# THE Neurodivergent HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

**A workbook for Autistic, ADHD, and AuDHD adults**

**By Mary Pasciak**

www.AuDHDWomen.com

# Welcome

You already know the holidays don't work for your brain the way they're "supposed to."

Here's the truth: You don't owe anyone a "traditional" holiday season. If the way we collectively "do" holidays doesn't work for your brain, the problem isn't your brain.

The holidays demand everything your brain struggles with: complex social navigation, constant decision-making, sustained executive function, sensory tolerance, emotional regulation.

This workbook starts from a different premise: What if you designed holidays that actually work for *you*?



# About the author

Hi, I'm Mary Pasciak. I help neurodivergent women figure out what they actually want (vs. what they think they're supposed to want) and then learn to use and protect their energy accordingly.

The idea for this workbook came from seeing the same pattern in my clients (and myself): We had responsibilities we didn't choose, said yes to things we didn't want, and felt guilty about even considering our own needs.

I hope you find it helpful!

# Empower yourself with new rules

The holidays come with unspoken rules we've internalized over the years — rules that often drain us because they don't align with how we actually function.

Here are some old rules, along with new ones that might help you celebrate the holidays in ways that feel right for you:

Old rule → ***Empowering rule***

Family harmony is more important than honesty.
→ ***Sharing the truth in a compassionate way creates authentic connections.***

Traditions can't change. → ***Traditions evolve to honor our changing needs.***

I need to act "normal" to make other people comfortable.
→ ***Being myself helps other people be themselves too.***

Other people's disappointment means I did something wrong.
→ ***I can honor my needs even when other people are disappointed.***

Sensory overload is something I just need to tolerate.
→ ***Respecting my sensory needs enables me to stay balanced.***

I should be able to do as much as everyone else.
→ ***Planning for the time and energy I actually have keeps me healthy.***

Saying yes keeps the peace. → ***Saying no when I need to say no keeps me healthy.***

***I*** have to open gifts in front of people and react "the right way."
→ ***I can open gifts where and when it's most comfortable for me.***

## REFLECTIONS

- What are some rules that you've internalized? You might choose some from the list above, and you might create some of your own.

- What are some empowering rules that you can replace them with? You might choose some from the list above, and you might create some of your own.

## TRY THIS

Ways to reinforce your new rules:

- Post them where you'll see them (mirror, phone wallpaper, refrigerator, coffee maker)
- Say them out loud
- Share them with someone you trust

The more you reinforce these rules, the more they'll guide your thoughts and actions this holiday season.

# Tuning into your core values

You deserve a holiday season that reflects who you are and what's important to you. When you make decisions based on your values, you reduce stress, protect your energy, and connect more authentically.

As you read through these values, pay attention to what happens in your body. Do you feel calmer? Lighter? More grounded? More energized? Those sensations are your nervous system telling you what you need.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Circle all the values that really resonate with you:

| Value | What it looks like | What it doesn't look like |
|---|---|---|
| **Authenticity** | Showing up as the real you without apology. | Pretending to enjoy things to make other people comfortable. |
| **Autonomy** | Celebrating in a way that feels right for you. | Letting other people decide how you spend your holidays. |
| **Balance** | A healthy mix of solitude and connection. | Prioritizing everyone else at your expense. |
| **Belonging** | Being accepted as your true self without masking. | Acting the way you think other people want or expect you to act. |
| **Boundaries** | Saying no to protect your energy and well-being. | Overcommitting because you feel guilty or obligated. |
| **Calm** | Slow, predictable days with minimal stress. | Rushing from one thing to the next. |
| **Comfort** | Sensory-safe environments, soft clothes, familiar food. | Loud, bright, or overwhelming settings. |
| **Creativity** | Making or expressing something in a way you enjoy. | Perfectionism that turns play into pressure. |

