

Compassion Recharge Holiday Survival Guide

Quick Resets When You're Running on Empty





Welcome. I'm glad you're here.

This workbook is not about "fixing yourself." It's about remembering that your nervous system is trying to protect you (sometimes too hard) and you can gently guide it back to safety.

How to use this workbook:

- Begin anywhere - there is no wrong order.
- Write in it. Tear pages out. Mark them up. Doodle on them.
- Notice what comes up: relief, irritation, sadness, clarity, all of it is information.

This is designed as a safety map - something you reach for when you feel overwhelmed, numb, stuck, or just tired.

You've got this!

Dr. Alexis Kennedy

Permission Slip

You are allowed to make your well-being a priority this season.

Even if others don't understand.

Even if you've never done it before.

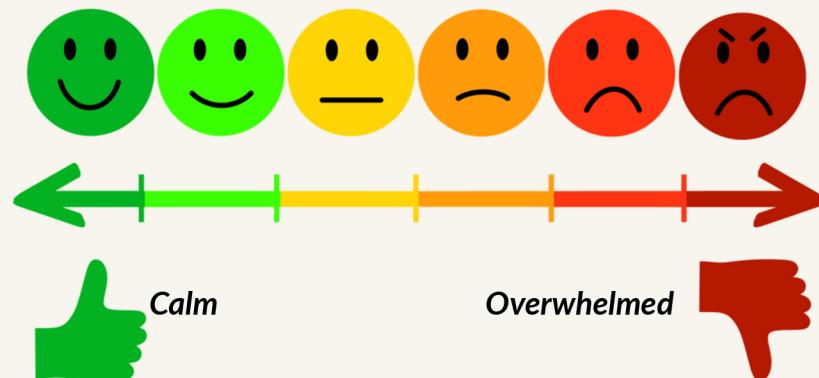


Sign your name here as a commitment to yourself



SECTION 1: CHECK-IN

Let's map how you're doing before the holiday adventures begin.

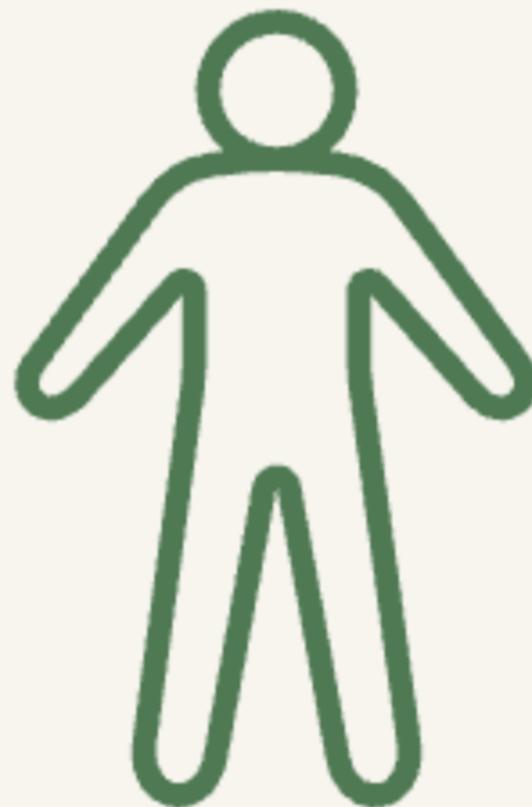


Where does stress sit in your body?

Your body holds the stress that you may be too busy to think about. Connecting with our bodies allows us to recognize our stress rather than storing it.

Circle, highlight, or write in:

- Jaw
- Chest
- Stomach
- Shoulders
- Hands
- Neck
- Back
- Head
- Hips
- Other





Your Warning Signs

Before your brain knows you're overloaded, your body already does. Which of these signs show up for you?

