THE REAL RETURN

By Ruth Matthews

A 12-Week Guided Workbook for Women in Midlife

Work. Health. Relationships. Identity. What comes next.

REFLECT · EMBODY · ALIGN · LIVE



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REALIGN WITH RUTH

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For every woman who is still doing all of it, and has started to wonder whether she still wants to.

For the one who remembers everyone's appointments, answers the late messages and keeps the household running in her head.

For the one who can still do the job, and has quietly stopped wanting it.

This is for you.

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A Letter from Ruth

Dear Friend,

For more than thirty-three years I worked in the motor industry, thirteen of them as a sales manager. It was structured, demanding and measured by results. I knew how to lead, how to deliver and how to keep a lot of moving parts moving. For a long time that suited me well.

From the outside, nothing needed fixing. But a question had started to turn up, usually at the end of a long day, and it didn't go away.

Is this still what I want?

It wasn't a crisis. I wasn't unhappy. I simply noticed that the life I had built was based on decisions I had made years earlier, with different information and different priorities.

Around the same time, life brought things I couldn't simply push through. Family illness, loss, and the kind of worry you carry for people you love. Those years taught me that you can be very capable and still not know what you want next. You can be the person everyone relies on and still need someone to think things through with.

I left the motor industry, not because it had failed me, but because I had outgrown it. I trained in coaching, including NLP, menopause coaching and somatic coaching, because I wanted to understand what actually changes for women after forty and how to help in a way that is practical and honest.

What I found in the women I worked with was not a need for another productivity system or a list of affirmations. They wanted better questions. They wanted to separate what needed action from what needed more information. And they wanted to stop measuring their worth by how much they could carry.

The REAL Method grew from that. Four stages, Reflect, Embody, Align and Live, that give you a structured way to look at what is happening, notice what your body and behaviour are telling you, decide what matters now, and act on it.

This workbook won't tell you who to become. It will help you think more clearly about the life you are actually living.

With gratitude,

Ruth Matthews
FOUNDER, REALIGN WITH RUTH

How to Use This Workbook

The REAL Return runs for twelve weeks and follows the four stages of the REAL Method. Each stage is a module of three weeks.

Every week opens with a short piece of teaching. Read it first, because it explains what the practices are for. Then work through the practices at whatever pace your week allows. Each week closes with three review questions, what shifted, what you learned and what you need next.

Before Week 1, complete Your Starting Point. You'll come back to it at the end of Week 12 and compare.

At the back you'll find a six-month plan, a twelve-month plan, a monthly tracker and extra practice pages for use long after the twelve weeks are done.

One honest page is worth more than five rushed ones.

A Few Ground Rules

Choose what is useful.
You don't have to complete every practice. Start with the pages that fit what is going on for you and come back to the others later.

Take the time the work needs.
Some weeks will move quickly. Others will take longer. If a week needs ten days, give it ten days.

Know when to stop.
If a page brings up more than you can manage on your own, stop. Talk to someone you trust, and if it stays heavy, speak to a qualified professional. That is good judgement, not failure.

Treat what you notice as information.
You'll be asked to notice thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and habits. None of it is a verdict on you and none of it is a diagnosis. It is information worth looking at.

Write in pencil if you like.
Your answers are allowed to change. A page you complete in Week 2 may read very differently by Week 10.

The REAL Method at a Glance

The four stages run in a deliberate order. First you look at what is actually happening. Then you add what your body, emotions, energy and behaviour are showing you. Then you decide what matters now. Finally you turn that into decisions and action.

R	**Reflect** WEEKS 1 TO 3	Notice what has changed, what keeps repeating and what deserves your attention.
E	**Embody** WEEKS 4 TO 6	Notice your body, emotions, energy and behaviour as information, not diagnosis.
A	**Align** WEEKS 7 TO 9	Clarify your values, priorities, boundaries and choices.
L	**Live** WEEKS 10 TO 12	Turn what you understand into decisions and practical action.

Three Ideas This Workbook Rests On

Something has changed, and it deserves your attention rather than your impatience.

Menopause may be part of the picture. It should never be used to explain everything away.

Self-trust is not believing every thought or diagnosing yourself. It is taking your own experience seriously enough to investigate it.

Your Starting Point

This is not a test. It is a snapshot of where you are today, so you have something honest to compare against at the end of Week 12.

DATE _____

RATE WHERE YOU ARE TODAY, FROM 1 (VERY LOW) TO 5 (STRONG)

Energy	1	2	3	4	5
Clarity about what I want	1	2	3	4	5
Self-trust	1	2	3	4	5
Capacity	1	2	3	4	5
Satisfaction with how my days are spent	1	2	3	4	5

The three biggest drains on my time and energy right now

One pattern I keep repeating

What I would like to be different by the end of these twelve weeks

One realistic thing I will do in the next seven days

MODULE ONE

Reflect

Notice what has changed, what keeps repeating and what deserves your attention.

Before you change anything, it helps to see clearly what is there. Most women in midlife are not short of self-criticism. What they are often short of is an accurate picture.

These three weeks look at where you are running on habit, what you actually feel underneath the busyness, and the old rules you may still be following long after they stopped being useful.

WEEK 1	Seeing Yourself Clearly
WEEK 2	Naming What You Feel
WEEK 3	Rewriting Old Stories

WEEK 1

Seeing Yourself Clearly

MODULE ONE · REFLECT

You have been doing what needed doing.

The busyness, the pushing through, the lists kept in your head. None of that was weakness. For years it was probably the most sensible way to get everything done. Keeping moving works. The trouble is that it can carry on working long after it has stopped suiting you.

This week is about noticing where that has happened.

What Autopilot Really Is

Autopilot is not laziness and it is not a personality flaw. It is your brain being efficient. It runs familiar routines so you don't have to think hard about every small decision.

That is useful. It is how you drive a familiar route without planning each turn, answer the same kind of email for the hundredth time, or cook dinner while holding a conversation.

It becomes a problem when it spreads from tasks to the rest of your life. You reach Friday and can't remember much of the week. You agree to things before you've checked whether you want them. You eat without tasting and rest without resting.

Autopilot keeps you functioning. Functioning is not the same as a life that fits.

Getting Through Versus Being There

Getting through says, just get to the end of today. Being there says, I'd like to actually notice today.

Getting through waits for things to calm down before it allows rest. The problem is that things rarely calm down on their own.

In my experience, the women who struggle most with this are not the ones who aren't trying. They are often trying very hard, sometimes at keeping up a version of their life that made sense ten years ago.

Paying attention won't make every day easy. It does mean you're making choices on purpose rather than by default. That is what the REAL Method is aiming for. Not a more productive you. A more deliberate one.

Awareness Is Data, Not a Verdict

This point shapes everything else in the workbook, so it's worth making now.

When women start looking honestly at their lives, many immediately turn what they see into evidence against themselves. How did I let it get like this? What is wrong with me? I've wasted years.

That reaction is common, and it is not useful. A map doesn't judge the terrain. It shows you where things are so you can decide where to go.

When you notice a pattern, you haven't failed. You've seen something. There is a difference between asking, what can I learn from this, and telling yourself, this proves I'm not good enough. This week you practise the first one.

It's very hard to see clearly while you're busy being ashamed of what you're looking at. So start with curiosity.

Awareness is data, not a verdict.

Your Focus This Week

There is nothing to fix this week. You are only asked to notice.