| Value | What it looks like | What it doesn't look like |
|---|---|---|
| **Family** | Spending time with people who feel like home to you. | Enduring painful dynamics just to avoid conflict. |
| **Financial ease** | Spending within a budget that feels manageable. | Overspending to avoid guilt or comparison. |
| **Fun** | Activities you genuinely enjoy and want to do. | Forced "fun" that drains your energy. |
| **Generosity** | Giving in ways that don't deplete you. | Giving so much that resentment builds. |
| **Gratitude** | Appreciating what's good without ignoring what's hard. | Forced positivity that dismisses your real experience. |
| **Health** | Sleep, nourishment, medication, gentle movement. | Ignoring your body's needs so you can "power through." |
| **Honesty** | Naming what's true for you, even when it's uncomfortable. | Pretending everything is fine to avoid disappointing others. |
| **Hospitality** | Hosting in ways that feel comfortable and manageable. | Hosting beyond your capacity just to impress or please other people. |
| **Joy** | Small moments that make your heart feel lighter. | Pretending everything is great when you're exhausted. |
| **Kindness** | Gentle actions that feel good to give. | Overextending yourself to take care of everyone. |
| **Mindfulness** | Savoring sensory-safe moments at your own pace. | Productivity disguised as self-care or rest. |
| **Organization** | Systems that support you without adding pressure. | Planning so much that the planning itself becomes one more thing to manage. |
| **Predictability** | Schedules and expectations you know ahead of time. | Last-minute changes that overwhelm your system. |
| **Rest** | Quiet time that recharges your brain and body. | Filling every minute to meet other people's plans. |
| **Safety** | Environments where you feel physically and emotionally secure. | Tolerating spaces or people that make you feel on edge. |

| Value | What it looks like | What it doesn't look like |
|---|---|---|
| **Self-compassion** | Treating yourself kindly when capacity is low. | Beating yourself up for not doing enough. |
| **Simplicity** | Choosing ease and fewer commitments. | Overscheduling, overdecorating, or overdoing. |
| **Spirituality** | Personal rituals or reflections that feel meaningful. | Obligatory events that don't align with your beliefs. |
| **Spontaneity** | Saying yes to small, optional surprises when you have the energy for them. | Last-minute changes by other people that derail your nervous system. |
| **Tradition** | Keeping the traditions that are still comforting or enjoyable. | Doing things just because "that's how we always do it." |
| **Other** | A value that's important to me but not listed: | |

## INSTRUCTIONS

From the values that you circled, put a star next to the five values that feel most important to you. Write them here:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Keep this list handy — you'll use it throughout this workbook to help make decisions that honor who you are.

# Mapping your values

When you spend time doing things that align with your core values, your nervous system can relax. When you don't, you're more likely to feel drained, restless, or on edge.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Write your top 5 core values (from page 7) at the top of the table below.

2. List everything on your plate this holiday season — things you did last year, new invitations, things you think you're supposed to do, and things you've been putting off or worrying about. Include:

   - Social events (parties, religious services, family gatherings)
   - Preparation (shopping, cooking, cleaning, hosting)
   - Travel (planning, packing, driving/flying)
   - Traditions (exchanging gifts, taking family photos, sending cards)
   - Emotional labor (keeping the peace, coordinating schedules, managing family dynamics)

3. For each activity:

   - In the second column, write any core values it aligns with. If it doesn't align with any, leave it blank.
   - In the third column, mark whether it energizes or drains you.

## My Core Values (from Page 7):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

| Holiday activity | Core values it aligns with | Does it energize me or drain me? |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

## REFLECTIONS

Now that you've created your values map, take a few minutes to think about what you've discovered.

- Which activities feel like a definite "yes" for you?

- Which activities might you want to consider letting go of because they either don't align with your values, or align with your values but drain you?

## INSTRUCTIONS

Go back to your values map and cross out the activities that you want to try letting go of this year. You don't have to eliminate everything that drains you. Letting go of just one or two things can make a significant difference.

> *By eliminating what doesn't serve you, you open up more space for what's truly meaningful.*

- What might you gain if you eliminated or reduced those activities?

- Which activities align with your values but still drain you? (In the next section, we'll look at ways you might be able to modify those activities so they drain you less.)

## REWRITING YOUR RULES

Letting go of activities that don't serve you isn't selfish. It protects your energy so you can show up authentically. This might stir up guilt or fear of disappointing others. That's normal.

Here are some old rules that might be creating resistance, along with new ones to replace them:

- *If I'm struggling, it means I'm not trying hard enough.*
  → ***My capacity is real, and honoring it protects my energy.***
- *If I don't do it, nobody will.*
  → ***If something is important to other people, they'll find a way to do it.***
- *I need to make sure everyone's happy.*
  → ***Each person is responsible for their own feelings.***

## REFLECTIONS

- What are some old rules you've been following that might be creating resentment for you?

- What are some empowering rules that you can replace them with?

# Protecting the essentials

In our effort to squeeze in holiday activities, we often sacrifice sleep, down-time, and routines that help keep us regulated. But that exhausts us even more, draining the energy we need to actually enjoy the holidays.

Let's map out a typical holiday week to see how much time you *actually* have available.

