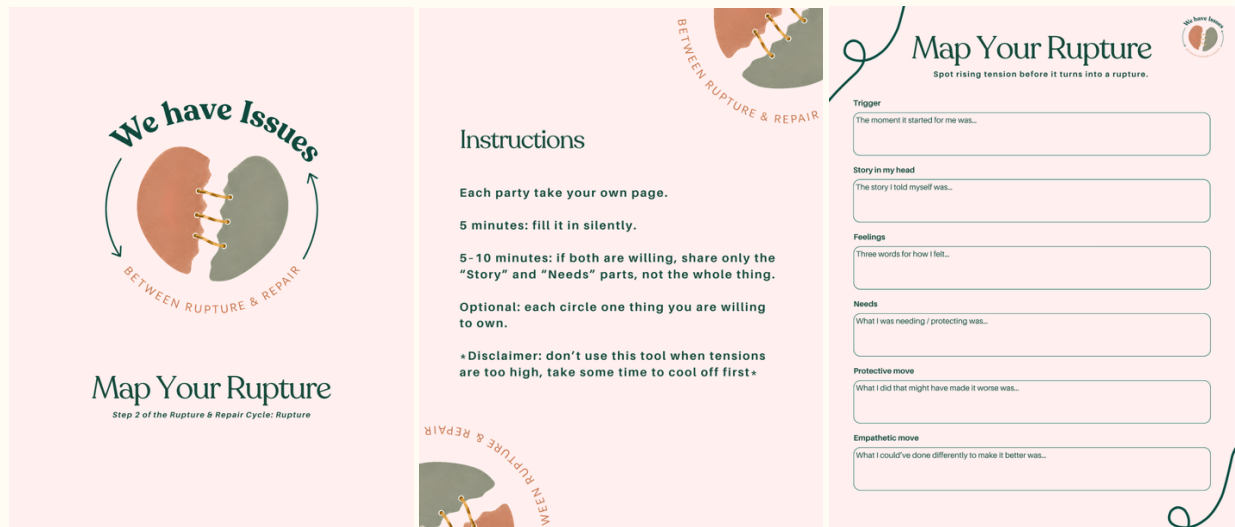


Map Your Rupture

Map Your Rupture addresses the moment after a conflict has occurred. Each person takes their own page and fills it in silently, moving through prompts such as trigger, story in my head, feelings, needs, protective move, and empathetic move. The structure helps externalise the conflict by placing it on paper rather than immediately inside an argument about who is right.

This tool emerged out of the need for a reflective buffer between rupture and repair. Testers appreciated that this journal slowed them down and made it easier to notice what story they had constructed about the other person, as well as what they themselves had done protectively that may have worsened the situation. One participant said, “It helped me separate what actually happened from the meaning I gave it.” Another noted, “The protective move question made it harder to stay only in blame.” However, feedback

also made clear that timing is crucial: the tool is not suited to moments of peak activation. This led to a clearer framing that it should be used only after some cooling down has already happened.

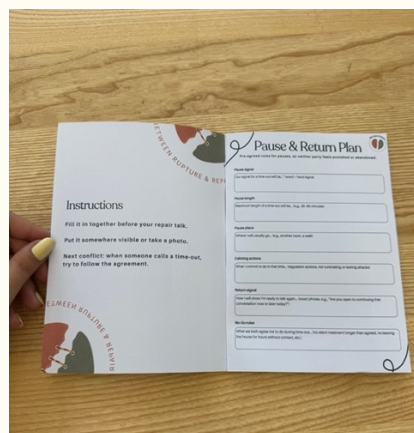


Pause & Return Plan

The *Pause & Return Plan* sits in the pause & regulation phase. It is filled out together before a repair conversation, not during a fight. The booklet asks users to agree on a pause signal, approximate pause length, where each person will go, what calming actions they will commit to, how they will signal readiness to return, and what “no-go rules” apply during the pause.

This tool replaces earlier, more formal pause and time-out concepts with a gentler, more relational framing. In testing, people responded positively to the idea of a shared pause language because it felt more caring than simply walking away or shutting down. The strongest feedback concerned trust: a pause only works when return is explicit and believable. As one tester put it, “The return part matters more than

the break itself. Otherwise it just feels like disappearing with better branding.” Another commented that agreeing in advance on what not to do during the pause reduced anxiety and prevented spiralling. For that reason, the final version puts equal emphasis on the pause itself and on how the conversation will be resumed.