Notice where you have been running on automatic. The moments you moved through without really being in them. The feelings you skipped past because there wasn't time. The needs you parked for later.

Collect what you see the way a good researcher would, with interest rather than judgement. You'll do something with it in the weeks that follow.

PRACTICE 1

Autopilot Awareness Map

You're not looking for what is wrong. You're looking for where you have stopped paying attention.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

For each area below, note where you are most on autopilot. Then circle how present you feel in that area, from 1 (completely automatic) to 5 (fully present).

RELATIONSHIPS

Where am I going through the motions?

WORK AND PURPOSE

Where am I doing the job without being in it?

BODY AND HEALTH

What am I ignoring or putting off?

DAILY HABITS

Which routines have lost their point?

HOW PRESENT DO I FEEL?

Relationships	1	2	3	4	5
Work and purpose	1	2	3	4	5
Body and health	1	2	3	4	5
Daily habits	1	2	3	4	5

What would change if I paid more attention to the area I rated lowest? One small thing I will do about it this week

PRACTICE 2

Getting Through and Being There

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

In the left column, write honestly about where you are just getting through. In the right column, write what you would like instead. Keep it specific. Leave my job is less useful than stop answering work messages after 8pm.

GETTING THROUGH, WHAT I DO NOW	BEING THERE, WHAT I WANT INSTEAD

Looking at both columns, what stands out?

One small change I will make this week

You are not here only to get through your life. You are allowed to be present for it.

PRACTICE 3

Awareness Log

Don't try to change anything yet. Just record it.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each day, take a few minutes to fill in one row. Note a moment when you felt present, a moment when you felt on autopilot, and what you noticed. Then circle how the day felt overall, from 1 (poor) to 5 (good).

	A PRESENT MOMENT	AN AUTOPILOT MOMENT	WHAT I NOTICED	THE DAY
Day 1				1 2 3 4 5
Day 2				1 2 3 4 5
Day 3				1 2 3 4 5
Day 4				1 2 3 4 5
Day 5				1 2 3 4 5
Day 6				1 2 3 4 5
Day 7				1 2 3 4 5

Is there a moment, feeling or situation that keeps showing up?

PRACTICE 4

Energy Awareness

Your energy is useful evidence about what fits your life and what doesn't.

What gives me energy?

People, places, activities, times of day

What drains my energy?

Be specific. The favour that became a standing arrangement counts.

Why do I keep doing the things that drain me?

Look for the reason rather than the fault. Most patterns made sense once.

How could I get a little more of what gives me energy this week?

PRACTICE 5

A Body-Based Practice

Paying attention is not only something that happens in your head.

Choose one of these and give it five to ten minutes. Sit or lie somewhere comfortable. You can stop whenever you like.

Body scan

Breathe at your normal pace. Move your attention slowly from the top of your head down to your feet and notice what is there, without trying to change it. When your mind wanders, which it will, go back to where you left off.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Starting with your feet, tense one group of muscles for about five seconds, then let go and notice the difference for about ten seconds. Work up through your legs, stomach, hands, arms, shoulders and face. Skip any area that is painful or injured. This is one of the better-researched relaxation techniques and many people find it easier than simply trying to relax.

Appreciation scan

Move your attention through your body and, at each area, name one thing it did for you today. My legs got me up the stairs. My hands made the coffee. Keep it plain.

THE PRACTICE I CHOSE

- ☐ Body scan
- ☐ Progressive muscle relaxation
- ☐ Appreciation scan

What did I notice in my body, and what did I notice about my mood afterwards?

What deserves most of my attention right now?

Write freely. There is no right length.

END OF WEEK 1

Week 1 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Noticing is the first useful thing you can do.

WEEK 2

Naming What You Feel

MODULE ONE · REFLECT

When life requires you to keep going, feelings tend to get postponed. They are filed under later, and later rarely comes.

This week is about getting better at naming what you feel, noticing what may have set it off, and choosing a response rather than defaulting to your usual one.

You don't need to dig up old pain or push past what you can manage. The aim is accuracy, not intensity.

What Your Body Can Tell You

Thoughts, emotions and physical experience affect one another. Under stress you may notice changes in your breathing, posture, jaw, stomach, energy or sleep. Noticing these earlier gives you more choice about what to do next.

That doesn't mean every sensation has an emotional cause. Physical symptoms have many possible explanations. New, severe, persistent or worrying symptoms should be checked by a qualified healthcare professional, not interpreted in a workbook.

In these pages, body-based practices are simply a way of noticing. You might pause, notice where you're tense, name an emotion, change position or go for a short walk. What you notice is information, not diagnosis.

> Notice first. Interpret carefully. Get professional advice when something falls outside what reflection and coaching can deal with.

Every Emotion Carries Information

Most of us were taught, somewhere along the way, that some emotions are acceptable and others aren't. Gratitude and cheerfulness are welcome. Anger, grief, envy and resentment are to be managed, apologised for or kept out of sight.

But emotions aren't good or bad behaviour. They carry information.

Anger often signals that something you value isn't being respected, or that a line has been crossed. Grief tells you something mattered. Fear suggests something feels uncertain or risky. Resentment is frequently a sign that you've been giving more than you agreed to. Even envy can point to something you want and haven't admitted to wanting.

Emotional literacy is the practice of reading that information. Not being ruled by it, and not performing it, but understanding it well enough to decide what to do.

A Word About Guilt

Guilt deserves its own section, because it is the feeling most likely to turn up as you do this work.

For many women it arrives the moment they rest, say no, spend money on themselves or want something that doesn't benefit anyone else.

Guilt can be useful. When you have genuinely acted against your values, it points you towards putting things right. But a lot of the guilt women carry is not that kind. It was learned early, from families, schools and a culture with firm ideas about what a good woman, a good mother or a good employee does. It was repeated so often that it started to sound like your own voice.

That kind of guilt treats your needs as optional. It says the decent thing is to ask for less.

This week, when guilt turns up, don't argue with it and don't obey it. Question it. Where did this rule come from? Is it still true? Would I apply it to a friend?

How to Approach This Week's Practices

These aren't tasks to complete perfectly. They are practices, which means you'll do them imperfectly and repeatedly, and get a bit better each time.

Some of what comes up may surprise you. Some of it may be uncomfortable. Some pages will take two minutes and others you'll come back to in a month.

You're not here to look emotionally healthy on paper. You're here to get more accurate about what is going on inside you.

> These practices are optional. If one brings up distress, memories or emotions that feel hard to manage, stop and speak to a suitably qualified mental health professional.

PRACTICE 1

The Emotional Check-In

You can't respond well to a feeling you haven't named.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each morning or evening, write three words that describe how you feel, one thing that may have influenced those feelings, and one practical thing that would help.

	THREE WORDS	WHAT MAY HAVE INFLUENCED IT	ONE THING THAT WOULD HELP
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

If the words don't come easily, try these. Tired, tense, flat, restless, hopeful, irritated, sad, content, stretched, lonely, relieved, anxious, grateful, numb, proud, bored.

PRACTICE 2

The Pause Practice

When you feel a strong reaction rising, pause before you respond. One slow breath, then ask, what is underneath this?

Irritation is often covering tiredness. Anger is often protecting hurt. Impatience can be fear that something won't get done unless you do it.

Noticing without acting

When an uncomfortable feeling arrives, try saying to yourself, "I notice I'm feeling this. I don't have to act on it straight away." Name what you can, then decide what a sensible response would be.