## BLOCK OUT A TYPICAL HOLIDAY WEEK WITH YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES:

On the next three pages, you'll find each day of the week broken down into one-hour blocks.

Fill in where each of these essentials go in each day during a typical week:

- Sleep
- Meals
- Morning routine
- Work / school
- Transition time
- Chores / errands
- Parenting
- Alone time / downtime to recharge or regulate
- Exercise

| | *Example* | Sunday | Monday |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Midnight** | *sleep* | | |
| **1:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **2:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **3:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **4:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **5:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **6:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **7:00 AM** | *sleep* | | |
| **8:00 AM** | *breakfast, shower* | | |
| **9:00 AM** | *work* | | |
| **10:00 AM** | *work* | | |
| **11:00 AM** | *work* | | |
| **Noon** | *lunch* | | |
| **1:00 PM** | *work* | | |
| **2:00 PM** | *work* | | |
| **3:00 PM** | *work* | | |
| **4:00 PM** | *work* | | |
| **5:00 PM** | *work* | | |
| **6:00 PM** | *dinner* | | |
| **7:00 PM** | *family time* | | |
| **8:00 PM** | *family time* | | |
| **9:00 PM** | *family time* | | |
| **10:00 PM** | *unwind* | | |
| **11:00 PM** | *sleep* | | |

| | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|---|---|---|---|
| Midnight | | | |
| 1:00 AM | | | |
| 2:00 AM | | | |
| 3:00 AM | | | |
| 4:00 AM | | | |
| 5:00 AM | | | |
| 6:00 AM | | | |
| 7:00 AM | | | |
| 8:00 AM | | | |
| 9:00 AM | | | |
| 10:00 AM | | | |
| 11:00 AM | | | |
| Noon | | | |
| 1:00 PM | | | |
| 2:00 PM | | | |
| 3:00 PM | | | |
| 4:00 PM | | | |
| 5:00 PM | | | |
| 6:00 PM | | | |
| 7:00 PM | | | |
| 8:00 PM | | | |
| 9:00 PM | | | |
| 10:00 PM | | | |
| 11:00 PM | | | |

| | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---|
| Midnight | | |
| 1:00 AM | | |
| 2:00 AM | | |
| 3:00 AM | | |
| 4:00 AM | | |
| 5:00 AM | | |
| 6:00 AM | | |
| 7:00 AM | | |
| 8:00 AM | | |
| 9:00 AM | | |
| 10:00 AM | | |
| 11:00 AM | | |
| Noon | | |
| 1:00 PM | | |
| 2:00 PM | | |
| 3:00 PM | | |
| 4:00 PM | | |
| 5:00 PM | | |
| 6:00 PM | | |
| 7:00 PM | | |
| 8:00 PM | | |
| 9:00 PM | | |
| 10:00 PM | | |
| 11:00 PM | | |

Take a look at what's left. Those empty spaces are your available time for holiday activities.

Does that feel like enough time for everything on your list?

If not, your current plan might be physically impossible. Something has to give. You get to decide.

## WHEN THE REALITY HITS

If you're realizing you don't have enough time for everything, you might be feeling all kinds of emotions, including:

- *Grief - mourning the idealized version of the holidays*
- *Anger - at yourself, at others, at impossible expectations*
- *Shame - for "failing" at something that seems easy for everyone else*
- *Confusion - about why this feels harder for you than for other people*
- *Panic - about disappointing people*
- *Relief - finally understanding why you always feel overwhelmed*

All your feelings are valid.

For years, you've been trying to do the impossible. Not because you weren't trying hard enough, but because you literally didn't have enough hours in the day.

## EMPOWERING YOURSELF

Before you start making decisions, take a few deep breaths. Here are a few affirmations you might want to say out loud:

- *"I'm allowed to make decisions that are right for me."*
- *"Having fewer obligations brings me more joy and peace."*
- *"Rest is productive. Presence is enough."*

## REFLECTIONS

- When you look at the time you have available after you block out your non-negotiables, what emotions come up?

- Which activities feel like a definite "yes" (ones you want to keep)?

- Which activities are you ready to let go of?

- What might you gain by protecting your time and energy?

## WANT SUPPORT WITH THIS?

These decisions can feel clear on paper but much harder to put into action, especially if you're used to prioritizing other people's needs.

If you want support figuring out how to actually protect these boundaries in your life, I offer one-on-one coaching where we can work through your specific situation together.

Learn more at **www.AuDHDWomen.com.**

# The Magic Question

When it comes to holiday traditions, we tend to default to autopilot without considering whether the way we've always done things actually works for us.