2 Lane Repair Script

The *2 Lane Repair Script* supports the repair-conversation phase. It is designed for situations in which one person’s pain and the other person’s responsibility are both present, but not in symmetrical ways. Rather than forcing both people into the same reflection format, the tool offers two lanes: one for the person whose pain is more in the foreground, and one for the person whose actions are more in the foreground. Both lanes end in shared forward-looking prompts about what is now better understood and what small step both agree to try.

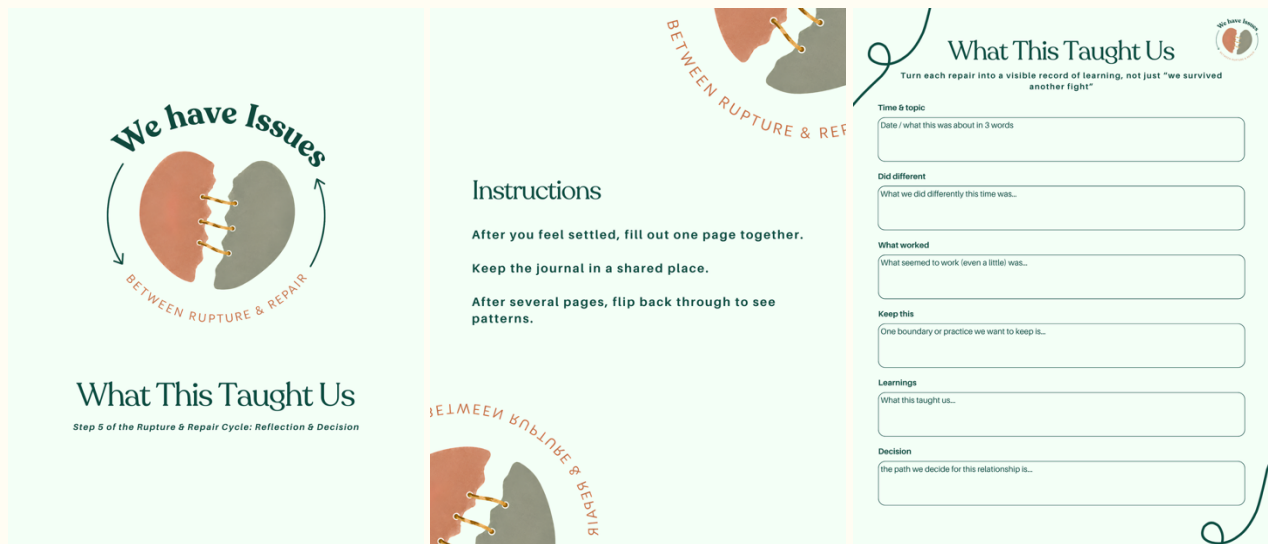
This was a key refinement from earlier repair concepts. Testing showed that people appreciated the recognition of asymmetry, because many conflicts do not feel evenly distributed even when both parties have feelings, needs, and responsibility. The reading structure also introduced a degree of ceremony that some users found moving and containing, though others experienced it as intense. One user noted, "It felt surprisingly respectful to have different scripts instead of pretending this was the same for both of us." Another said, "Reading it aloud made it feel serious in a good way, but I would only use it when we were already somewhat steady." This confirmed that the tool is best used when there is at least some shared recognition of what happened and some willingness to listen without interruption.



What This Taught Us

What This Taught Us is the final reflection and decision journal. After things have settled, the pair fills out one page together, noting the topic, what they did differently, what seemed to help, what they want to keep, what they learned, and what path they now want for the relationship. Over time, the journal becomes a visible record of recurring themes, successful changes, and unresolved patterns.

This final tool became especially important because it transformed repair from a single event into an accumulative learning process. Testers valued the small scale of the pages and the way the booklet could be kept in a shared place and returned to later. Looking back across multiple entries sometimes brought relief, because change became visible, but it could also bring harder truths into view. One tester said, “It made me realise we were actually learning, even though we still mess things up.” Another reflected, “Seeing the same issue come back on several pages was uncomfortable, but it was honest.” That tension was important to preserve: the journal does not promise harmony, but supports more conscious pattern recognition and decision-making over time.