WHAT HAPPENED	MY FIRST REACTION	WHAT WAS UNDERNEATH

What did I learn from pausing?

PRACTICE 3

Movement and Mood

Try up to ten minutes of comfortable movement. Stretching, walking, or moving to music you like. Pay attention to how your body feels rather than how it looks. Physical activity is one of the more reliable ways people find to shift their mood, even briefly.

Stop if you feel pain or dizziness, and adapt the movement to what your body can do today.

What kind of movement did I choose?

What did I notice in my body and my mood, before and after?

PRACTICE 4

Energy Leak Inventory

Resentment is often a sign that you have agreed to more than you can sustain.

Where am I feeling resentful, depleted or overcommitted right now?

Which conversation or boundary have I been putting off?

What would feel like relief?

One small thing I could do about it this week

END OF WEEK 2

Week 2 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Your emotions are not problems to solve. They are information worth reading.

WEEK 3

Rewriting Old Stories

MODULE ONE · REFLECT

Some of the rules you live by were written a long time ago.

They may belong to a younger version of you, a girl who was trying to make sense of the adults around her and work out what it took to be accepted. She drew conclusions. About herself, about what she deserved, and about who she needed to be.

Those conclusions made sense at the time. Because they formed before she could question them, they didn't feel like opinions. They felt like facts.

Some of them may still be running things.

How Old Stories Form

Old stories rarely come from one dramatic event. More often they build up through repeated small moments.

A parent who was too stretched to respond consistently may have taught you, without meaning to, that your needs were a burden. A classroom that laughed at a wrong answer may have taught you that being visible was risky. A family that didn't talk about feelings may have taught you to keep yours to yourself. A relationship where approval had to be earned may have taught you to keep performing.

Culture adds its own layer. Messages about what women should want, how they should look, how much they should give and how they should age. Because these are everywhere, they are the hardest to spot.

Every story you formed was once a sensible response to your circumstances. The difficulty isn't that you formed them. It's that you may still be following rules written for a situation that no longer exists.

Three Clues You Are Living an Old Story

Old stories don't announce themselves. They just feel like the way things are. So it helps to know the signs.

Clue one. A reaction bigger than the moment.

Mild feedback from a colleague and a day of feeling useless. A friend cancels and you're suddenly certain people always let you down. When the reaction is out of proportion to the event, something older is usually involved.

Clue two. A pattern that keeps repeating.

Different job, same dynamic. Different relationship, same argument. When the details change but the shape stays the same, it's worth asking what rule you might be following.

Clue three. The inner critic.

The voice that says you're too much, or not enough, or that it won't last. It usually didn't start with you. It is often an echo of something you heard early and repeated for decades. It sounds authoritative because it has had a lot of practice. That doesn't make it accurate.

When you notice any of these, pause. Something worth examining is present.

The Four-Step Reframe

Reframing is not positive thinking. It isn't swapping a hard truth for a comfortable one. It is looking at an old belief with your adult judgement and asking, is this actually true, or is this what I learned? And if it was useful once, is it still?

Step one. Notice it.

When you feel a strong reaction or a familiar spiral, ask, what story am I telling myself right now? Not what happened, but what meaning am I making of it? Write it down in plain words so you can look at it properly.

Step two. Name its purpose.

Before you try to get rid of the story, work out what it was for. When did I start believing this? What was it protecting me from? What did it let me do, or avoid?

"I am too much" may have been built by a child who learned that being quiet kept the peace. "I have to earn my place" may have come from a girl who noticed that achievement got attention. Understanding the purpose isn't excusing it. It makes it easier to put down.

Step three. Acknowledge it.

This can feel odd. But the belief was doing a job, with the only tools a younger you had. A plain acknowledgement is enough. I understand why this made sense. It's easier to let go of something you're no longer fighting.

Step four. Replace it.

Now write something more accurate. Not a fantasy and not an affirmation so far from your experience that you can't believe a word of it. A statement that is truer than the old one.

“I am too much” might become, I have strong opinions and feelings, and the right people can handle them.

“I have to earn my place” might become, I contribute a great deal, and I am learning that my worth isn’t only what I produce.

“I’m not the kind of person who succeeds” might become, that belief formed before I knew what I could do, and I’m prepared to find out.

The new statement won’t feel true straight away. That’s normal. Belief tends to follow repetition and experience, not the other way round.

Before You Begin the Story Audit

The Story Audit is one of the most demanding practices in the book, so give it time. Don’t aim for the cleverest reframe. Aim for the most honest one.

If emotion comes up as you write, it usually means you’ve found something that matters. If it becomes too much, stop and come back another day.

The girl who formed these stories did the best she could with what she had. You have more information now, and you’re allowed to use it.

You are allowed to update rules you wrote before you knew better.

PRACTICE 1

Story Audit, Story 1

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Work through one old story at a time, using the four steps. There is space for two. Use the extra practice pages at the back for more.

The old story, in plain words

Step two. When did I start believing this, and what was it protecting me from?

Step three. My acknowledgement of why it made sense

Step four. A more accurate story

One action this week that fits the new story

PRACTICE 1

Story Audit, Story 2

The old story, in plain words

Step two. When did I start believing this, and what was it protecting me from?

Step three. My acknowledgement of why it made sense

Step four. A more accurate story

One action this week that fits the new story

PRACTICE 2

Limiting Beliefs Map

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

When an old belief is triggered it moves fast. This map slows it down so you can see what happened and choose a different response.

	TRIGGER *What happened or was said?*	**OLD BELIEF** *What story fired instantly?*	**NEW RESPONSE** *What could I choose instead?*
Map 1			
Map 2			
Map 3			

What pattern do I notice across these three maps?

You can't change a response you can't see. Mapping it is the first step in choosing differently.

PRACTICE 3

A Letter to My Younger Self

HOW TO APPROACH THIS LETTER

Write to the younger you who first learned the story you're ready to change. You might acknowledge what she was dealing with, recognise that she was doing her best, and tell her what you know now that she didn't.

DATE _____

Dear younger me,

She did what she could with what she knew. You know more now.

PRACTICE 4

Practising the New Story

Say it out loud

Stand or sit upright with your feet on the floor. Take a slow breath and say your new statement aloud. Notice how it feels to say it, including any urge to laugh it off.

The mirror line

Each morning this week, say one line from your new story to yourself in the mirror. Choose words you can almost believe. I'm allowed to rest. I'm allowed to change my mind. It isn't too late to start something.

Music and movement

Choose a song that captures how you feel about the old story and move however you like, even if it's just swaying in the kitchen. Some women find music gets to feelings that words don't. If it becomes too much, stop and look around you, naming five things you can see.

Which of these did I try, and what did I notice?

The new line I said to myself this week

Which old rule am I ready to stop following?

END OF WEEK 3

Week 3 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

You are not your past. You get a say in what comes next.

MODULE TWO

Embody

Notice your body, emotions, energy and behaviour as information, not diagnosis.

Understanding a pattern in your head doesn't always change what you do. Many women can explain their habits perfectly and still repeat them.

These three weeks add another source of information, what you notice physically as you think, decide and respond. Tension, tiredness, appetite, restlessness, what you reach for at the end of a long day. None of it is a diagnosis. All of it is worth noticing.

WEEK 4	**Stress, Sleep and Your Nervous System**
WEEK 5	**Noticing Your Body**
WEEK 6	**Pleasure and Presence**

WEEK 4

Stress, Sleep and Your Nervous System

MODULE TWO · EMBODY

Before you try to change how you feel, it helps to know where you are.

