

A GUIDED WORKBOOK

THE SMALL LEAVINGS JOURNAL

*A guided companion to coming back to yourself — and
building what comes next.*



BY CARRIE DAVIDSON

For the woman in the middle of the work.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This is not a self-help book.

It is a working journal, designed to walk you through seven stages of coming back to yourself after a long time of being gone. Each section opens with a short essay that names what the section is doing. Then twelve prompts that ask you to look at your own life, honestly and without performance, in the specific way that section is asking you to look.

You do not have to do the prompts in order. You do not have to do all of them. You do not have to do any of them on a schedule. There is no right way to do this work. There is only the work, and the willingness to look.

What I can tell you is this. The seven sections are arranged in the order they need to happen. You cannot build the life you want from a self that is still leaving. You cannot stay if you cannot read your body. You cannot read your body if you have never met your parts. The sections build on each other.

You can move through them slowly. You can come back to them. You can spend a year on one section and a weekend on another. The book is yours to use however your particular nervous system needs to use it.

A few things to know before you begin.

This work can stir things up. If you are in active crisis, or if you do not have a therapist, please consider waiting to do the deeper sections, or doing them with professional support. The prompts are designed to be safe for most people. They are not a substitute for therapy.

You will need a pen and a quiet place. The journal works best when you write by hand, slowly, without checking your phone. This is not a productivity exercise. It is an act of attention.

You may notice resistance. That resistance is information. The parts of you that have been working hardest to keep the patterns running do not want to be looked at. They will tell you the work is silly, the prompts are too much, your handwriting is bad, you do not have time, you can do it tomorrow. Notice the resistance. Then, if you can, sit down and write anyway.

The work is slow. It is also worth it.

Welcome to the middle.

— Carrie

HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

Pace. There is no right pace. Some people do one prompt a day for several months. Some people do a section a week. Some people do it all in a weekend retreat and come back to specific prompts later. Use it the way you would use any practice that is meant to last: gently, consistently, without forcing.

Pen. Write by hand if you can. The body remembers what the hand writes in a different way than what the fingers type. If you cannot write by hand, type in a private document, not in an app that backs up to the cloud or syncs to other devices. This work is between you and you.

Privacy. Keep this journal somewhere safe. The prompts will pull up material that is not for anyone else to read. If you share a home with someone whose access to your writing would change what you can write, find a hiding place or a lockbox or a friend's apartment to store it.

Returning. You will want to come back to some prompts. That is the point. The answer you give a prompt in section one will not be the same as the answer you give the same prompt eight months later. Date your entries. Watch yourself change.

Therapy. If you have a therapist, consider bringing the prompts that stir the most into your sessions. If you do not have a therapist, consider whether the deeper sections (four through seven) might land better with one. There is no shame in needing support for this work. There is shame in not getting the support you need.

Crisis. If anything in this journal triggers a mental health crisis, please stop and reach out. Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988. You can come back to the journal. The journal will wait.

THE SEVEN SECTIONS

The workbook moves through seven stages of returning: noticing, meeting, reading, reckoning, staying, visioning, and building.

1

Noticing the Leavings

Identifying the pattern of self-abandonment.

2

Meeting Your Parts

The internal architecture of who is actually inside you.

3

Reading Your Body

Learning to trust the record your body has been keeping.

4

Reckoning with Your Patterns

Looking at the loop you have been inside.

5

Choosing to Stay

The daily work of not abandoning yourself.

6

Visioning from the Self That Stayed

What becomes possible from a regulated body.

7

Building What Comes Next

Translating vision into daily aligned movement.

SECTION ONE

Noticing the Leavings

Identifying the pattern of self-abandonment.

Noticing the Leavings

There is a kind of leaving most people are never taught to recognize.

Not the kind that happens at airports. Not the kind with a date attached. The quieter kind. The kind that happens inside your own body, while you are still in the room with everyone, smiling, performing, keeping it together.

You leave yourself a little.

The first time it happens, you are usually a child. You learn that the safest thing you can do, in this particular room with these particular adults, is to make yourself smaller. Quieter. Less of a target. You do not know you are leaving. You only know that something in your body got quieter, more compliant, more careful. That something inside you took a small step back.

The second time happens easier than the first. The third time easier than the second. By the time you are an adult, the leaving is so automatic that you have forgotten there used to be someone in the room.

