

# PLAYER MODE SERIES: A Customer Design Case Study

Not Help. Relief. How a Skill Training Series Was Built Around How Teenagers Actually Work.



## The Origin

The Player Mode Series did not begin with a market brief. It began as a gift — a lifetime of skills and experience, distilled into something simple enough to hand to a teenager.

After years in corporate roles spanning human resources, coaching, and change management — and decades watching people operate under pressure — the author wanted to synthesise what she knew into the simplest possible form, for the young people in her life who were struggling to navigate it.

The question was never: what's missing from the market? It was: if I could hand something to the next generation — something they'd actually use and relate to — what would it be?

The Player Mode Series is the answer. A lifetime of experience in human behaviour, translated into something simple enough for a teenager to run.

## The Insight

The synthesis process produced a core behavioural insight that became the foundation of the series — drawn from the author's accreditation in brain-based coaching and years of human behaviour training:

The body goes into threat mode before the thinking brain gets a vote. You cannot reason your way out of a state your body has not left yet. The skill is noticing the automatic response and choosing what happens next.

That insight shaped everything that followed — the structure, the tone, the practice-based format. Rather than information or inspiration, each book trains one capacity through small, repeatable practice, reinforced daily over a structured period.

The language was chosen deliberately to feel approachable rather than clinical — something a teenager could pick up and use without it feeling like therapy.

## From Personal Synthesis to Validated Product

Validation was woven into development across multiple stages — from lived proximity to the reader, through structured external feedback.

Early drafts were tested with teenagers who fit the target profile. Anything adult-coded, over-explained, or condescending was identified and removed. Parents, teachers, and a school counsellor reviewed the series for appropriateness and practical utility. A registered psychologist and mindset coach formally endorsed it — noting the deliberate positioning outside therapeutic framing as a strength, not a gap.

What validation consistently revealed: the series' approach removed the stigma barrier, and most readers engaged with it precisely because it didn't ask them to identify as struggling. The companion log was identified as the highest-value element — it's where the skill actually installs, through daily practice rather than reading.

*"Practical, unfussy, and mercifully free of the kind of earnest over-explaining that makes most books aimed at teenagers unappealing to actual teenagers."* — Linda Miller, Registered Psychologist and Mindset Coach

## The Outcome

What began as a personal gift became a validated, commercially published series. The customer design process — applied from the inside out with the help of Toughproblem — produced a system that:

- Started with empathy and proximity, not market gap analysis
- Was stress-tested across multiple user cohorts before publication
- Addresses the mechanism — the automatic nervous system response — not just the symptom
- Uses language the end user recognises as real
- Installs capacity through daily practice, not one-time inspiration

*"He's not more argumentative — he's just stopped folding the second someone disagrees with him. For a parent watching their kid shrink in real time, that's everything."* — Parent of a teenage reader, Book 2

Most life skills content for young people is delivered by adults in group settings. Player Mode offers something alongside it — portable, private, and entirely theirs to run. A complete series. Built from lived experience. Validated by real users.

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