



THE 5-MINUTE MIDLIFE MELTDOWN RESCUE KIT

Regulation Skills for When You're About to Lose It

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About The Author

“You can be holding everything together and still feel like you’re falling apart inside”



Karin Guertin, LICSW

Hi, I’m Karin.

I’m a licensed psychotherapist (LICSW), caregiver, midlife nervous system specialist, and founder of Women Gone Well™. In this space, I’m here to offer simple realistic educational courses and skills grounded in both science and lived experience.

I support midlife women who feel exhausted, overwhelmed, and not like themselves—holding everything together on the outside, while running on empty inside.

I know this place personally.

Through my own midlife transitions and caregiving journey, I learned how to support my nervous system in ways that actually fit real life—without overwhelm or complicated routines.

Now I help women feel calmer, more steady, and more like themselves again—one small step at a time.

Welcome to Women Gone Well™—
where you can begin to feel like yourself again.

You're Not Losing It —Your Nervous System Is Stuck

If you're reading this, you're probably:

- Snapping at people you love (then hating yourself for it)
- Lying awake at 3am even though you're exhausted
- Feeling anxious for no clear reason
- On the verge of tears over something small
- Just... done

Here's what might be happening:

Your nervous system has gotten stuck in survival mode—responding as if you're in danger 24/7, even when you're safe. It keeps you in fight-or-flight (wired, anxious, irritable) or freeze (numb, exhausted, disconnected).

This isn't a character flaw. This is biology.

And there are specific skills that can help you shift it—**skills that work in the moment AND get stronger with practice.**

That's what this kit is for: tools you can use right now when you're about to lose it, and practices that help your nervous system find its way back over time.

You can learn to regulate. Here's how.



Why Your Nervous System Is Maxed Out

Midlife women face a unique combination of stressors:

- ✓ **Hormonal shifts** (perimenopause/menopause) may make you more reactive
- ✓ **Caregiving overload** (aging parents + adult kids who still need you)
- ✓ **Identity shifts** ("Who am I beyond everyone's needs?")
- ✓ **Cumulative stress** (decades of putting yourself last)
- ✓ **Sleep disruption** (which makes everything harder)

Your nervous system was never designed to handle this much, this long, with this little support.

So it tried to protect you the only way it could: **survival mode.**

And here's the thing: Your nervous system can learn a new way.

These techniques can help you build that skill. **If it feels scary or makes things worse, stop. You choose what works for your body.**

Did you know? Studies suggest the majority of midlife women experience nervous system dysregulation. You're not alone.
You're actually in the majority.

Skill #1: The 4-7-8 Breath



When to Use:

- When your mind is racing
- When you can't fall asleep or wake at 3am
- Before a difficult conversation
- When you feel irritable or snippy
- When you need to calm down but don't have time for a full practice

How It Works:

- Holding your breath increases CO2 in your bloodstream, which calms your nervous system
- Long exhale activates your vagus nerve (your body's brake pedal)
- Counting gives your anxious mind something to do instead of spinning
- Regular practice strengthens your parasympathetic nervous system over time

The Skill:

Step 1: Position

- Sit comfortably
- Place tip of tongue on roof of mouth, just behind front teeth
- Keep it there the whole time

Step 2: Exhale completely through your mouth (whoosh sound)

Step 3: Follow the 4-7-8 pattern

→ Inhale through nose: count 1-2-3-4 (quiet, gentle)

→ Hold breath: count 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (don't strain)

→ Exhale through mouth: count 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 (whoosh sound)

Step 4: Repeat 3 more times (4 total cycles)

How long: 90 seconds

Notice anything? Even a small shift counts.

Pro tip: The ratio (4:7:8) matters more than speed. If 7 seconds feels too long, start with 4-5-6 and work up.

*Based on the 4-7-8 breathing technique by Dr. Andrew Weil

Skill #2: The Cold Snap



When to Use:

- Rage or explosive anger
- When you're about to say something you'll regret
- Feeling "too big" for your body
- Intense emotional overwhelm

How It Works:

Cold activates your dive reflex—an ancient mammalian response that calms your nervous system by stimulating your vagus nerve. It interrupts the rage response your body can't ignore.