This is what trauma adaptation actually looks like for most people. Not the dramatic breakdown. The quiet drift. The slow, careful disappearance of the person you were, in service of becoming the person you needed to be to survive whatever you were inside of.

Recovery, the kind that actually works, begins with noticing.

Not fixing. Noticing.

You cannot stop leaving yourself until you can see the leaving as it happens. And you cannot see the leaving until you have language for what it looks like, what it feels like in your body, what triggers it, what comes before it, what comes after.

That is what this section is for.

The prompts below are not asking you to change anything. They are asking you to look. To pay attention to the small moments where you have been disappearing for so long you have forgotten you are doing it. To start collecting evidence of your own pattern, gently, without judgment, the way a researcher would gather data.

You do not have to know what to do with what you find. You only have to be willing to look.

That is enough for now.

PROMPT 01

Describe a moment from your childhood when you remember making yourself smaller, quieter, or more careful in order to be safe. Where were you? Who was in the room? What did you do with your body?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

What did you learn, as a child, was unsafe to want? Unsafe to need? Unsafe to feel?
Make a list. Do not edit it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

When was the first time you remember performing a version of yourself that was not quite true? What were you performing? Who were you performing for? What did it cost you?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

Describe a recent moment when you felt yourself disappearing inside an interaction. Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing to manage the situation? What did your body feel like during it and after?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

What does leaving yourself feel like in your body? Where does the leaving live? Is it a tightening, a numbness, a sensation of floating, a holding of breath, something else?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

What does staying with yourself feel like in your body? Have you experienced it? When?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

List five situations in your current life where you reliably leave yourself. Be specific. Not "at work" but the specific meeting, the specific person, the specific moment.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 08

What is the version of yourself that you most often perform? Describe her. What does she look like, sound like, do? What does she want people to think about her?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

What is underneath the performance? Not who you would be if you had been raised differently. Who you actually are, right now, when no one is watching. What do you know about her?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

Write a letter from your current self to the child who first learned to leave. Tell her what you understand now that she could not have understood then. Tell her you see what she did. Tell her she was not wrong to do it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 11

If you could give one piece of information to your current self, the version of you reading this right now, about your pattern of leaving, what would it be?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 12

What would it mean to stay, this week, in one specific situation where you usually leave?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

SECTION TWO

Meeting Your Parts

The internal architecture of who is actually inside you.

Meeting Your Parts

You are not one person.

This is the first thing most therapy did not teach me. The voice in my head that called me too much, too needy, too sensitive was not me. It was a part of me. A part with a job. A job assigned to her by a younger version of me, in a room where being too much had not been safe.

Internal Family Systems calls these parts by specific names. There are exiles, the young wounded parts that carry the original pain. There are managers, the parts that try to keep the exiles safely hidden by running your life on a tight schedule of achievement, perfectionism, or control. There are firefighters, the parts that come in when the managers fail, with whatever is available to numb the pain fast. Alcohol. Food. Sex. Work. The next relationship. The next substance. The next anything.

For most of my life I had been treating all of these parts as if they were me. The voice that said I was unlovable was not the truth. It was a manager trying to keep me from getting close enough to anyone that the exile underneath her could get hurt again. The compulsion to numb out when I felt too much was not a moral failing. It was a firefighter doing the only job she knew how to do.

When you start to see your parts as parts, two things happen. First, you stop fighting them. You start asking them what they are protecting. Second, you discover there is a version of you underneath all of them. The Self, IFS calls it. The you who was here before the parts learned to do their jobs. The you who is still here.

This section is not asking you to be your therapist. It is asking you to begin noticing the parts inside you that have been doing the heavy lifting of your survival. Most of them have been working overtime for decades. They deserve, at minimum, your attention.

You do not have to fix anything. You only have to start meeting them.

PROMPT 01

What is the loudest voice in your head when things go wrong? Describe it. Whose voice does it sound like? How old does it feel?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

What is the voice trying to protect you from? Even if you do not know for sure, guess.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

Make a list of the parts of you that have been working hardest. The achiever. The pleaser. The numbing one. The controlling one. The hyper-vigilant one. The one who disappears. Whatever names fit. Do not worry about getting it right.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

Pick one of those parts. Write her a letter. Thank her for the job she has been doing. Ask her how old she is.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

Now write back from her, to you. Let her tell you what she has been carrying.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

What is your manager part most afraid would happen if she let go of her job for one day?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

What is your firefighter part most afraid you would feel if she did not numb it for you?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 08

Who or what does your exile carry? What is the original wound underneath all the protecting?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

When you imagine the Self underneath all your parts, the you who was here before any of them, what do you notice? A feeling, an image, a memory, a sense of presence?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

What would it look like to relate to your loudest voice this week as a part of you, rather than the truth about you?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 11

Describe a recent moment when one of your parts took over. What did she do? What was she protecting? What did the rest of you experience while she was driving?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 12

Write a sentence you could say to yourself, the next time a part takes over, that would help you remember you are not her. Something simple enough that you would actually use it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

SECTION THREE

Reading Your Body

Learning to trust the record your body has been keeping.

