Weaponised Incompetence

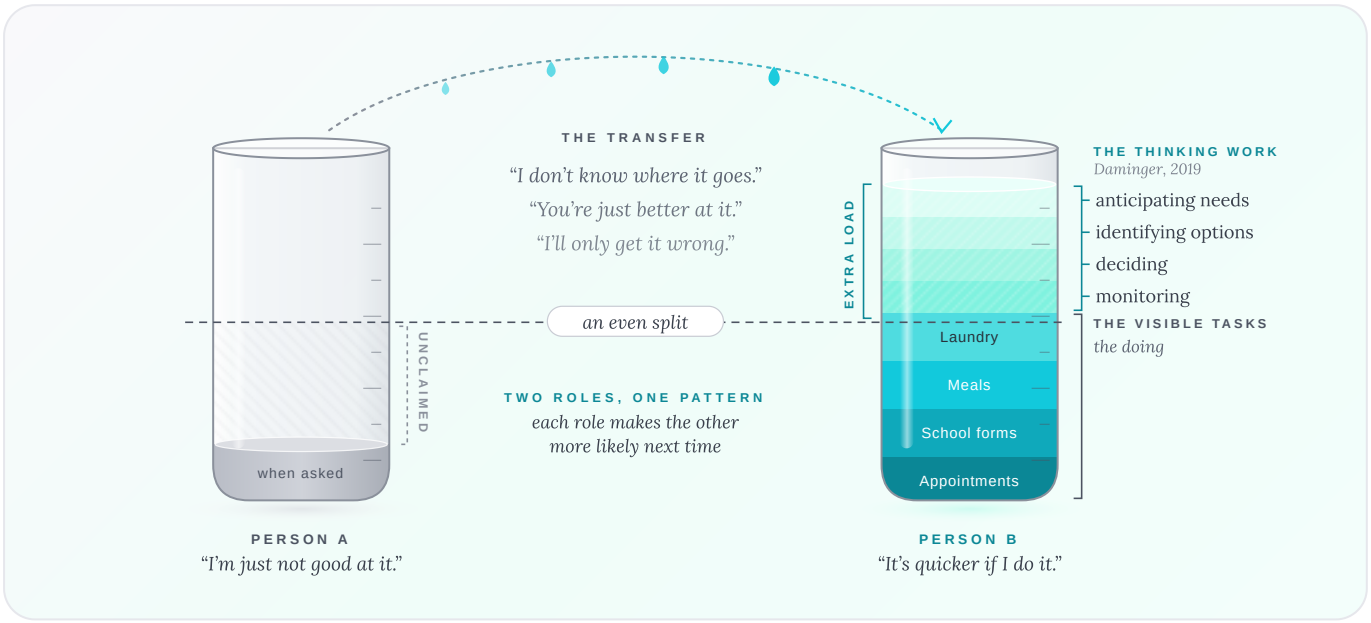
RELATIONSHIPS · SHARED LOAD

When appearing unable moves the work onto someone else

A pattern in which one person performs a task poorly, or presents as unable to do it, so that responsibility shifts to someone else. It is a popular term rather than a clinical diagnosis: it describes a **pattern of behaviour**, not a fixed trait or a proven motive, and it is usually maintained by both people's responses.

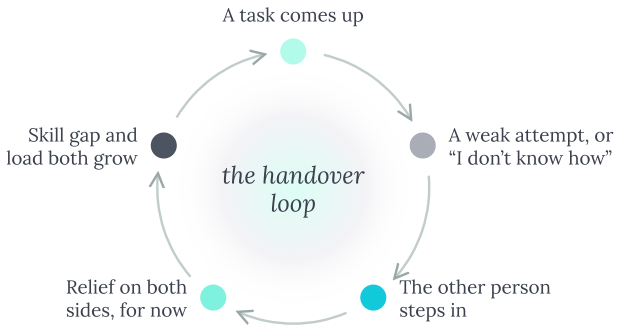
01 The shared load

where the work settles



02 How the pattern holds

a two-person loop



In behavioural terms, both roles are kept going by **relief**. Stepping back removes the discomfort of an unwanted task; stepping in removes the discomfort of waiting, mess or uncertainty.

PERSON A · AVOIDANCE IS RELIEVED
"If I hesitate long enough, it gets done."

PERSON B · TAKING OVER IS RELIEVED
"At least it's done properly."

Over time the skill gap becomes real, which makes the next handover **harder** for both.

03 Not every difficulty is strategic

consider the alternatives first

A genuine skill gap
never taught, or never needed to learn; it improves with practice

Executive function or health
ADHD, low mood, fatigue or overload can affect planning and follow-through

Different standards
"done" means different things; rigid standards can discourage trying

Strategic avoidance
difficulty appears mainly for unwanted tasks, and persists despite clear instruction

04 Worth knowing

what the research does and does not say

Intent is hard to judge
Research has not measured how often incompetence is deliberate. The pattern can be named and changed without needing to prove a motive.

The thinking work counts
Running a home involves anticipating needs, identifying options, deciding and monitoring. This work is often invisible, and a frequent source of conflict (Daminger, 2019).

An uneven load has costs
Feeling disproportionately responsible for managing the household has been linked with lower well-being and relationship satisfaction (Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019).

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05 Map the load

from noticing to finishing

TASK OR AREA *name it*	WHO NOTICES IT *anticipating*	WHO PLANS IT *options and decisions*	WHO DOES IT *the visible part*	WHO CHECKS IT *monitoring*
EXAMPLE School forms and trips	A **B** Both	A **B** Both	**A** B Both	A **B** Both
	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both
	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both
	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both
	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both	A B Both

06 Notice your side of it

both roles are worth looking at

IF I TEND TO STEP BACK

- ☐ I say “I don’t know how” rather than asking to learn
- ☐ I wait, and the task usually gets done by someone else
- ☐ My mistakes cluster around tasks I dislike
- ☐ I feel relief when a task is taken off me

IF I TEND TO STEP IN

- ☐ I redo tasks rather than accept a different way
- ☐ I take over before the other person has had a chance
- ☐ I hold most of the noticing and remembering in my head
- ☐ I feel resentful, not just tired

07 Reframes that hold up

clear, fair and specific

AN UNHELPFUL THOUGHT	A BALANCED ALTERNATIVE
“It’s easier if I just do it myself.”	It is quicker today. Each time I take over, though, the skill gap and my load both grow. A slower handover now may cost less over a year.
“They’re doing it on purpose.”	Some of this may be avoidance, and some may be habit, skill or different standards. I can name the pattern and ask for change without proving intent.
“If I bring it up, I’m nagging.”	Asking for a fair share of a joint responsibility is a reasonable request. How I raise it matters more than whether I raise it.

08 A fairer handover

small, specific, whole tasks

1

Hand over a whole task

Including the noticing, planning and checking, not only the doing.

THE TASK _____

2

Agree what “done” means

Settle the standard once, then allow “different, not wrong”.

DONE LOOKS LIKE _____

3

Review, don’t rescue

Check in after a week, rather than stepping back in.

REVIEW DATE _____

A WAY TO SAY IT

“When I’m the one who notices, plans and checks most things, I end up stretched and resentful. I’d like you to take full ownership of _____, from remembering it to finishing it, and I’ll step back from redoing it.”

IMPORTANT NOTE

This resource is for general education and reflection. If the pattern sits within wider control, criticism, threats or financial restriction, it may be more than a division-of-labour issue, and support from a professional or a specialist service may be important.

SOURCES

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers’ beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*(1), 199–212. https://doi.org/10.2307/353894

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