Physical

Tight jaw or grinding teeth
Shallow breathing or holding breath
Headaches
Fatigue or exhaustion

Restlessness
Digestive Changes
Racing Heart
Tension

Emotional

Irritability
Feeling tearful or on the
verge of crying
Numbness or disconnection

Sense of dread
Overwhelm
Shame
Anxiety
Emotional Spikes

Behavioral

Overworking
Withdrawning
People-pleasing
Avoiding tasks

Snapping at people
Overthinking
Overeating or undereating
Drinking more alcohol
Doomscrolling on phone

My Top 3 Stress Signals Are:

These are my early warning signs
that I need to reset:



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

REPEAT THIS TO YOURSELF: When I notice these signals, I commit to pausing
and using a reset strategy from this workbook.



External Triggers

Triggers don't mean you're weak, they mean your nervous system remembers. Let's name what tends to activate you.

Financial Pressure

- Worrying about gift costs
- Travel expenses
- Hosting costs
- Feeling pressure to spend more than I can afford
- Comparing my financial situation to others

Time Pressure

- Too much to do, not enough time
- Disrupted routines and schedules
- Lack of downtime or rest
- Feeling like I'm always behind

Sensory Overload

- Crowded stores and spaces
- Constant noise and activity
- Too much stimulation
- Lack of quiet time alone

My top three external holiday triggers are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For each trigger, what's ONE thing I can do differently this year?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



Emotional Triggers

Triggers show us where your nervous system is still holding on.
Let's name what tends to activate you.

Family Dynamics

- Difficult family members
- Old family conflicts resurfacing
- Feeling judge or criticized
- Intrusive questions
- Feeling responsible for everyone's happiness

Social Obligations

- Too many events
- Feeling obligated to attend things
- Small talk and social performance
- Being around people who drain my energy

Grief & Loss

- Missing loved ones who are gone
- First holiday without someone
- Memories that bring sadness
- Feeling alone even in crowds

My top three emotional holiday triggers are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

For each trigger, what's ONE thing I can do differently this year?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____



SECTION 2: YOUR RESET TOOLKIT

The 90-second Nervous System Reset

Here's some good news: Science shows that your body can shift from a stress response to a calmer state in about 90 seconds when you know how to work with your nervous system. These are evidence-based techniques that actually interrupt your stress response.

Reset #1: Box Breathing

Use this when you're feeling anxious or need to calm down quickly

1. Breathe IN slowly through your nose for 4 counts
2. HOLD your breath for 4 counts
3. Breathe OUT slowly through your mouth for 4 counts
4. HOLD empty for 4 counts
5. Repeat 4 times



Why it works: This pattern activates your parasympathetic nervous system (turning off your stress alarm) and gives your brain something to focus on besides your stress.

Reset #2: The Hum

Use this when you're feeling disconnected, anxious or need to ground quickly

1. Take a comfortable breath in
2. As you exhale, make a humming sound (like "hmmm")
3. Feel the vibration in your chest and throat
4. Repeat 5-6 times



Why it works: Humming stimulates your vagus nerve, the main highway between your brain and your body's calm-down system. It's like hitting a reset button.

Reset #3: Cold Water

Use this when you need immediate relief

Choose one:

- Run cold water over your wrist for 30 seconds
- Splash cold water on your face
- Hold an ice cube in your hand.
- Place a cold, wet cloth on the back of your neck



Why it works: Cold temperature activates your mammalian dive reflex, which quickly slows your heart rate and brings you back into your body.



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

This technique pulls you out of your head (where stress and anxiety live) and back into your body and the present moment. It is especially helpful when you are spiraling with worry or feeling disconnected.

Why it works: Using your five senses helps you anchor yourself in the here and now.



5 Things I can SEE

Look around right now. Name five things you can see:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

4 Things I can TOUCH

Reach out and touch four different textures. Describe them:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____



5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

3 Things I can **HEAR**

Close your eyes if comfortable. What three sounds do you hear?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

2 Things I can **SMELL**

What two scents can you notice right now?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____

1 Thing I can **TASTE**

What can you taste right now?

- 1 _____

*Tip: You don't have to do all five senses every time.
Even just 5-4-3 can be enough to bring you back
to the present moment.*



Compassion Recharge for Common Scenarios

Let's be honest. You can't always excuse yourself for 10 minutes of meditation during the holidays. These are quick resets you can do anywhere, anytime, without anyone noticing.