Reading Your Body

The body has been keeping a record of everything that happened to you.

Most of us were taught to ignore the record. We were taught that the body is the unreliable narrator. That the mind is where truth lives. That if the body says one thing and the mind says another, the mind wins. For many of us, this lesson was reinforced by adults who told us we were not actually feeling what we were feeling. We were too sensitive. Too dramatic. Too much.

So we learned to override the body. We learned to interpret hunger as weakness. Fatigue as laziness. Discomfort as something to push through. Tension in the jaw as just how we hold our face now. Tightness in the chest as just how we are built. We learned to call dissociation calm and call hypervigilance focus and call shutdown maturity.

The body kept the record anyway.

Trauma recovery, at some point, becomes the work of learning to read the record again. Not the work of fixing the body. The work of finally listening to it. Of asking, before each next decision, what does my body actually think about this? Of trusting the answer when it arrives in a form the mind cannot fully justify.

The body knows things the mind does not. It knows whose presence regulates it and whose presence dysregulates it. It knows what kind of work it can do today and what kind of work would deplete it. It knows when something is wrong long before the mind has the language to describe what.

The window of tolerance is the somatic term for the zone in which your body can stay present and functional. Above the window is hyperarousal. Anxiety, racing thoughts, fight-or-flight activation. Below the window is hypoarousal. Numbness, fog, shutdown, freeze. Inside the window is where you can think, feel, choose, connect. Most trauma survivors spend most of their lives outside the window without knowing it.

The work of this section is to begin reading your own body. Where the window is. When you leave it. What pulls you back in.

You do not have to change anything. You only have to notice.

PROMPT 01

Right now, as you read this, do a body scan. Start at the top of your head and move slowly downward. Where do you feel tightness? Where do you feel warmth? Where do you feel nothing at all? Write down what you find.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

Describe the body sensation you call anxiety. Where is it in your body? What does it feel like? When did you first remember feeling it?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

Describe the body sensation you call calm. Where is it in your body? What does it feel like? When was the last time you felt it?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

When you are hyperaroused, what does it look like in your behavior? Speaking faster, planning compulsively, cleaning, scrolling, working, fixing other people?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

When you are hypoaroused, what does it look like in your behavior? Withdrawing, sleeping more, scrolling differently, going numb, disappearing into work or substances or food?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

Make a list of people whose presence regulates your nervous system. People you feel calmer around. People whose company lets your shoulders drop. Be honest. Some of them may surprise you.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

Make a list of people whose presence dysregulates your nervous system. People you tighten around without knowing why. People whose company leaves you exhausted. Be honest about this too.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 08

What activities reliably bring you back into your body? Walking, swimming, dancing, eating slowly, lying on the floor, being outside, being in water, breathwork, stretching, anything else?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

What activities reliably take you out of your body? Be specific. Not "social media" but the specific kind of scrolling. Not "drinking" but the specific kind of drinking.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice area with 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

When was the last time your body told you something the mind did not want to hear?
Did you listen? What happened?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 11

What is one thing your body has been telling you, recently or for a long time, that you have been trying not to hear?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 12

This week, before each meaningful decision, pause and ask your body. Not the mind. The body. Notice what arrives. Notice if you trust it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

SECTION FOUR

Reckoning with Your Patterns

Looking at the loop you have been inside.

Reckoning with Your Patterns

The patterns you keep choosing felt like love because they felt like home.

This is the line I had to learn the hard way, and the one I see the most resistance to when I talk about it with other women in recovery. Nobody wants to believe she has been choosing what hurt her. Nobody wants to believe her chemistry was a malfunction of recognition rather than a sign of fate.