⚠️ **Safety Note:** If you have heart conditions, high blood pressure, or Raynaud's disease, check with your doctor first. If cold feels too intense, use Option A or try a different skill.

The Skill (Choose one, start with what feels safest):

Option A: Cold Water Drink (Gentlest)

- Drink ice-cold water slowly
- Feel it going down your throat
- Notice the temperature shift
- Take 5-10 slow sips

Option B: Ice Cube Hold

- Hold ice cube in your hand OR press to inside of wrist
- Focus on the cold sensation
- Hold for 30-60 seconds (stop if painful)

Option C: Cold Water Face Splash (Most intense)

- Splash cold water on your face (forehead and cheeks)
- OR hold cold, wet cloth over face for 30 seconds
- Breathe normally through your mouth

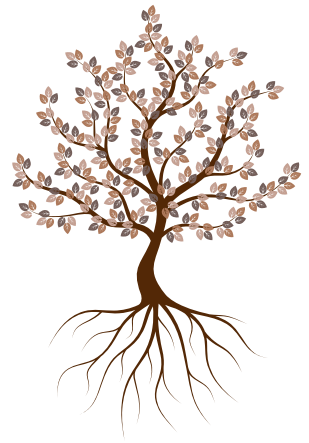
Why this works: Cold activates your vagus nerve (your body's brake pedal), slowing your heart rate and shifting you from fight-or-flight to calm.

Real talk: This might feel intense—that's normal. If it feels scary or makes things worse, stop. You choose what works for your body.

Pro tip: Keep ice-cold water or an ice pack handy.

*Based on DBT's TIPP skills (Marsha Linehan, PhD)

Skill #3: Grounding 5-4-3-2-1



When to Use:

- Feeling disconnected or "not really here"
- Dissociation or numbness
- Spiraling thoughts
- Panic moments

How It Works: Grounding brings you back to your body and the present moment. It's not about calming down—it's about coming back.

The Skill(Choose one):

Look around and name:

5 things you can SEE (lamp, coffee cup, your hands, the wall, a plant)

4 things you can TOUCH (your shirt, the chair, your hair, the table)

3 things you can HEAR (traffic outside, the fridge humming, your breath)

2 things you can SMELL (coffee, soap, fresh air, your clothes) If smell feels triggering, skip to taste or repeat touch

1 thing you can TASTE (mint, coffee, or just notice your mouth)

Can't find 5 things to see? That's okay—just name what you can.

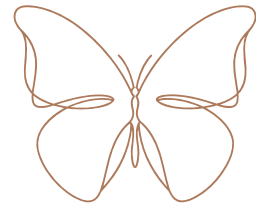
How long: 2-3 minutes

Why this works: Your brain can't spiral into panic AND notice sensory details at the same time. Grounding forces you into the present.

Pro tip: Say them out loud if you can. The sound of your own voice is grounding.

*A sensory grounding technique commonly used in trauma-informed care

Skill #4: Butterfly Hug



When to Use:

- Anxiety or racing thoughts
- Before bed (can't shut your brain off)
- After something upsetting or triggering
- Overwhelm that won't settle

How It Works: The alternating left-right tapping soothes your nervous system and helps emotions move through.

The Skill:

Step 1: Cross your arms over your chest

- Right hand on left shoulder
- Left hand on right shoulder
- Like giving yourself a hug

If crossing arms feels uncomfortable, you can tap your knees instead

Step 2: Alternately tap left and right

- Tap right hand, then left hand
- Slow, rhythmic, gentle
- Like a slow heartbeat

Step 3: Continue for 2-3 minutes

- Close your eyes if comfortable
- Breathe normally
- Notice what you notice

How long: 2-3 minutes

What you might notice:

- Yawning (good sign—your nervous system is releasing)
- Deep breaths
- Emotions coming up (that's okay—let them come if you can, or stop if it's too much)
- Mind wandering (normal)
- Feeling calmer or more settled

Why this works: The alternating rhythm mimics REM sleep, when your brain processes emotions. It signals to your nervous system: "We're safe enough to rest."