This week looks at your nervous system, how stress shows up for you, what midlife may be adding to the picture, and which grounding practices actually help you. The aim is not to be calm all the time. It is to recognise when you are wound up, flat or somewhere in between, and to know what helps you settle.

These practices are not treatment for anxiety, depression, panic or any other health condition. If you are struggling, speak to a doctor.

Your Nervous System, Simply Put

Your nervous system is always scanning for what is safe and what needs your attention, mostly without you thinking about it. When it senses pressure, it gears you up. Your heart rate rises, your muscles tighten and your thinking narrows. When the pressure lasts too long, or feels too big, some people swing the other way and go flat, foggy or shut down. When things settle, you return to steady.

You may have come across polyvagal theory and the vagus nerve. Some of the specific claims made about them are still debated by researchers, so this workbook keeps to what is well supported. Your stress response is real, it shows up in your body, and simple things like slower breathing, movement, rest and time with people you trust can help it settle.

At any point in the day you might feel wound up, flat or reasonably steady. Everyone moves between these many times a day. They are states to notice, not labels to adopt.

Wound up

Racing thoughts, tension, restlessness, irritability, a sense of urgency, difficulty switching off.

Flat

Low energy, numbness, fogginess, not wanting to engage, wanting to retreat.

Steady

Clearer thinking, more flexibility, able to listen, able to make a decision without it feeling enormous.

The point isn't to stay in one state. It's to recognise which one you're in and what tends to help you move out of the unhelpful ones.

What Midlife Can Add

Many women notice that stress feels different in their forties and fifties. There are several possible reasons, and hormones are only one of them.

During perimenopause and menopause, oestrogen and progesterone fluctuate and then fall. For some women this shows up as broken sleep, night sweats, hot flushes, brain fog, low mood, irritability or anxiety that wasn't there before. Others notice very little.

At the same time, midlife often brings more responsibility, not less. Teenagers or adult children, ageing parents, demanding jobs, money decisions, relationships that have changed. Poor sleep makes all of it harder to handle.

Menopause may be part of the picture. It should never be used to explain everything away. If you're reacting more strongly than you used to, it's worth asking what else has changed too.

> If symptoms are affecting your sleep, mood, work or relationships, talk to a doctor, ideally one with an interest in menopause. Go prepared with notes on what you've noticed. A consultation is a conversation, and you are allowed to ask questions and seek a second opinion.

Why This Comes Before Big Decisions

It is much harder to think clearly when you're exhausted or wound up. Stress narrows your attention to whatever feels most urgent, which is useful in an emergency and unhelpful when you're trying to think about your life.

That's why this week sits here. Not because you have to feel relaxed before you're allowed to change anything, but because a decision made on four hours' sleep in the middle of a stressful week is rarely your best one.

Knowing what helps you think straight is practical information. Use it.

PRACTICE 1

My Stress Signals

Start with what you can observe, not what you think it means.

When I'm stressed, where do I feel it in my body?

What do I tend to do when I feel that way?
Scroll, snack, snap, clean, work late, go quiet

What is usually happening when I feel steady?

Which signals do I tend to ignore until they get loud?

Your body often gives early warnings. Noticing them sooner gives you more options.

PRACTICE 2

Nervous System Check-In

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Read the three columns and tick the one closest to where you are right now. Then complete the rest of the page. There's no right answer, only an honest one.

WOUND UP	IN BETWEEN	STEADY
Overwhelmed	Uneasy	Clear-headed
On edge	Restless	Able to focus
Irritable	Distracted	Flexible
Racing thoughts	Foggy	Patient
Can't switch off	Hard to say	Able to decide
☐ THIS IS ME TODAY	☐ THIS IS ME TODAY	☐ THIS IS ME TODAY

WHERE AM I HOLDING TENSION RIGHT NOW?

- ☐ Jaw and neck
- ☐ Shoulders and back
- ☐ Chest
- ☐ Stomach
- ☐ Hands
- ☐ Somewhere else

What else might be contributing today? Sleep, food, workload, a conversation, hormones, something else

What would help in the next hour?

One small thing I will do now

PRACTICE 3

Grounding Practices to Try

Small things done often are more useful than big things done rarely.

Grounding means bringing your attention back to your body and the present moment, so your nervous system has a chance to settle. Try each of these at least once this week and notice which ones suit you. What works for one person doesn't work for everyone.

Longer out-breath

Breathe in through your nose for a count of about four, then out slowly for a count of about six. Carry on for two to five minutes. Slow breathing with a longer exhale is one of the simplest things many people find helps them feel less wound up. If counting makes you tense, just let the out-breath be a little longer than the in-breath.

Look around the room

Name five things you can see, four you can hear and three you can feel, such as your feet on the floor. It brings your attention back to the present when your thoughts are racing ahead.

Change your surroundings

Step outside, open a window, or go for a ten-minute walk. Time outdoors and light physical activity are among the more consistently useful ways people find to lift their mood.

Move slowly

Spend ten minutes stretching, doing a few easy yoga poses or moving to music you like. Aim for attention rather than performance.

PRACTICE 4

Grounding Log

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each time you use a grounding practice, rate how you feel before and after, from 1 (very wound up) to 5 (steady). Over the week you'll build a picture of what actually helps your nervous system settle.

	PRACTICE I USED	BEFORE	AFTER	WHAT I NOTICED
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Which practice helped most, and why do I think that is?

PRACTICE 5

My Toolkit for Hard Days

Work this out on a good day so it's ready for a bad one.

What helps me feel steadier? Activities, places, people and practices

What are my early warning signs that I need one of these?

My top three

1

2

3

My plan. What will I do, where, and how often?

Something I have noticed that I want to mention to my doctor

END OF WEEK 4

Week 4 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Knowing what helps you think straight is useful information.

WEEK 5

Noticing Your Body

MODULE TWO · EMBODY

Interoception is the ability to notice what is happening inside your body. It's how you know you're hungry before you've thought about food, or that you're tense before you've worked out why.

Many women who have spent years putting everyone else first get out of the habit of noticing. The signals are still there. There just hasn't been time to pay attention to them.

This week is about paying attention again. What you notice is information, not diagnosis.

PRACTICE 1

The Sensation Scan

Lie down or sit comfortably. Move your attention slowly from the top of your head to your feet. Notice warmth or coolness, tightness or ease, heaviness or tingling.

You're not trying to fix anything or work out what it means. You're just noticing.

What did I notice, and where?

Was there anything I hadn't noticed before?

PRACTICE 2

The Body Check-In

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Set a reminder for three times a day. When it goes off, pause and ask what you're feeling physically, where you feel it, and what else is going on at that moment. Record it. Don't interpret it yet.

	MORNING	AFTERNOON	EVENING
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			

PRACTICE 3

The Hunger and Rest Question

Before you eat, or before you push through tiredness, pause and ask, am I hungry, am I tired, or do I need something else?

Sometimes the honest answer is that you want a break rather than a biscuit, or a conversation rather than another coffee. Sometimes you are just hungry. There's no wrong answer. This is about responding to what you actually need.

WHAT I REACHED FOR	WHAT I ACTUALLY NEEDED

What did I learn about my needs this week?

PRACTICE 4

The Yes and No Check

Think of a small decision you need to make. Sit comfortably and take a breath.

Imagine saying yes and notice what happens physically. Then imagine saying no and notice again. Do you feel lighter, tighter, relieved, dreading it?