When you're neurodivergent, acting in ways that contradict your core values is incredibly draining, sometimes almost paralyzing.

So the next (probably most important) step is to figure out how to approach your holiday activities in ways that honor what's truly important to you.

For each activity on your values map, you're going to ask yourself what I call the Magic Question:

***"What would be the simplest way for me to stay true to my commitment to {core value(s)} when I {do this activity} this year?"***

This keeps the focus on your core values while creating space for possibilities you might not have considered.

The Magic Question doesn't ask: "How can I do this the 'right' way?" There is no "right" way; there's only what works best for you.

Let's look at a couple of examples.

**Example 1:** Maybe one of the activities on your values map is "visit my parents," and the core value it honors is *family*.

Your Magic Question would be:

"What would be ***the simplest way*** for me to stay true to my commitment to family when I visit my parents this year?"

Some possible answers:

- Visit for two days instead of five
- Stay at a hotel instead of their house
- Plan one special activity together instead of trying to fill every moment
- Schedule the visit for January instead of December

**Example 2:** Maybe one of your activities is "host a holiday gathering," and the core value it honors is hospitality.

Your Magic Question would be:

*"What would be **the simplest way** for me to stay true to my commitment to hospitality when I host a holiday gathering this year?"*

Some possible answers:

- Host a potluck instead of cooking everything yourself
- Invite fewer people
- Make it a game night instead of a dinner party
- Order takeout instead of cooking

We're focusing on the reason each activity is important to you – your core values – and then *designing the details around your core values.*

Focusing on the simplest way to honor your core values when doing an activity is essentially an invitation to eliminate all the extraneous stuff (which is most likely the stuff that's draining you).

You're going to brainstorm ways to simplify each of your holiday activities. First, some ideas that might help you with that.



## BRAINSTORMING TIP: ASK LOU

If you're having trouble coming up with ideas, try asking yourself: "What would my friend Lou do?"

Lou (who is imaginary) is someone who genuinely doesn't care what other people think. Lou does things in whatever way works best for them, without worrying about judgment or criticism.

When you ask yourself, "What would Lou do?" you give yourself permission to think creatively, leaving other people's expectations behind.

(Another approach: Ask yourself, "What would I encourage my friend Lou to do in this situation?")

## SOME STRATEGIES

Here are four types of modifications that might help with your brainstorming.

### Shortcuts

Shortcuts aren't cheating. They're strategic. They free up your energy for the things that really matter.

For years, I dreaded making mashed potatoes for holiday meals. There were just too many variables. How small to chop the potatoes? How long to boil them? How much butter to add?

Last year, I discovered instant mashed potatoes. I worried I'd be letting my family down. But you know what? I was less stressed, the potatoes actually tasted better, and nobody cared that I'd "cheated."

***Look for shortcuts: faster or easier ways to achieve essentially the same result.***

**Examples:**

- Buy pre-made cookie dough
- Skip the fancy tablecloth, holiday plates, and festive napkins
- Get a tabletop tree instead of a full-size one
- Use gift bags instead of wrapping paper

### Time tweaks

For years, Christmas Day ended in a let-down for my son. After weeks of anticipation, there was so much intensity gets packed into a single day. And then… it was all over.

One year, he asked if I could give him one of his presents every few days before Christmas.

Honestly, it's one of the best things we've done. It spreads the excitement out for him, and it makes things more manageable for me.

***Think about ways you could tweak an activity by adjusting the timeline, length, or intensity of an activity.***

**Examples:**

- Move the cookie exchange to the week after Christmas
- Host brunch instead of dinner so that it ends earlier in the day
- Build in a 30-minute break between activities to give yourself time to decompress
- Leave the party after an hour instead of staying the whole time

## Support

Cut-out cookies with buttercream frosting taste like my childhood, but they're a pain to make. The whole process takes at least an entire day. The worst part for me is frosting and decorating, since I'm not very artistic.

A few years ago, we started inviting a friend who enjoys decorating to help. Now the cookies get done faster, and it's more fun making them.

***Think about ways you could enlist other people to help, whether that means collaborating, having someone keep you company while you work, or taking something off your plate entirely.***

**Examples:**

- Request that everyone brings a dish to share
- Bring someone with you to the party so that you have someone to talk to
- Ask a friend to sit with you while you wrap gifts (body doubling)
- Split the hosting – appetizers at one person's house, dinner at another, dessert at a third person's house

## Sensory modifications

When you're neurodivergent, sensory overwhelm can turn a meaningful activity into an unbearable experience. The good news is that small adjustments can make a huge difference.