Scenario 1: In the crowded store

Your nervous system says: Too many people, too much noise, I need to get out of here!

The Compassion Recharge:

- Plant your feet firmly on the ground
- Press your thumb and pointer finger together firmly
- Take 3 slow breaths, focusing on the pressure of your fingers
- Say internally: "I am here. I am safe. I can do this."
- Bonus: Put in headphones (even without music) to create a buffer

Estimated time: 30 seconds

Scenario 2: Before a difficult family dinner

Your nervous system says: Here we go again. I'm already dreading this

The Compassion Recharge:

- Before going inside, sit in your car for 2 minutes
- Do one round of box breathing (page 4)
- Identify ONE person who will be safe or supportive
- Remind yourself, "I can leave if I need to. I have an exit plan."

My exit plan is: _____

My one boundary is: _____

Estimated time: 2 minutes



Compassion Recharge for Common Scenarios

Scenario 3: When someone asks intrusive questions

Your nervous system says: I feel exposed and judged. I want to hide.

The Compassion Recharge:

- Take one deep breath before responding
- Use a pre-planned redirect: "You know, I'm not talking about that today. Tell me about YOUR _____"
- If needed, excuse yourself: "I need to use the restroom" or "Let me refresh my drink"
- In the bathroom/kitchen: splash cold water, do the hum exercise
- Remind yourself: "I don't owe anyone my private information"

My go-to redirect phrase is:

Estimated time: 1 minute

Scenario 4: Stuck in holiday traffic

Your nervous system says: I'm going to be late. This is awful. Why is everyone so slow?!

The Compassion Recharge:

- Loosen your grip on the steering wheel
- Drop and roll your shoulders back 3 times
- Play music that matches your mood, then gradually shift to calmer songs
- Use red lights for box breathing
- Reframe: "This is time I didn't know I had. What can I do with it?"
 - Call a friend
 - Listen to a podcast
 - Practice gratitude by listing what you're looking forward to

My emergency traffic playlist or podcast:

Estimated time: As necessary



Personal Stress First Aid Kit

Everyone's nervous system is different. What calms your friend might not work for you and that is okay. Use this page to create YOUR personalized toolkit.



When I'm starting to feel stressed but still functioning

I will try these strategies:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Ideas: Box breathing, 5-minute walk, text a friend, listen to a specific song, drink cold water, step outside

When I'm overwhelmed and need immediate help

I will use these emergency strategies:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Ideas: Cold water on face/wrists, excuse myself and go to another room, call my support person, use my exit plan, practice the hum



Personal Stress First Aid Kit



My Support Team

People I can call, text, or reach out when I feel overwhelmed

Name: _____ Call for: _____

Name: _____ Call for: _____

Name: _____ Call for: _____

Professional support (therapist, hotline, etc.):

My Safe Spaces

Places I can go when I need to reset:

At home:

In public:

At family gatherings:

Permission slips I'm giving myself

Examples: leave early, say no, not be perfect, take a break, set boundaries, prioritize my needs

It's okay to _____

It's okay to _____



Holiday Survival BINGO

Self-care isn't selfish, it's survival! Every time you complete one of these, mark it off. Aim for BINGO (five in a row) or even better, a BLACKOUT (all 25)!

Said NO to an obligation	Took 5 deep breaths	Left a situation when overwhelmed	Asked for help	Laughed today
Got &= hours of sleep	Moved my body	Set a boundary	Ate a nourishing meal	Spent time alone
Checked my warning signs	Talked to my supportive person	Free Space: You've got this!	Did a grounding exercise	Took a break from social media
Said something kind to myself	Stepped outside for fresh air	Drank enough water	Did something creative	Excused myself from something
Used a recharge strategy	Let go of perfectionism	Practiced gratitude	Honored my feelings	Listened to favorite music

First Bingo: _____

Pattern: _____

Second Bingo: _____

Pattern: _____

BLACKOUT: _____

Reflection: What was easiest to do? What was hardest? What surprised me?