Treat what you notice as one useful piece of information, alongside your values, the facts and your judgement. Your body can offer clues. It isn't a final verdict, especially when you're tired or anxious.

The decision I was considering

What I noticed when I imagined yes

What I noticed when I imagined no

What I decided, and how it felt afterwards

PRACTICE 5

Appreciation Practice

Place a hand on a part of your body you often criticise or ignore. Breathe slowly and say, “Thank you for everything you do.”

Try it daily for a week. It may feel awkward. Most things do the first few times.

How did it feel on the first day?

How did it feel by the end of the week?

Putting It Together

Noticing your body is a skill, and like any skill it improves with practice. You don’t need to understand every signal. Notice it, note it, and respond sensibly.

If you notice something new, persistent or worrying, that’s a reason to see a doctor, not to work it out on your own.

PRACTICE 6

Mindful Eating Journal

This isn't about eating perfectly. It's about noticing. Use this page after one meal this week when you chose to slow down and pay attention.

What I ate

How I ate. Rushed, distracted or paying attention?

How I felt during the meal

How I felt an hour later. Energised, heavy, satisfied, something else?

What this taught me

How you eat can tell you as much as what you eat.

END OF WEEK 5

Week 5 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Your body is always giving you information. The question is whether you're paying attention.

WEEK 6

Pleasure and Presence

MODULE TWO · EMBODY

For many women, pleasure feels like something that happens once everything else is done. Which, as most women know, means it rarely happens.

You may have learned that rest comes after productivity and that enjoyment has to be earned. This week questions that.

Pleasure Is Not a Reward

If you notice some resistance as you start this week, a voice that says this is self-indulgent, or I don't have time, or I should be doing something useful, that's worth noticing too. It is usually an old rule about worth being measured by output.

Pleasure isn't indulgence. Enjoyment, rest and things that are simply nice are part of how people refuel. Leaving them until everything else is done is a plan that rarely works.

Presence isn't doing nothing. It is paying attention to what you're actually doing instead of the next five things on the list.

This week isn't asking you to care less about the people you're responsible for. It's asking you to include yourself on the list.

PRACTICE 1

The Free Movement Practice

Put on a song you like and move however you want. No choreography and no audience.

Notice how your body wants to move when nobody is watching and nobody is judging, including you.

How did it feel?

What did I notice about my body?

Reflect

What happens when I let myself slow down?

What is the difference, physically, between rushing and paying attention?

PRACTICE 2

The Slow Task Challenge

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each day, choose one ordinary task and do it more slowly than usual. Making tea, washing up, walking to the car. Notice what changes.

	THE TASK I SLOWED DOWN	WHAT I NOTICED
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

PRACTICE 3

The Pleasure Pause

A few times a day, stop and take three slow breaths. With each one, notice something pleasant. The feel of a jersey, sunlight through a window, the first sip of coffee, a few minutes of quiet.

You're training your attention to find pleasure in small moments, not only in big occasions.

Small pleasures I noticed this week

What would I do more of if enjoyment didn't need justifying?

One thing I'll do for enjoyment next week, without earning it first

END OF WEEK 6

Week 6 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

You are allowed to enjoy your life without earning it first.

MODULE THREE

Align

Clarify your values, priorities, boundaries and choices.

With a clearer picture of what is happening, you're in a better position to decide what matters now.

These three weeks look at your values, where your time and energy are really going, and how the woman you are now fits with the roles you've been carrying. This is where the work starts to show up in actual choices.

WEEK 7	**What Matters Now**
WEEK 8	**Boundaries and Where Your Energy Goes**
WEEK 9	**Identity and What Comes Next**

WEEK 7

What Matters Now

MODULE THREE · ALIGN

You've done six weeks of noticing.

You've looked at where you run on autopilot, what you feel underneath the busyness, the old rules you've been following and what your body and behaviour have been telling you.

That wasn't a warm-up. It's the information you need for the next question. What matters now?

Why Direction Comes After Noticing

Most goal-setting advice starts with the destination. Decide where you want to be in five years and work backwards. Plenty of women do exactly that, get there, and then wonder why it doesn't feel the way they expected. Was this what I wanted, or what I thought I was supposed to want?

It's hard to know what you want when you're exhausted, following rules you haven't examined, or too busy to notice your own reactions. Under those conditions, goals tend to become another way of proving yourself.

That's why this week comes now. You have better information than you did six weeks ago. Use it.

Clarity Is Not Certainty

Clarity isn't a perfect plan. It isn't knowing exactly how things will turn out or a promise that you won't change your mind.

It's being honest about what matters to you, underneath what you've been told should matter.

This distinction is important, because waiting for certainty is one of the most common reasons women don't move. I'll decide once I'm sure. I'll allow myself to want that once I can see how it would work. Some women wait years.

You don't need to see the whole road. You need to be honest about which direction you're facing, and what the next sensible step is.

You Are Allowed to Want Things

Before the practices, one plain statement. You are allowed to want things.

Not only practical things, or things that benefit everyone else. Things that simply appeal to you. A different kind of work, a quieter house, more time with friends, a trip on your own, fewer obligations.

Wanting isn't selfish, and it isn't reserved for women with fewer responsibilities. For a lot of women who have spent years editing their wants down to what seems reasonable, just naming what they want, without immediately explaining why they can't have it, is a useful exercise in itself.

So this week, ask what you actually want your life to be like. Not what you should want. Not what is realistic yet. Not what would suit everyone else. Start with what is true and deal with practicalities later.

> There are no wrong answers in the practices that follow. You're not committing to anything on these pages. You're getting a clearer look at what you're moving towards.

PRACTICE 1

Values Clarification

Your values are a useful test for decisions. They tell you what fits and what doesn't.

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Read through the list and circle every value that genuinely matters to you. Add your own if they're missing. Then narrow it down to five.

Adventure	Authenticity	Balance	Beauty	Calm	Compassion
Connection	Contribution	Courage	Creativity	Faith	Family
Freedom	Friendship	Fun	Generosity	Growth	Health
Honesty	Independence	Integrity	Joy	Kindness	Learning
Love	Loyalty	Nature	Peace	Purpose	Respect
Rest	Security	Simplicity	Spirituality	Stability	Wisdom

MY FIVE VALUES

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

RANKED BY IMPORTANCE RIGHT NOW

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

PRACTICE 2

The Values Check

AM I LIVING BY THESE?

For each of your five values, circle how fully you're living it right now, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (fully).

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

Where am I compromising on my values, and why?

Where is my life already a good fit with what matters to me?

One thing I could do this week that fits my top value better

When your choices match your values, decisions get easier.

PRACTICE 3

Planning My Vision Board

Gather images, words and phrases that represent the experiences you want more of. Magazines, photographs, printouts or a digital board all work. The point isn't to collect things you'd like to own. It's to get specific about the life you want to be living.

Plan it here first. When it's done, put it somewhere you'll see it.

What do I want more of in my days?

Choose three to five words

Experiences I want to have

Words and phrases for my board

Images I'm looking for

Where I'll put it

PRACTICE 4

The Wanting List

Each morning this week, finish this sentence out loud, then write it down. Saying it aloud makes it harder to dismiss.

DAY 1 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 2 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 3 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 4 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 5 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 6 *I am allowed to want* _____

DAY 7 *I am allowed to want* _____

Which of these surprised me?

Which one would I find hardest to say to someone else, and why?