Think about ways you could modify the sensory environment to make an activity more comfortable for you.

**Examples:**

**Sound:**

- Wear noise-canceling headphones or earplugs
- Lower the background music or choose instrumental music
- Give yourself permission to step outside or into a quiet room when needed

**Light:**

- Use warm, dim lighting instead of bright overhead lights
- Wear sunglasses
- Skip the flashing/blinking decorations

**Smell:**

- Skip heavily scented candles, air fresheners, or potpourri
- Open windows to air out overwhelming food smells
- Step outside or into another room if a smell is overwhelming

**Touch/texture:**

- Wear soft, comfortable clothes
- Bring a familiar comfort item (soft scarf, fidget, weighted lap pad)
- Use wrapping paper with a pleasant texture

**Taste:**

- Eat beforehand if you're going somewhere with unfamiliar foods
- Bring a safe food with you
- Give yourself permission to skip unpleasant foods

**Social/environmental:**

- Arrive early to gatherings before they get crowded and loud
- Limit the number of people at your gathering
- Schedule activities during times of day when you have more capacity

Sensory accommodations aren't "high maintenance." They're essential for your wellbeing. When you aren't fighting sensory overload, you have more energy to actually enjoy the activity.

## INSTRUCTIONS

On the next page, you'll find a worksheet to guide you through the Magic Question process for your first activity.

Turn back to your values map on page 7 to fill in the blanks at the top of the worksheet. Then use the brainstorming section to explore possibilities using shortcuts, time tweaks, support, and sensory modifications.

When you're done, write your plan for that activity at the bottom of the worksheet.

Then repeat the process for each activity on your values map. Additional worksheets are provided on the following pages.

# Magic Question Worksheet

- Activity from my values map: _____
- Core value(s) this activity honors: _____
- What would be the simplest way for me to stay true to my commitment to _____ (core value[s]) when I _____ (activity) this year?

## BRAINSTORM:

- Shortcuts I could take (easier or faster methods):

- Tweaks I could make (timeline, length, or intensity):

- Support I could ask for (collaborating, delegating, or body-doubling):

- Sensory modifications I could make (adjusting the environment or my experience of it):

## MY PLAN:

- Based on my brainstorming, here's how I'll approach this activity this year:

# Magic Question Worksheet

- Activity from my values map: _____
- Core value(s) this activity honors: _____
- What would be the simplest way for me to stay true to my commitment to _____ (core value[s]) when I _____ (activity) this year?

## BRAINSTORM:

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- Tweaks I could make (timeline, length, or intensity):

- Support I could ask for (collaborating, delegating, or body-doubling):

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- Activity from my values map: _____
- Core value(s) this activity honors: _____
- What would be the simplest way for me to stay true to my commitment to _____ (core value[s]) when I _____ (activity) this year?

## BRAINSTORM:

- Shortcuts I could take (easier or faster methods):

- Tweaks I could make (timeline, length, or intensity):

- Support I could ask for (collaborating, delegating, or body-doubling):

- Sensory modifications I could make (adjusting the environment or my experience of it):

## MY PLAN:

- Based on my brainstorming, here's how I'll approach this activity this year:

# Magic Question Worksheet

- Activity from my values map: _____
- Core value(s) this activity honors: _____
- What would be the simplest way for me to stay true to my commitment to _____ (core value[s]) when I _____ (activity) this year?

## BRAINSTORM:

- Shortcuts I could take (easier or faster methods):

- Tweaks I could make (timeline, length, or intensity):

- Support I could ask for (collaborating, delegating, or body-doubling):

- Sensory modifications I could make (adjusting the environment or my experience of it):

## MY PLAN:

- Based on my brainstorming, here's how I'll approach this activity this year:

# Communicating your boundaries

You've done amazing work: you've redesigned your holiday season in a way that protects your energy and honors what's most important to you.

The next step: Telling other people about the changes you've decided to make.

## KEEP IT SIMPLE AND DIRECT

### Who needs to know, and when

Focus on people directly affected by your decision. Give them enough advance notice to make alternative plans. Have the conversation one-on-one, when you're calm and have adequate energy.

### How to communicate it

Use whatever method feels most comfortable: in person, on the phone, via email or text. You can write down what to say ahead of time. You don't have to make eye contact.

### What to say

"I've decided to do / not do / modify {activity} this year, and I just wanted to let you know."

You're not asking for permission. You're not justifying. You're not apologizing.

