

# Adam's guide for checking in on the people you love ~~2018-2019-2023-2025~~

**Content warning: this piece contains allusions to mental illness, suicide, and self-injury.**

*This is Adam's daily journal. Writing floats scattered with no regard for perpendicularity, angling down and up, crossing the guidelines if at all the letters ever follow. The guide begins with annotations of different inks and forces, showing the spaced-apart visits of the one visitor it was meant for. There is a vicious stroke running diagonal across the first page...*

January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 — Hi, future Adam. How are you doing? I hope your life has become better. No more cockroaches on your sheets or yellowed sunken bedding in your new Australian study dorm, eh? You've said your goodbyes (hopefully). To Dad and Sky. Picked which of Mom's to bring. If it's gotten lighter at all to carry, you might not even need this guide. You're the best of us I'd like to think. Regardless, I do hope this guide reminds you where home lies. Good luck, Adam!

Step 1. Say "Hi." Always start by saying "Hi."<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Said "I'm home" to Dad in the kitchen.

<sup>2</sup> The house smells of grandma's rendang.

Step 2. Ask them<sup>3</sup> how they're doing.

<sup>3a</sup> Laura sat in front of her dinner plate, fiddling with her wedding ring.

Step 3. Be interested.<sup>4</sup> Meet their eyes. Don't fidget.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3b</sup> It looked better on Mom.

<sup>4</sup> She didn't even look up at me or at Sky.

Step 4. Don't overthink things.

Step 5. Be engaged.<sup>5</sup>

Ask open-ended questions. Instead of hanging on the minutiae, ask questions that allow them to expand on their experiences. Be sensitive<sup>5</sup> of topics that cause ebbs in the conversation. Follow their eyes. Focus on validating them: don't play devil's advocate about someone's dead dog. String their attention with curiosity, then knot it with empathy.

<sup>5a</sup> Jane sobbed through the phone static.

Step 6. Prepare to leave the conversation. Let conversations naturally fizzle out. End on a positive note!

<sup>5b</sup> Jane also felt alone.

<sup>5c</sup> We spoke Indonesian to say goodbye.

Step 7. Say "Goodbye."

~~"See you later, alligator."~~

~~"Till next time?" "I'm going now."~~

~~"Good night."~~

"Bubyee."

~~Step 0. No one needs a guide. Trust the process. Go back home.~~ Repeat<sup>6</sup> steps 1 to 7!

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<sup>6</sup> Every couple days for close friends. A week for family. A month for acquaintances.

*The guide continues on the next page: a drawing of an eye with viscid droplets oozing out the sclera on the top left of the page. Rusted brown fingerprints trace diagonal, creasing and clustering where it might once have been damp paper—oxidized blood inside the broken pen lines of the droplets.*

Ezekiel

February 14<sup>th</sup> 2020 — You have this, future Adam. There is a 30% chance that ~~Deer~~ likes you. That's good enough for me, and that's good enough for you.

No one.

~~Step 1. Say "Howdy."~~ No. Just say "Hi."

Step 2. Ask them how they're doing. ~~For the millionth time.~~

Step 3. Be interested. Meet ~~their~~<sup>1</sup> his<sup>2</sup> hazel<sup>1</sup> brown<sup>2</sup> eyes. Keep your hands to your side.

<sup>1</sup> Their blazer has dragons and flowers entwined. Remember, Deer  
is a *different* person.

~~Step 4~~ Step 5. "I like your top."

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel and I, we caught glimpses of each other's spectacles.  
~~He might be into me.~~

Step 4. Don't overthink things.

Step 6. ~~Ask them out.~~ Say goodbye.

*A steadily written entry. Just below, the writing scrawls alive—*

August 17<sup>th</sup> 2020 — We're doing quarantine for the next few months. All my university classes are online. For the first time, I feel as equidistant from my friends in Australia as I am from my friends back home. Their morning, Indonesia is celebrating independence, indoors. I am three hours ahead as I call them at my midday. My friends wear weak streaks of red-and-white face paint, a banner behind reading 'merah-putih' and 'INDEPENDENCE'. Half their cameras have the granular texture of unsanded teak wood. They play games online as my friend pockets me into his desktop tabs. I miss their loudness; their peaking microphones attenuated so that I can listen to my lectures. The thick Celtic tongue flicks of my professor sound mostly from his forehead on screen, going on about Risperidone. I lose his words in the latency of language and my limited bandwidth. I wonder if this is what ~~Mom~~ mum felt like.

*—alive: scratched by the claws of a rat inside a trap. Throes of its tail winched between sprung metal, rending a crack into bone husked of flesh. Adam writes:*

Step 1. Nod your head.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It's normal to hear your eyes in their sockets.