PRACTICE 5

Choices That Fit

Each time you make a choice that fits what matters to you, you gather evidence that you can trust your own judgement. That's what alignment means in practice. Your choices, time and energy pointing in the same direction as your values.

This week I felt most like myself when

One choice I made on purpose rather than out of habit

What am I still waiting for permission to do, and whose permission am I waiting for?

END OF WEEK 7

Week 7 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Knowing what matters makes the next decision easier.

WEEK 8

Boundaries and Where Your Energy Goes

MODULE THREE · ALIGN

The favour that became a standing arrangement. The committee you joined for a year, six years ago. The family group chat you're expected to manage.

This week looks honestly at where your time and energy actually go, and whether that still matches what you value.

What Boundaries Actually Are

The word boundary has become loaded. It can sound cold, or like something people say just before they cut someone off. For women who learned that being available is part of being a good person, setting limits can feel like letting people down.

But a boundary isn't a rejection or a punishment. It's an honest answer to a simple question. What can I realistically give, without resenting it?

Boundaries say, I matter too. Not instead of you. Not more than you. Too.

Energy Is Finite

Your energy isn't unlimited. It is topped up by sleep, food, enjoyment, good company and work that means something. It is used up by obligations that no longer fit, relationships that only go one way, and a habit of saying yes before thinking.

A woman running on empty doesn't become more generous. She becomes tired, short-tempered and resentful, often towards the very people she's trying to look after.

Choosing where your energy goes isn't selfish. It's the only way to keep giving what you actually want to give.

When Guilt Turns Up

If guilt arrives this week, and for many women it will, it doesn't mean you're doing something wrong. It often means you're doing something unfamiliar.

The guilt here is usually the discomfort of breaking an old rule, the one that measured your worth by how much you did and how little you asked for.

Protecting your energy is honest. It means that when you do show up for someone, you're actually there rather than quietly counting the cost.

Saying no to what drains you makes room for what you'd actually say yes to.

You are allowed to protect your time. You are one of the people it belongs to.

PRACTICE 1

The Before I Say Yes Pause

When someone asks for your time, attention or help, pause before answering. Ask yourself, do I have the capacity for this? Is this a real yes, or a yes out of habit or fear?

It's always fine to say, "Let me check and come back to you." That gives your honest answer time to arrive.

THE REQUEST	REAL YES OR HABIT YES?	WHAT I CHOSE	HOW IT FELT LATER

PRACTICE 2

Words for a Clear No

Many women know they need a boundary and then go blank when it's time to say it. Here are some starting points. Change them until they sound like you.

> *"Thank you for thinking of me. I can't take that on right now."*

> *"Let me check what I have on and come back to you tomorrow."*

> *"I can help with this part, but not all of it."*

> *"That doesn't work for me, but here is what I can do."*

> *"I'm keeping my evenings free for a while."*

> *"I care about you, and I'm not able to do this."*

You don't owe a long explanation. A clear, kind no is usually more respectful than a resentful yes.

A boundary I need to set, and with whom

The words I will use, in my own voice

What I'm afraid will happen, and what is more likely to happen

PRACTICE 3

After the Interaction

Notice how you feel after different interactions this week. Feeling lighter may suggest something fits. Feeling tense or drained may point to a limit worth looking at.

Treat this as a clue, not a rule. A difficult conversation can leave you drained and still have been the right thing to do.

PERSON OR SITUATION	HOW I FELT AFTERWARDS	WHAT IT MIGHT BE TELLING ME

PRACTICE 4

One Thing I Will Protect

Each morning, before the day gets going, choose one thing you will protect today. Your lunch break. An hour without your phone. Your energy for a conversation that matters.

	WHAT I WILL PROTECT TODAY	DID I PROTECT IT?
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

Key Points

- A boundary is an honest statement of what you can realistically give.
- Resentment is useful information. It often shows you where a boundary is missing.
- Boundaries don't make life free of friction. They make it more honest.
- Each boundary you keep is evidence that you take your own needs seriously.

END OF WEEK 8

Week 8 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Every boundary you keep is information about what matters to you.

WEEK 9

Identity and What Comes Next

MODULE THREE · ALIGN

Midlife often brings a quiet question about identity. Who am I now?

The roles that defined your earlier years may be changing. Children need you differently. Work may no longer fit. Parents may need more from you. A relationship may have shifted. The version of you that was built around those roles doesn't always know what to do when they change.

That question isn't a crisis. It's an honest reassessment, and it deserves proper attention.

What Changes, and What Doesn't

The point isn't to become someone new. It's to look at which parts of your life were built around other people's needs, old expectations or rules you've since outgrown, and decide what you want to keep.

What changes in midlife isn't your value or your relevance. What often changes is your willingness to keep performing a version of yourself that no longer fits.

For many women this period also includes menopause. It's a real biological transition and for some it's genuinely hard. But it usually arrives alongside a lot of other change, and it's rarely the whole story. Looking at all of it together gives you a far more useful picture than blaming any one part.

PRACTICE 1

Marking a Transition

Transitions in midlife are often invisible. Nobody throws a party when you stop being the default carer or decide your career has run its course. A small, deliberate act can help mark the change. Choose an object that represents a role, responsibility or expectation you're ready to put down. A photograph, a note, a key, anything that works for you.

1. Find somewhere quiet and sit comfortably.
2. Hold the object and think about what it represents, and what that role has given you and cost you.
3. Say aloud, or to yourself, "I value what this taught me. I am choosing to put down what no longer fits."
4. Put the object away, in a box, a drawer, or somewhere out of sight. You're putting down an obligation, not the love or the memories attached to it.
5. Write down one thing you will do differently now.

The object I chose, and what it represents

How it felt

PRACTICE 2

After Marking the Transition

Afterwards, take some time to write freely.

Which roles or expectations am I ready to let go of?

Which qualities am I definitely keeping?

How do I want the next few years to be different?

What will I start, stop or change as a result?

PRACTICE 3

The Identity Statement

Complete these sentences. Be as specific as you can.

I am no longer the woman who

I am becoming a woman who

Something true about me that I'm ready to take seriously is

My identity statement, in the present tense, starting with I am

PRACTICE 4

Small Acts of Purpose

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Purpose doesn't have to be grand. It's often made of small things that matter to you. Each day this week, note one thing you did that felt meaningful.

	SOMETHING MEANINGFUL I DID	WHY IT MATTERED
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

What do these small things tell me about what gives my life meaning?

END OF WEEK 9

Week 9 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

You don't need to become someone new. You need to decide what fits now.

MODULE FOUR

Live

Turn what you understand into decisions and practical action.

Understanding something isn't the same as acting on it. The last three weeks turn what you've noticed and decided into the way you actually spend ordinary days.

You'll build a few small habits that last, gather evidence that you can rely on yourself, and plan the next few months. No dramatic finale. Just decisions and follow-through.

WEEK 10	**Consistency Without Perfection**
WEEK 11	**Confidence and Self-Trust**
WEEK 12	**Momentum and Next Decisions**

WEEK 10

Consistency Without Perfection

MODULE FOUR · LIVE

This is where it has to work on a normal Tuesday.

Nine weeks ago you started paying attention. Since then you've looked at habits, feelings, old rules, your body, your values and your boundaries. None of that matters much unless some of it shows up in how you actually live.

That rarely happens through a grand overhaul. It happens through small things done often enough that they stick.