You're simply telling them about a decision you've made.

## OTHER PEOPLE'S REACTIONS

Let's be realistic: Some people might not be supportive. They might push back, guilt-trip you, or act hurt.

It can help to prepare responses ahead of time. Practice saying them out loud, or keep them on your phone so you can read them if you freeze under pressure.

**If people react negatively:**

- "This is what feels right for me this year."
- "I'm simplifying things so I can enjoy the holidays more."
- "I need some time to think about that." (If you're not sure how to respond.)
- "I'm not going to discuss this any further." (If they won't drop it.)

**If they press for details:**

- "This is what's right for me."
- "I'm making changes so I can take better care of myself."
- "This is what works for my family."
- Optional: "Thank you for supporting my decision to take care of myself."

It's okay for someone to feel uncomfortable about your decisions. Discomfort is often a necessary ingredient for growth.

## TALKING TO YOUR KIDS

If you have kids, you might worry: "What if they're disappointed?"

Remember: Your kids benefit when you take care of yourself. When you're less stressed, you're more present. Kids are more adaptable than we think. They might even prefer a simplified version of the holidays.

### 1 Start with your reasons.

For younger kids:
"You know how I get really tired during the holidays? I want more energy to play with you and do fun things. So we're doing some things differently this year."

For older kids/teens:
"I've been thinking about how stressed I get during the holidays. I want to spend my energy on the things that really matter, like spending time with you."

### 2 Make it a two-way conversation.

Ask what the holidays are like for them:

- *"What's your favorite part of the holidays?"*
- *"Is there anything that feels hard or stressful?"*
- *"If you could change one thing, what would it be?"*

Give them time to process and reflect. You might want to plant the seed, then revisit the conversation periodically over several hours or days.

### 3 Share your ideas and connect them to your "why."

*Connect the change to a benefit for them. Kids accept change more easily when they see how it helps them, too."*

*Cooking a big meal wipes me out. So instead of having everyone over for dinner, we're inviting them for cookies and games. That way I'll have more energy to actually enjoy being with everyone, especially you."*

### 4 Let them make decisions within your boundaries.

Give them a voice in *how* things change, even if they don't get to decide *whether* things change.

*"We're doing a smaller meal this year. Do you want to help pick what we make, or would you rather go out to eat?"*

### 5 Validate their feelings.

- Acknowledge: "I can see you're really sad about this. It's okay to feel that way."
- Offer empathy: "I know this is hard. Change can be really challenging."
- Invite problem-solving (if appropriate): "Is there something else we could do that would feel special to you?"

If your child has a meltdown: Give them space, offer sensory regulation tools, and revisit the conversation when they're calm.

Their disappointment doesn't mean you made the wrong decision. It just means they're adjusting to change.

### 6 Check in as things unfold.

Be open to adjusting if something isn't working. You're teaching them it's okay to advocate for their needs.

*"How are you feeling about the changes we're making?"*

## MANAGING YOUR REACTION TO OTHER PEOPLE'S REACTIONS

When you start advocating for yourself after years of ignoring your needs, conflicting feelings might come up:

- *Guilt: "I'm letting people down."*
  → You're taking care of yourself. That's not selfish. It's necessary.
- *Fear: "What if they're mad at me?"*
  → Their feelings aren't your responsibility.
- *Doubt: "Maybe I should just suck it up."*
  → Your needs are valid.

Remind yourself: "I'm modeling what it looks like to honor my values and protect my energy."

When we see someone make a change, it gives us permission to do the same. You're giving other people permission by going first.

## WHEN TO ADJUST YOUR PLAN

Sometimes you might realize you simplified too much or not enough. That's part of the process. You're allowed to adjust.

**Signs something might need adjusting:**

- You feel resentful or drained instead of energized
- You're missing something that genuinely matters to you
- Your circumstances changed

**Your options:**

- Try a different strategy
- Adjust your approach
- Let it go for this year and revisit next year

# Your new holiday season

You did it.

You just did something most people never do: You questioned the way things have always been done, and you designed a holiday season that actually works for you.

That takes courage.

It takes self-awareness.

It takes a willingness to prioritize what truly matters, even when it feels uncomfortable.

**You now have:**

A clear understanding of what makes the holidays meaningful to you, not to someone else.

A realistic picture of where your energy is going and permission to redirect it.

A plan that honors what's important while protecting your wellbeing.

The tools to communicate your boundaries with clarity and confidence.

And most importantly: Permission to do things differently.

Here's to a holiday season that feels more like *you*.