*The Butterfly Hug (Artigas & Jarero) - a bilateral stimulation technique for self-soothing

Skill #5: The Hum



When to Use:

- Feeling overwhelmed or spiraling
- Mind racing with anxious thoughts
- Need to calm down but can't focus on breathing
- Feeling disconnected from your body

How It Works: Humming creates vibration that directly stimulates your vagus nerve (your body's calm-down system). The vibration signals safety to your nervous system and helps you feel more grounded in your body.

This works even better than silent breathing because you can feel it working—the vibration is physical proof your nervous system is shifting.

The Skill:

Step 1: Get comfortable

- Sit or stand with relaxed shoulders
- Close your mouth gently, jaw relaxed
- You can close your eyes or keep them open

Step 2: Inhale through your nose

- Normal, easy breath
- Don't force it deep

Step 3: Exhale while humming

- Make a soft "mmmmm" sound as you breathe out
- Any pitch that feels comfortable (usually low feels best)
- Feel the vibration in your chest, throat, or face
- Let the hum last as long as the exhale (about 5-8 seconds)

Step 4: Repeat 5-8 times

- Pause between hums to breathe normally
- Notice where you feel the vibration

How long: 1-2 minutes

Why this works: Humming vibrates your vagus nerve (runs from brain through chest), massaging your nervous system from the inside. The sound gives your busy mind something to focus on.

Pro tip: Car, shower, or anywhere private. Hum a song or one continuous tone—both work.

*Based on vagal toning and polyvagal theory (Stephen Porges, PhD)

Which Skill & When? Your Quick Reference Guide

IF YOU'RE FEELING...

😡 ANGRY/RAGE

→ Use: Cold Snap (page 6)

→ Then: 4-7-8 Breath (page 5)

😰 ANXIOUS/PANICKED

→ Use: 4-7-8 Breath (page 5)

→ Then: Butterfly Hug (page 8)

😐 NUMB/DISCONNECTED

→ Use: Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 (page 7)

→ Then: The Hum (page 9)

🌀 OVERWHELMED/SPIRALING

→ Use: The Hum (page 9)

→ Then: Grounding 5-4-3-2-1 (page 7)

😴 CAN'T SLEEP/RACING MIND

→ Use: Butterfly Hug (page 8)

→ Then: 4-7-8 Breath (page 5)

PRO TIPS:

- ✓ You can use more than one skill
- ✓ They work better with practice (not just in crisis)
- ✓ Some skills will feel better than others—that's normal
- ✓ If it feels scary or makes things worse, stop.
You choose what works for your body.
- ✓ Keep this PDF on your phone for quick access



You've Got This

You're lying awake at 3am. Snapping at people you love. Running on empty.

You're not broken. Your nervous system is maxed out.

I invite you to do this right now:

Pick ONE technique from this kit. Try it in the next 5 minutes.

That's it. Just see what happens.

Want more than emergency relief?

These 5 techniques help in the moment. A nervous system that has spent years, or decades, in survival mode doesn't fully recalibrate after using these skills a few times — the real felt shift comes with practice and co-regulation in community.

21 days of practice, to be specific.

The techniques in this Rescue Kit are part of what I teach in Week 1 of the *21-Day Midlife Return to Steady Course*.

The course gives you:

- Daily practice (not just emergency tools)
- Live sessions with me
- Community

Your nervous system learns by doing, not knowing.

Want to learn more? You'll get details in the emails I'm sending you.

Not perfection. Practice.

Your nervous system will learn to regulate again. Because that's how nervous systems work—**through repetition.**

21 days is enough for your body to remember what regulated feels like.

So... are you ready? →



Ready to stop running on empty?

The 21-Day Midlife Return to Steady course opens soon. Sign up to get first access + founding member pricing.

👉 [Get First Access](#)

Your nervous system can learn a new way. You don't have to keep running on empty.

Let me show you how. ❤️

—Karin Guertin, LICSW

DISCLAIMER

The information in this guide and all Women Gone Well™ materials (including but not limited to courses, websites, emails, and social media content) is for educational purposes only. It does not constitute therapy, counseling, medical advice, or mental health treatment.

Use of these materials does not create a therapist-client relationship. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis or need clinical treatment, please contact a licensed mental health provider in your area.

CRISIS RESOURCES:

- Call 988 - Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (24/7, free, confidential)
- Call 911 - For immediate danger
- Text HOME to 741741 - Crisis Text Line

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