Small Things, Repeated

Most lasting change comes from small actions repeated until they no longer need much willpower. The research on habits is fairly consistent on this. Linking a new habit to something you already do, and making it small enough that you can do it on a bad day, both make it much more likely to last.

The Daily Anchor and Consistency Tracker that follow are built on that. They're not a test of discipline. They're a way of making one useful thing easy to repeat.

Missing a day doesn't undo anything. Coming back the next day is the skill.

This week isn't about doing more. It's about repeating the few things that help.

PRACTICE 1

My Daily Anchor

Choose one small habit to anchor your day. Make it small enough that you'd still do it on a difficult day.

- ☐ Two minutes of slow breathing
- ☐ Writing down three things that went well
- ☐ Ten minutes outside
- ☐ A five-minute body scan
- ☐ Phone off for the first half hour
- ☐ Something else

My anchor this week is

When I'll do it, and the existing habit I'll attach it to

For example, after I put the kettle on, or before I open my laptop

After three days, how is it going?

At the end of the week, what did I notice?

A small habit you keep beats a big one you abandon.

PRACTICE 2

Consistency Tracker

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Tick each day you do your anchor. If you miss a day, no drama. Just do it the next day.

	DONE	NOT TODAY	HOW IT WENT
Mon	☐	☐	
Tue	☐	☐	
Wed	☐	☐	
Thu	☐	☐	
Fri	☐	☐	
Sat	☐	☐	
Sun	☐	☐	

Starting again

When you miss a day, skip the self-criticism and simply start again the next day. Returning is the skill you are building, not perfection.

Consistency isn't perfection. It's starting again, as many times as it takes.

PRACTICE 3

Weekly Reflection

Reflection shows you what is working. That makes the next decision easier.

What went well this week, big or small?

What was difficult, and what did I learn from it?

How did I look after my body, mind and energy this week?

What will I change next week?

What does this work look like on an ordinary day?

Be specific. Morning, work, evenings, weekends.

END OF WEEK 10

Week 10 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Small, repeated actions are what make change last.

WEEK 11

Confidence and Self-Trust

MODULE FOUR · LIVE

Confidence isn't something you either have or don't. It's built.

It's built in small moments. The promises you keep to yourself, the times you say what you think, the days you do the thing even though you didn't feel like it.

This week you're not asked to feel confident. You're asked to act on your own judgement in small ways and notice what happens.

Self-Trust Is Built on Evidence

Self-trust is not believing every thought or diagnosing yourself. It is taking your own experience seriously enough to investigate it.

It grows the way trust between two people grows, through kept promises and repeated experience. Each time you do what you said you'd do, even something small, you add to the evidence.

Many women underestimate how much evidence they already have. You've run households, managed teams, handled emergencies and made hard calls. This week is about noticing that evidence and adding to it.

PRACTICE 1

The Confidence Log

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each day, write down one example of how you backed yourself. Keeping a boundary, resting when you needed to, saying what you thought. Over time this becomes a record you can look back on when doubt turns up.

	HOW I BACKED MYSELF TODAY
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	

PRACTICE 2

The Evidence Check

When self-doubt arrives, look at the evidence on both sides. The second column is often longer than you expect.

The situation I'm doubting myself about

EVIDENCE THAT I CAN'T HANDLE THIS	EVIDENCE THAT I CAN

What would I say to a friend with the same evidence?

PRACTICE 3

The Daily Promise

Each morning, make one small, realistic promise to yourself, and keep it. Drink a glass of water when you wake up. Take five slow breaths before checking your phone. Go to bed at a set time. Walk for ten minutes.

	MY PROMISE TO MYSELF TODAY	KEPT	NOT TODAY
Day 1		☐	☐
Day 2		☐	☐
Day 3		☐	☐
Day 4		☐	☐
Day 5		☐	☐
Day 6		☐	☐
Day 7		☐	☐

What did I notice about keeping, or not keeping, these promises?

PRACTICE 4

When I Slip

When you break a promise to yourself, the usual response is self-criticism. It rarely helps. Try something more useful.

When you slip, say to yourself, “I’m learning to keep my word to myself, and I’m starting again.” Then do exactly that.

What did I slip on this week?

What did I say to myself, and how did I start again?

Standing tall

Before a hard conversation, stand or sit upright, take a slow breath and say to yourself, “I can handle this.”

To be clear about the evidence, research on so-called power posing found little support for claims that it changes hormones or behaviour. Some studies do suggest an upright posture can help people feel a little more confident. Treat it as a small cue, nothing more.

How did it feel to use this before something difficult?

Starting again counts as evidence too.

END OF WEEK 11

Week 11 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

Self-trust is built in the moments you back your own judgement.

WEEK 12

Momentum and Next Decisions

MODULE FOUR · LIVE

Motivation and momentum aren't the same thing.

Motivation is a feeling. It turns up full of energy, and then it leaves. You can't plan a life around it.

Momentum is steadier. It comes from knowing what matters to you and taking the next step anyway, whether you feel like it or not.

The Next Step, Not the Whole Plan

Momentum doesn't need certainty or enthusiasm. Some days you'll take the next step with doubts, tiredness and old rules still muttering in the background. That's normal.

What matters is that the next step is clear. You don't need a five-year plan. You need to know what you're doing in the next ninety days, what support you need, and what you'll do when things wobble.

That's what this final week is for. What has changed? What matters now? And what are you going to do with what you know?

PRACTICE 1

The Progress Log

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Each evening, note one moment when you felt capable, proud or at ease. It might be speaking up, resting without guilt or making a decision that fits your values. You're training yourself to notice progress rather than only problems.

	A MOMENT I FELT CAPABLE, PROUD OR AT EASE
Day 1	
Day 2	
Day 3	
Day 4	
Day 5	
Day 6	
Day 7	

PRACTICE 2

The 90-Day Plan

Write a short, realistic plan for the next ninety days.

What do I want to be different three months from now?

What do I want to be doing, starting or finishing?

Three habits that will keep me on track

1

2

3

Two decisions I need to make

1

2

One thing that needs more information before I decide

1

Who can support me, and what will I ask them for?

PRACTICE 3

The Celebration Ritual

Write a short statement that sums up how you intend to live now. For example, “I make decisions based on what matters to me, not on what is expected” or “I take my own needs as seriously as everyone else’s.” Read it when you need a reminder.

My statement

Your celebration ritual

Twelve weeks is a real commitment, and most women skip straight past what they have done to whatever is next. A ritual gives the ending its due. It doesn’t need to be elaborate. Pause somewhere that feels like yours, say out loud or write down what you have done, and do one thing that honours it. A walk somewhere you love, a meal with someone who supports you, flowers on your own table.

How I’ll celebrate, where and when

What I am honouring about myself as I finish these twelve weeks

PRACTICE 4

Then and Now

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Go back to Your Starting Point at the front of the book. Without looking at your first scores, rate where you are today. Then compare.

	AT THE START	TODAY	CHANGE
Energy			
Clarity about what I want			
Self-trust			
Capacity			
Satisfaction with how my days are spent			

What has actually changed?

What hasn't changed yet, and what might it need?

What would I say to the woman who filled in the Starting Point twelve weeks ago?

END OF WEEK 12

Week 12 Review

What shifted for me this week?

What did I learn about myself?

What do I need next?

What has changed? What matters now? What will you do with what you know?

PART FIVE

Beyond Twelve Weeks

Twelve weeks is a start, not a finish. The pages that follow help you keep using the REAL Method over the next year. Come back to them whenever something changes.

