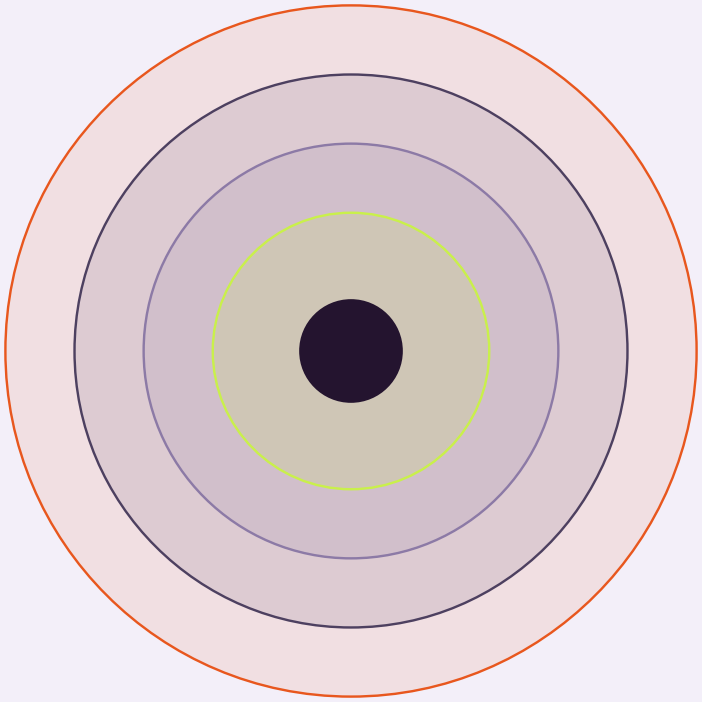


The Explosive Child

A reading of the book by Ross W. Greene (1998)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Explosive Child, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Ross Greene's case that a child who blows up is not a child who won't behave but a child who can't — lacking flexibility, frustration tolerance and problem-solving the way another child lacks reading. Rewards and consequences do not teach a missing skill, so the book replaces them with Collaborative & Proactive Solutions: name the specific problems the child keeps failing to meet, pick which ones to work on now, and solve each one with the child rather than at them, in a calm conversation held long before the next explosion.

Below are the 8 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A child who explodes is not choosing badly under pressure — the pressure has simply exceeded what they can currently do.

Greene's own formulation is that challenging behaviour occurs when the demands being placed on a child outstrip the skills they have to respond adaptively. Read that way, an outburst is not a verdict on character. It is a reading on a gauge, and it tells you the demand went past the capacity — nothing more and nothing less.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Kids do well if they can. If yours isn't, something is in the way — and finding it is the work.

The competing belief, the one most discipline is built on, is that kids do well if they want to. That belief makes motivation the missing ingredient, which makes rewards and punishments the obvious tools. Greene's version makes skill the missing ingredient, and nothing you can offer or withhold installs a skill.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Rewards and consequences can raise the stakes on a problem. They cannot solve it, and they cannot teach the skill it needs.

The sticker chart assumes the child already knows how and just isn't bothering. If that were true it would have worked by the second week. When it doesn't work, the honest conclusion is not that the incentive was too small.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Stop describing the explosions and start naming the specific expectations the child keeps failing to meet.

Greene calls these unsolved problems, and the rules for writing one are strict: no mention of the behaviour, no theory about why, split into pieces rather than clumped, and as specific as you can make it. Most start with the word difficulty followed by a verb — difficulty coming to the table when dinner is ready. It looks small. That is the point.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

There are only three things you can do about any expectation: impose it, solve it together, or set it aside for now.

Plan A imposes your solution. Plan C drops the expectation, at least for the moment. Plan B solves the problem with the child. Plan C is not surrender — it is triage, and without it you are working on nineteen problems at once and finishing none of them.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You cannot solve a problem you only half understand, and the half you are missing is the child's.

The first step of Plan B is nothing but gathering that half: ask what makes the thing hard, then keep asking until you actually know. Greene's phrase for the discipline it takes is drilling, not grilling. Most parents skip this step because they are certain they already know the answer, and most of the time they are wrong.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The middle of an explosion is the worst possible time to solve anything — and the most predictable moment you have.

Almost every episode is triggered by a problem that has been going off for weeks. That predictability is the opening: the conversation belongs on a quiet Tuesday afternoon, not in the doorway at bedtime. Proactive beats emergency almost every time.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A solution only counts if both people can actually live with it and actually do it.

Realistic and mutually satisfactory are the two tests, and a solution that fails either one comes back. Most first attempts do come back — which means the process is iterative by design, not because you did it wrong.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Write down every expectation they are not meeting
- [ ] Rewrite each one until it passes the four rules
- [ ] Pick three. Move everything else to Plan C
- [ ] Schedule the first conversation for a calm moment
- [ ] Write your own concern down before you open your mouth

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Open with what you noticed, then ask what's up
- ◯ Keep asking until you could argue their side
- ◯ Say your concern second, and only after theirs is clear

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Write down every expectation they are not meeting

One sitting, one list.

Not the outbursts — the expectations. Homework, teeth, leaving the park, the sibling's door. You are looking for the reliable ones, the problems that go off the same way every week.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Rewrite each one until it passes the four rules

No behaviour in it, no theory about why, split rather than clumped, and specific.

"Difficulty starting maths homework on school nights" — not "melts down over homework because he's lazy." If the sentence explains anything, cut the explanation.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Pick three. Move everything else to Plan C

Three is roughly the most any household can work on at once.

Everything not in the three gets set aside on purpose, out loud, for now. That is not letting them win; it is the only way the three you kept get solved.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Schedule the first conversation for a calm moment

Not at bedtime, not after an episode, not while anyone is still hot.

Pick a time when nothing is being asked of either of you — a drive, a Saturday morning — and go in with one problem, not three.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Write your own concern down before you open your mouth

It will almost always be health, safety, learning, or how the problem lands on someone else.

One sentence. Written in advance, because in the moment it tends to come out as "because I said so," which is not a concern.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Open with what you noticed, then ask what's up

"I've noticed it's been hard to get off the tablet at bedtime.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Keep asking until you could argue their side

"Can you say more about that?" "I don't quite understand." "When does it happen — always, or mostly on school nights?" Reflect back what you heard and ask what you missed.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Say your concern second, and only after theirs is clear

"The thing is, if it goes past nine you're wrecked at school the next day." Two concerns are now on the table.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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December 2026

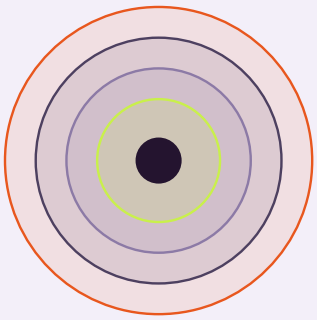
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



And it's a lot easier when your kid is your partner instead of your enemy.

ROSS W. GREENE