YEAR END BRAIN TRAP

Stop beating yourself up. Here's what typically happens at year's end: You start making a mental list of everything you didn't accomplish. Every goal you missed. Every habit you failed to build. Every version of yourself you didn't become.

Sound familiar?

Here's the truth: **Your brain is designed to do this, and it's not helping you.**

Why your brain focuses on what went wrong

Your brain has something called a **negativity bias**. This is an evolutionary feature, not a bug. Our ancestors survived because their brains were really good at remembering threats and mistakes. The person who forgot where the dangerous animal lived didn't pass on their genes. So your brain is designed to:

- Notice what went wrong more than what went right
- Remember failures more than successes
- Overestimate threats and underestimate your capabilities
- Focus on gaps rather than gains

Translation: When you beat yourself up at year's end, you're not broken. You're just a human with a very old brain doing a very old thing that no longer serves you.

The problem with traditional "New Year's Resolutions"

Most resolutions fail. Not because you lack willpower, but because they're set up to fail from a neuroscience perspective.

Traditional resolutions often:

- Focus on deprivation ("I won't eat X")
- Are vague ("Be happier")
- Ignore your current capacity and stress level
- Start with self-criticism ("I'm so lazy, I need to...")

What your brain hears: "You're not good enough. You need to be different starting **NOW**."

Result: Your nervous system perceives this as a threat, which increases your stress, so you quit to relieve the stress.

A better way: The success inventory

Before you think about what you want to change, let's acknowledge what your brain is trying to ignore: **what actually went well this year**. This isn't toxic positivity or not wanting to improve. This is neuroscience.

When you actively recall your successes, you:

- Activate the reward pathways in your brain
- Build evidence that you ARE capable
- Create psychological safety for growth
- Shift from threat mode to possibility mode



SUCCESS INVENTORY

Think small and specific. Not “I’m a good person” but “I helped my neighbor by watching her dog in March.”

Things I accomplished this year (no matter how small):

Hard things I survived:

Skills I learned or improved:

Times I showed up (for me or someone else):

NOW READ THAT LIST AGAIN.

That’s not a disappointment. That’s evidence of your resilience and capacity.
This is your foundation for growth.



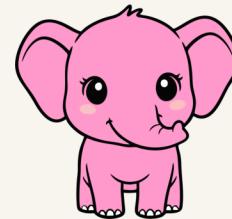
BRAIN-FRIENDLY GOALS

Setting goals your nervous system can handle

Forget resolutions. Let's talk about approach goals instead of avoidance goals and the neuroscience of the difference.

Avoidance goals (What you want to STOP or AVOID):

- “Stop eating junk food”
- “Don’t be so anxious”
- “Quit procrastinating”



What happens in your brain: These activate your threat-detection system. Your brain focuses on what you’re trying to escape from, which actually makes you think about it MORE. (Remember the “don’t think about a pink elephant now” example. I bet you’re picturing her).

Approach goals (What you want to MOVE TOWARD):

- “Eat at least 1 vegetable with dinner 5x this week”
- “Practice one grounding technique daily”
- “Start my work project 10 minutes earlier”

What happens in your brain: These activate your reward system. Your brain sees possibilities, not threats. You’re moving toward something desirable rather than running from something scary.

Specific & Small

Your prefrontal cortex (planning center) needs concrete information. Vague goals create decision fatigue.

Vague: “Be less stressed.” **Specific:** “Use box breathing for 2 minutes each morning before I check my phone.”

Vague: “Get healthier.” **Specific:** “Walk for 10 minutes after lunch on workdays.”

Your turn. Pick ONE area for a brain-friendly goal:

Vague goal I used to have:

Specific, small version:



You're stronger than you think!

You've learned to:

- Recognize your stress signals
- Reset your nervous system in 60 seconds or less
- Set strategies for stressful scenarios
- Honor your needs
- Keep going even when things are difficult



These skills aren't just for the holidays - they are for life!

To get year-round support, join the compassion recharge newsletter list at <http://www.recharge.how>

Keep this workbook handy for when you need a quick reset.

You've got this, Dr. Alexis Kennedy



Want More Support?

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