Completion Reflection

You've worked through all four stages of the REAL Method, Reflect, Embody, Align and Live.

What do I now know about myself that I didn't know before?

What am I proud of?

What will I keep doing, and how will I make sure I do?

COMPLETION

My REAL Commitment

A commitment is a direction, not a demand. Write down what you're committing to from here. Read it when you need a reminder.

I commit to

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

The Six-Month Plan

The next six months are about keeping what worked when life gets busy again, which it will.

Think of this as a rhythm rather than a checklist. The goal is simple. Keep paying attention and keep acting on what you notice.

Six-Month Focus Areas

1. Core habits. Which habits keep me on track? I will review these weekly.

2. Boundaries. Where do I need to say no, or not now?

3. Check-ins. When each week will I stop and ask how I'm doing and what I need?

4. Reviewing my 90-day plan. What is changing, and what needs attention next? I will review this every three months.

5. Support. Who helps me think clearly? Who do I want to spend more time with?

The Sunday review

Each week, take thirty minutes to look back and plan ahead. Ask yourself, “What do I want this week to include, and what am I not taking on?”

My Sunday review will include

Body check. How am I sleeping, eating and moving? Anything to mention to my doctor?

A Letter to Myself in Six Months

Write a letter to yourself six months from now. What do you hope will be different? What boundaries do you hope you've kept? What do you want to be enjoying?

Dear me, six months from now,

Monthly Wins

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

At the end of each month, list three things you're proud of and one way you'll mark them.

MONTH 1

MONTH 2

MONTH 3

MONTH 4

MONTH 5

MONTH 6

The Twelve-Month Plan

A year gives you time to go further. To test what you want, make bigger decisions and build on what's working.

Twelve-Month Focus Areas

1. Direction. What do I want this year to include, in work, health, relationships and the rest of my life?

2. My REAL habits. Which are still useful? Which can I drop?

3. Leading by example. Where could I show others what I've learned, at home, at work or in my community?

4. Enjoyment. Which experiences, interests or plans do I want more of?

5. Sharing. Is there someone my experience could help?

Twelve-Month Practices

The year in review. What did I learn about myself this year?

Energy review. Where is my energy going, and does that match what matters to me?

Marking the year. How will I mark the end of this year?

Monthly Tracker

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Once a month, score each area from 1 (needs attention) to 10 (going well). The point isn't to judge yourself. It's to see where to put your attention next.

AREA	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Emotions *Do I notice what I feel before I react?*												
Body *Am I paying attention to sleep, food and movement?*												
Boundaries and energy *Am I protecting my time and energy?*												
Self-trust *Have I kept my promises to myself?*												
Values *Do my choices match what matters to me?*												
Enjoyment *Have I made time for things I enjoy?*												
People *Have I spent time with people who support me?*												
Reflection *Have I stopped to review each week?*												

Column numbers are months one to twelve.

Monthly Reflections

MONTH _____

What is working this month?

What needs more attention?

What will I focus on next month?

My reminder for the month

MONTH _____

What is working this month?

What needs more attention?

What will I focus on next month?

My reminder for the month

Monthly Reflections

MONTH _____

What is working this month?

What needs more attention?

What will I focus on next month?

My reminder for the month

MONTH _____

What is working this month?

What needs more attention?

What will I focus on next month?

My reminder for the month

PART SIX

Extra Practice Pages

Extra space for the practices you find most useful. Use them in any order, as often as you like, whenever something needs thinking through.

EXTRA PRACTICE

My Stress Pattern

You can't change a pattern you haven't looked at. Here is how stress tends to show up for you.

What tends to set off my stress? Situations, people, thoughts or places

How does stress show up in my body?

How does it show up in my thoughts and moods?

What do I usually do when I'm stressed?

One or two small changes that could help

EXTRA PRACTICE

Life Timeline

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

List the key events of your life so far, from childhood to today. Turning points, losses, achievements and changes of direction. Beside each, note how it shaped you.

AGE OR YEAR	WHAT HAPPENED	HOW IT SHAPED ME

EXTRA PRACTICE

The Five Whys

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Choose a situation or pattern you want to understand. Ask why it happens, then ask why again of your answer, five times in total. Each answer usually takes you a layer deeper.

The situation or pattern

Why? (1)

Why? (2)

Why? (3)

Why? (4)

Why? (5)

What I found underneath

EXTRA PRACTICE

Five Senses Log

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Stop at any point in your day and notice what each of your senses is taking in. It's a quick way to get out of your head and into the present.

	SEE	HEAR	TOUCH	TASTE	SMELL
Moment 1					
Moment 2					
Moment 3					
Moment 4					
Moment 5					

EXTRA PRACTICE

What I Enjoy and What Keeps Returning

Experiences that have brought me real enjoyment, at any age

What did they have in common?

Interests, strengths and patterns that keep turning up in my life

How could I make more room for these now?

EXTRA PRACTICE

Gratitude Thread

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Write down one thing you're grateful for. Then ask why it matters to you. Then ask what that tells you about what you value. Follow it as far as it goes.

THREAD 1

I am grateful for

It matters to me because

This tells me I value

THREAD 2

I am grateful for

It matters to me because

This tells me I value

EXTRA PRACTICE

Free Reflection

HOW TO USE THIS PAGE

Use this page when something needs somewhere to go. A difficult feeling, a realisation, a decision you're turning over.

Today I am proud of

One thing I will do for myself

You don't need every answer. You need to stay honest with yourself.

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

A Closing Word

This isn't the end of the work. It's the end of the first twelve weeks.

You now have a way of looking at your life that you can use again whenever something changes. Notice what has changed and what keeps repeating. Pay attention to what your body, emotions, energy and behaviour are telling you. Decide what matters now. Then act on it.

You won't do it perfectly and you don't need to. What matters is that you keep asking useful questions and keep taking your own experience seriously.

Thank you for doing this work. I hope you keep going.

With gratitude,

Ruth

What has changed? What matters now? And what are you going to do with what you know?

ONE LAST PAGE

Three Questions to Keep

What has changed?

What matters now?

What am I going to do with what I know?

You don't need every answer. You need one honest place to start.

NEXT STEPS

If You Want to Take This Further

This workbook is designed to be used on your own. For some women that is enough. Others find it useful to work through what came up with someone else.

If that's you, these are the ways I work with women in midlife. Current details and prices are on my website.

The Survival Mode Reset

A free workshop, and a practical starting point if you're running on empty and want to look at why.

The Quiet Shift

A private sixty-minute one-to-one session to work through one question or decision that keeps coming back.

The REAL Reset Circle

Four weeks of live coaching in a small group of women working through similar questions.

The REAL Method Coached

Twelve weeks of one-to-one coaching using the REAL Method, for women who want structure, accountability and someone to think things through with.

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About the Author



Ruth Matthews is the founder of Realign with Ruth and the creator of the REAL Method. She is a certified life coach and an NLP, menopause, somatic and neuroplasticity coach based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Before founding her coaching practice, Ruth spent more than thirty-three years in the motor industry, including thirteen years in leadership as a sales manager. That background taught her a lot about responsibility, pressure, managing people and making decisions, and about how easy it is to keep functioning well while something underneath has changed.

Today she works with women in midlife on the questions that tend to arrive after forty. Work, relationships, health, confidence, identity and what comes next. Her approach is practical and evidence-aware. Menopause may be part of the picture, but she doesn't use it to explain everything away.

www.realignwithruth.co