Step 2. Ask about their<sup>2</sup> ~~sears~~ problems.

<sup>2</sup> You don't have to care but do

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Pretend.

Step 3. Call the witness<sup>3</sup> to the stand.

<sup>3</sup> Listen to the testimony.

Step 4. This is the aftermath<sup>4,5,6</sup> of her<sup>7</sup> bruised neck.

<sup>4</sup> The fog that mum tried to walk through.

The smoke that lies hung between valleys; moisture that is too frayed floats into last exhales.

Step 5. What is there left to say?

<sup>5</sup> She surrendered, left Sky and me.

Step 6. What is there left to wonder?

<sup>6</sup> Risperidone, anti-psychotic  
serious side effects include:

Permanent dyskinesia,

Neuroleptic Malignant Syndrome,

Increased risk of suicide,

Step 7. What is right and wrong

when all that has happened has settled  
into that untenable past? <sup>7</sup> I

miss

Mom.

Step 8. The flags fly half-mast for the fallen<sup>8</sup> as ~~we~~ they  
sing the national anthem.

Home, the dinner table is set where the neighbours do  
understand the meaning of the lyrics and cries.

<sup>8</sup> Get up. There are still people to live ~~with~~ for.

Step 9. ~~Seriously, who gives a shit?~~ Sky asked<sup>9</sup> once, "Why are you still alive?"

<sup>9</sup> Your brother should know better.

Step 10. You're still on a call<sup>0</sup> with your friends. You're still<sup>0</sup> in the lecture.

<sup>0</sup> Leave.

*Another ink drawing. Of Adam's mother. She is standing on a cliff, the shore sprawls behind her in more delicate pencil sketching. Frangipani flowers tucked between her glasses, and a branch of blooms trailing out the margin.*

December 5<sup>th</sup> 2020 — Mom's anniversary.

*Rust returns onto this page, specks of red iron in deeper creases—a quarry flattened by the dust covers; each line of the page is infested with two rows of skittering ink, black worker ants mashed into legibility:*

December 6<sup>th</sup> 2020 — This being alive thing, over and over, infected urges to etch deeper the arbitrary scrawls called names and their descriptors. This ink starts dark, ends darker, thickens, then bleeds over. The whittling knife sacrificed, its wronged blade chipping more than bark, to set misbegotten carvings on hand where rests the woodblocks. It is only sap. Dark desiccated sap of a half-dead tree too far into winter. Half-alive when thick black ink-sap suppurates from deep gorges; thin vessels to break after each stroke drawn exclaims where home is, and what it was like to stay and then to run away. ~~There is honesty~~ in the two drops and droplets sown on two different continents. ~~Honesty~~, in explaining to Sky how self-flagellation is different from what Mom did. ~~In first person, pain does not tell lies~~, so please, don't lie to say that you're all fine.

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*The writing separates. Spaced-apart. There is much more emptiness between the lines. But the page is dirtier, not least because the letters are written in crayon, smearing when closed.*

December 24<sup>th</sup> 2020 — An assemblage of letters to describe the disorders of the mind.

Step 1. The letters are now mine.

Step 2. Sentences<sup>1</sup> in the psych ward drawn on soft—safe—edgeless wax pastels.

Step 3. There are worse things to be.

<sup>1</sup> Tantal writes you a release letter. He sends it to Arana.

Step 4. Read the room. Count the sounds<sup>2</sup> that you see.

<sup>2</sup> Your heart still beats that consonant rhythm.

Step 5. Apologize to the metronome.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> I'm sorry.

*The pen returns.*

November 20<sup>th</sup> 2025 — Arana wanted to go through some of my journals. When she found this, she asked if I could try to write something similar to this in one of our sessions. To talk to mum, I guess?

Step 1. Lay the white and purple orchids on the base.<sup>1</sup>

Step 2. Ask how she's doing.

If she<sup>1</sup> still picks the frangipani blooms of the street, sniffs and decorates the rim of her<sup>1</sup> glasses before they wilt. If she's met Jane's dad up there, and if he ever talks about how proud he must be of Jane. Surely she's found shore; is the beach walk as long and steady as she<sup>1</sup> likes? Does she<sup>1</sup> still watch the clouds? If time still seemed that "intangible swell wave" between when you and Sky went to school? If her<sup>1</sup> woodcraft improved without your input? If, in the expanse between the forests—in her<sup>1</sup> escapes to the endless unknown—if she<sup>1</sup> ever misses home?

<sup>1</sup> She's not here.

<sup>2</sup> Tell her how you've been.