

THE FIRST YEAR

A beginner's ledger, and how to strike a person safely

Read this before Addendum I — for adults 18 and over

BEFORE ANYTHING

Addendum I describes one household's practice after many years — two people who know each other's bodies, arrived at slowly. Its figures are a destination. A number that is ordinary for a man conditioned to it across a decade would injure a man in his third week, and a wife who reads those totals as a specification will hurt her husband while believing she is following a document. That is the single most likely way this framework causes harm, and this page exists to prevent it.

So set Addendum I aside. Do not read its numbers again until this document has been outgrown, which will take the better part of a year. What follows is where a house actually begins: fewer questions, smaller numbers, more rest, and a great deal of attention paid to skin. It is written mostly for her, because she is the one being asked to strike a person she loves, and almost nobody teaches that.

The evening is the point. The number is only the evening's shape.

I. THE LAW THAT OUTRANKS EVERY NUMBER

Before technique, the principle a beginner most needs and most often loses: the ritual is doing the work, not the severity. A couple who read the ledger honestly every evening and settle it with twenty of her palm will build more in a year than a couple who improvise something dramatic once a fortnight. Consistency is the active ingredient. Intensity is only the flavour.

This matters practically. When a beginner feels the arrangement isn't working, the instinct is always to raise the number. It is almost always the wrong instinct, and it is how people get hurt. If an evening feels thin, the answer is nearly always that the questions were asked carelessly, or the week has been skipped, or the reading has become a formality. Fix the ritual. Leave the number alone.

II. ANATOMY — WHERE, AND WHERE NEVER

This section is not optional, and it is the part no one tells a wife. There is one safe target and several places that must never be struck, and the difference is not aesthetic. It is the difference between a sting and a hospital.

The safe zone

The fleshy lower curve of the buttocks — the rounded part, sitting above where the buttock meets the thigh and below the upper slope. That is the target. It is padded, it is designed to absorb impact, and there is nothing beneath it that can be damaged by a hand or a properly used implement. When in doubt, strike lower and more central than instinct suggests.

Never, under any circumstances

- The tailbone and the base of the spine. Bone directly beneath skin; a strike here can cause lasting injury.
- The lower back, above the buttocks. The kidneys sit here, protected by very little. This is the most dangerous error a beginner makes, and it is made by aiming too high.
- The hip bones at either side. Bone again, and the commonest site of accidental injury through wrap.
- The spine anywhere along its length.
- The backs of the knees, and the joints.

The upper thighs may be used in time — the skin is thinner, marks more readily and lasts longer — but not in a first year. Keep to the safe zone until reading skin has become second nature.

Wrap — the beginner's injury

Wrap is what happens when an implement is too long for the target or aimed too far across: the tip continues past the buttock and curls around the hip, landing on the side where there is no padding. It stings far more sharply, it bruises deeply, and it is the single most common way a well-meaning person hurts someone. It is entirely preventable. Stand square to the target rather than off to one side, aim at the centre of the rear buttock rather than across the whole width, and choose implements no longer than the target is wide. If a mark ever appears at the side of the hip, the answer is not to strike more gently — it is that the aim or the implement is wrong.

III. WARM-UP — NOT CEREMONY, PHYSIOLOGY

A beginner thinks warm-up is a courtesy. It is not. Cold tissue bruises; warmed tissue does not, or far less. Striking hard on cold skin causes deep bruising at a fraction of the force that warmed skin absorbs comfortably, which means warm-up is not the gentle preamble to the real thing — it is what makes the real thing safe.

The method is simple and takes longer than you think: begin with the open hand, light, spread across the whole safe zone, in an easy rhythm. Continue until the skin has taken on a warm pink and feels genuinely warm to the back of your hand. That is usually two to five minutes, and it is never skipped, not once, not when time is short, not when either of you is impatient. Anything concentrated — anything with wood or leather — happens after this and only after this.

The pleasant secondary effect: warmed skin receives everything better. Warm-up is not the tax on the evening. It is most of what makes the evening work.

IV. READING THE SKIN

Learn to read colour and you will never need a rulebook. Colour tells you where you are far more reliably than any count, and it is why every page in this library says her judgement rather than a number.

- Pale pink — warming, the beginning. Continue.
- Rose, evenly spread — warmed and ready. This is where a first-year evening lives.
- Deep red, still even — the ceiling for a beginner. Stop here, and stop for the night.
- Purple or blue tones appearing — bruising. Too far. Stop, and that area rests for several days.
- White patches within a reddened area — blood has left the tissue. Stop at once.
- Any break in the skin, however small — stop entirely; clean it; nothing touches it again until fully healed.

Two further rules. Colour arrives gradually and then suddenly, so check every ten or twelve strokes rather than at the end — a beginner discovers she has gone too far by looking too late. And bruising often appears the following day rather than at the time, which is why the next section exists.

V. THE MORNING AFTER

Look at the skin the next day, in daylight, without exception. This is the feedback loop that will teach her more than any document. Warm pink fading by morning means the previous evening was well judged. Deep colour still present after twenty-four hours means it was too much, whatever it felt like at the time. Any bruising means the number or the implement was wrong, and the next several evenings carry no impact at all.

Nothing is struck twice before it has recovered. Cumulative loading — not any single session — is how lasting harm actually occurs, and it is invisible unless someone is deliberately looking. She looks.

VI. THE FOUR STAGES

A year, roughly. Move to the next stage only when the current one has become unremarkable — when it happens without discussion, without nerves, and without anyone having to be reminded. If in doubt, stay where you are another month. Nothing is lost by moving slowly and a great deal can be lost by hurrying.