Why this version became final

The final toolkit marked a shift away from trying to solve rupture and repair through one format or one “big conversation.” Instead, the system acknowledges that close-relationship conflict has phases, and that each phase asks for a different kind of support. This is what distinguishes the final toolkit from earlier

card-based, sheet-based, and game-based experiments. The final version is not built around novelty for its own sake, but around practical fit: small, modular, emotionally legible tools that can enter everyday life without requiring facilitation, expertise, or a large emotional threshold to begin.

The move into booklet form also strengthened the identity of the project. The individual tools feel connected, but not overwhelming; each has a specific role in the rupture-repair cycle, while the shared visual language and central framing hold them together as one coherent system. In that sense, the final toolkit resolved one of the central design challenges of the project: how to make support for difficult relational work feel structured and serious without becoming clinical, rigid, or emotionally inaccessible.

Impact Assessment

The project's primary objective was not to eliminate conflict, but to create lightweight supports that help people navigate recurring rupture and repair more consciously, safely, and constructively in close relationships. In that sense, its impact lies less in promising resolution and more in expanding what becomes possible between avoidance and escalation. The prototypes show that there is meaningful design space in this area: people responded positively to tools that made difficult relational work feel more graspable, visible, and structured without becoming therapeutic in a narrow or intimidating sense.

The strongest impact of the project is conceptual and practical at once. Conceptually, it reframes rupture and repair as a cyclical process rather than a single conversation or binary outcome. Practically, it demonstrates how this understanding can be translated into small artefacts that support distinct phases of conflict. Test feedback suggested that different tools met different needs: some reduced fear of starting, some slowed down reactivity, some clarified expectations, and some made learning visible over time.

At the same time, the project also has clear limits. The toolkit depends on a minimum degree of willingness, basic safety, and enough relational stability that tools do not become weapons. Several prototypes revealed that timing is critical: even a well-designed tool can fail if introduced at the wrong moment. There are also contexts where outside support from friends, therapists, spiritual leaders, or other trusted third parties is more appropriate. Rather than undermining the design, these limitations clarify the boundaries of its use and point toward future service directions such as facilitation, adaptation, or supported use with professionals.

Reflection

Looking back across the project, the most important learning is that support for rupture and repair must be both emotionally intelligent and materially modest. Early in the process, there was a temptation to design something more ambitious, more novel, or more system-like. However, repeated testing showed that when people are in relational pain, they do not need complexity for its own sake. They need forms that feel believable, gentle, and specific enough to use in real life.

The iterative process also changed the understanding of what “innovation” means in this context. Innovation did not come from inventing a radically new conflict model, but from combining existing relational insights with a clearer service-design response: phase-based, modular, low-threshold, and tangible. The project gradually moved away from generic communication tools and toward supports that acknowledge asymmetry, activation, hesitation, repetition, and the possibility that repair does not always mean returning to what was before.

Another important reflection concerns tone. Across testing, people repeatedly responded to softness, humour, and non-clinical language. This does not mean the project became superficial; rather, it showed that emotional seriousness and design softness are not opposites. In fact, for a topic as vulnerable as recurring rupture in close relationships, softness often made engagement more possible. This was especially visible in tools like Weather Check and later in the more journal-based and less confrontational final system.

The final toolkit also sharpened the connection between Part 1 and Part 2 of the thesis. Part 1 revealed that many people oscillate between self-erasure and disconnection when facing recurring value- and lifestyle-based conflict. Part 2 demonstrates one possible design response to that insight: not a universal fix, but a set of grounded tools that scaffold noticing, pausing, making sense, attempting repair, and deciding what to carry forward. In this way, the practical work did not simply illustrate the research; it became another way of thinking through it.

If the project were to continue, the next steps would involve more systematic long-term testing, adaptation for different relationship types and cultural contexts, and exploration of how the toolkit might live within broader services such as workshops, counselling-adjacent resources, or community support settings. Another promising direction would be semi-customisable versions that allow users to tailor recurring topics, body-based regulation actions, and relationship-specific language. These future paths are already suggested by prototype feedback and indicate that the toolkit could evolve further without losing its lightweight character.

In conclusion, the design process moved from broad conversation support toward a more coherent and phase-sensitive toolkit for navigating rupture and repair in close relationships. The final version, *We Have Issues — Between Rupture & Repair*, is the outcome of that narrowing and sharpening. It reflects a design approach that treats conflict not only as a problem to be solved, but as a relational reality that can be better held, paced, and learned from through thoughtful, tangible supports.