Stage One — The Evening Only (weeks 1 to 4)

No implements at all. The ledger is read aloud, answered honestly, and recorded in her hand — and that is the whole of it. Settle it with her palm, warmed up as described, and stop at rose. There is no count to reach and no total to serve. Three evenings a week, not seven.

This stage looks like nothing and is the most important of the four. What is being built is the habit of two adults telling each other the truth at a set hour. Couples who rush past this because it seems insubstantial are the couples whose arrangement collapses in month five.

Stage Two — The Hand (months 2 and 3)

Still the hand alone, but now the ledger's total means something: the score sets a count, with a floor of five and a ceiling of thirty. Note how small that is. It is meant to be. Four evenings a week; at least three evenings carry no impact at all.

The hand is the finest teaching instrument there is, because it hurts her too. Her palm tells her exactly how hard she is striking in a way no implement will, and a beginner who spends two months learning force through her own skin will never afterwards misjudge an implement badly. Nobody skips this. Nobody who has done it regrets it.

Stage Three — The First Implement (months 4 to 6)

One implement, and it is leather — broad, flexible, forgiving. Leather spreads force across a wide area and builds warmth rather than bite, which makes it the correct first choice by a distance. Wood is not introduced in this stage. Neither is anything else.

Hand warm-up remains compulsory and now takes longer, not less. The leather begins after rose is established, at perhaps a third of the force instinct suggests, and rises only across weeks. Ceiling of fifty, floor of ten. Four evenings weekly, three clear.

First evening with any new implement: ten strokes, light, and then stop and look, whatever the ledger says. Every implement lands differently and the only way to know how is to try it gently and inspect.

Stage Four — Rotation (months 6 to 12)

Now a wooden paddle may join, and the order becomes the one Addendum I describes: sharp first while skin is fresh, broad after — a modest count on wood, the bulk on leather. Different implements load tissue differently, and alternating them lets one kind of

loading recover while another carries the count. That is the single greatest factor in whether a practice survives years rather than months.

Ceiling for the year: one hundred combined, and most evenings well below it. Five evenings weekly at most, and two full rest nights in every seven, on which the ledger is still read, scored, and recorded — only the striking pauses.

The cane belongs to none of these stages. It is not a beginner's instrument, it is not part of a rotation, it marks readily, it breaks skin more easily than anything else in the house, and it is not touched in a first year. When a couple is ready for it, they will know because everything else will have become ordinary — and they should seek instruction from someone experienced rather than learn it from a page.

VII. THE BEGINNER'S LEDGER

Five questions, not twenty. They are asked aloud, one at a time, answered honestly, and recorded in her hand. An answer given is an answer — it is not renegotiated afterwards.

1. Did he keep the standard set for today — the specific things agreed at the start of the week?
2. Did he do what was asked the first time, without needing reminding?
3. Was his bearing good — steady, willing, without sulking or sharpness?
4. Was he wholly honest with her today, hiding nothing?
5. Looking at the whole day: was she the centre of it?

Scoring is deliberately coarse. A — met fully: one point. B — mostly, with slippage: two points. C — not met: four points. A perfect evening therefore returns five; a poor one returns twenty.

Stage One: the total is recorded and not served — the evening ends with her palm to rose, no count. Stage Two: the total is the count, floor of five, ceiling of thirty. Stage Three: double it, floor of ten, ceiling of fifty. Stage Four: treble it, ceiling of one hundred combined across two implements.

Note the floor, and understand what it is for. A perfect day still ends in an evening. If the only nights he answered for were the nights he had failed, he would learn to manage appearances rather than keep a standard — and she would lose the one honest hour of the day. The floor is the shape of a good day, not the price of a bad one.

VIII. HONESTY MUST BE CHEAP

The ledger works only if he answers truthfully, and he will not answer truthfully if honesty costs more than concealment. So: a failure admitted openly is scored and nothing further — no additional penalty, no coldness, no bringing it up again next week. A failure hidden and later discovered is a different matter entirely, belonging to the Annex on Breach rather than to tonight's arithmetic. She should say this aloud, more than once, in the first months, until he believes it. Most beginners' arrangements fail here, quietly, when a man starts shading his answers and nobody notices for a year.

IX. THE STOP SIGNS

These end an evening at once, whatever the ledger said, and the remainder is never owed:

- The halt word — from either of them, at any point, including mid-count. Its use is never punished, never priced, and never remembered against him.
- Broken skin, bruising, white patches, or any change of colour beyond even redness.

- Numbness anywhere in the area.
- Sharp or radiating pain, as opposed to the ordinary sting.
- Nausea, faintness, shaking that is not settling, or a change in breathing that alarms her.
- Anything she does not like the look of. She does not need a reason and does not have to justify it afterwards.

And she stops if her own hand is unsteady, if she is angry, or if she has had a drink. Correction comes from authority, never from temper, and never from someone whose judgement is impaired. An evening postponed costs nothing; an evening served in anger costs a great deal.

X. AFTERWARD

Care closes everything it opens, and in a first year it matters more than anything else on this page, because both of them are learning. Warmth, water, her hands over what she has just done, and time — no rushing away, no immediate return to ordinary talk. He is told plainly that it is finished and that nothing is held against him. She is allowed to say, if it is true, that she found it difficult; a beginner Regulator often needs more settling than the man she has just corrected, and there is no shame in it whatsoever.

Then, the following day, the two questions that will teach them both more than any document: how does the skin look this morning, and was anything about last night more than either of us wanted? Asked honestly, every time, for the first year at least.

Small numbers, kept faithfully, become a marriage. Large numbers, arrived at quickly, become an injury.

A guide only. Not medical advice. For consenting adults, 18 and over. This document governs a first year; Addendum I is not read as instruction until it has been outgrown. The halt signals and the Schedule of Limits outrank every figure on this page.