But chemistry, for a person whose nervous system was shaped in chaos, is almost always a familiarity signal. The relationships that feel right are the relationships that match the rooms you grew up in. The dynamics that feel like home are the dynamics your earliest blueprint already knows how to survive. What you are calling attraction is, half the time, your nervous system reaching for what it recognizes.

This does not make you broken. It makes you a person whose recognition system was calibrated under conditions that were not safe. The calibration happened before you had any choice about it. The patterns that came out of the calibration are not your fault. They are also not your destiny.

The fawn response is the most common pattern in this category for women in trauma recovery. Fawning is the survival strategy of becoming whatever the person across from you needs you to be, in order to stay safe. It is not flexibility. It is not maturity. It is not being the kind of woman who does not need too much. It is a child who learned that having needs got her hurt, doing the only thing she could think of to do, which was to disappear her needs entirely.

The fawn response is also the hardest pattern to see in yourself. Because fawning is rewarded by the people you are fawning at. You get called easy to be with and low-maintenance and not like other women. You get to be the one who handles everything. And the more you get praised for it, the more you do it. Until one day you wake up and you do not know what you actually want, because you have been answering everyone else's wants for so long that yours have gone silent.

The other patterns are no less common. The hyper-independence that does not let anyone help. The over-responsibility that takes the blame for things that are not yours. The control that tries to manage everyone's emotions because feeling out of control of the room used to be life-threatening. The drama-seeking that mistakes chaos for aliveness. The choosing of unavailable partners because availability feels suspicious and unreliable people feel familiar.

The reckoning is not about shame. It is about clear sight. You cannot stop choosing the pattern until you can see the pattern. And you cannot see the pattern while you are still inside the loop calling it love.

This section is about looking. Honestly. Without flinching. At the loop you have been inside.

PROMPT 01

Describe the relational pattern you keep finding yourself inside. Not the people. The pattern. What dynamic do you keep reproducing?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

What did love look like in the house you grew up in? Be specific. Not the answer you would give in therapy. The actual answer.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

What is the connection between what love looked like in your childhood and what feels like love to you now?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

When you meet someone who would actually be good for you, what does your body do? Does it feel attraction or does it feel suspicion?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

When you meet someone who matches your old blueprint, what does your body do?
Be honest about the chemistry.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 06

Have you ever experienced the fawn response? Describe a recent time. What were you giving up to stay safe in that moment? Did you know you were doing it?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 07

What do people praise you for that is actually a trauma adaptation? Easy to be with. Low-maintenance. Reliable. Doesn't get jealous. Doesn't ask for much. Make the list.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 08

What patterns of self-abandonment have you been calling personality?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

Make a list of the people you have chosen across your life that hurt you. Look for what they have in common. Not the obvious things. The subtle things. The things that match your earliest blueprint.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

What would change in your life if you let yourself see the pattern clearly? What would you have to stop doing? Stop tolerating? Stop calling love?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 11

What would you have to grieve, in order to let the pattern go? Naming the grief is the work. Do not skip this.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 12

Write a sentence that names the pattern. One sentence. The kind of sentence you could say out loud to yourself, the next time the pattern starts to fire, that would help you remember what you actually know.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

SECTION FIVE

Choosing to Stay

The daily work of not abandoning yourself.

Choosing to Stay

Staying is the hardest thing I have ever done.

It is also the only thing that has ever worked.

For most of my life I had been leaving. Leaving rooms by going quiet inside them. Leaving relationships by performing the version of me that the person across from me wanted. Leaving my body by getting high, getting drunk, getting busy, getting lost in the next person, the next project, the next anything that could pull my attention out of the present. Leaving was the strategy. It had been the strategy since I was six years old on a staircase in the dark.

The work of staying began very small. It began with noticing the urge to leave and not following it. Just that. Not for the whole day. For one minute. Staying in the conversation when the conversation got hard. Staying in the body when the body did not want to be felt. Staying in the room when the room asked something of me that I was used to dodging.

The first time I did this on purpose, it was excruciating. Every cell in my body was screaming for the door. The leaving was so automatic that not-leaving felt like death. I had to remind myself, sometimes minute by minute, that the death was not actually coming. That the discomfort of staying was uncomfortable but survivable. That the part of me who was sure the door was the only option was a much younger part who had learned that lesson in a different room, and that the current room was, mostly, safe enough.

Staying is not heroism. It is not virtue. It is a practice. It is a thousand small choices a day, each one a tiny pivot from the old pattern. Most of them so small that no one but you will see them.

The cumulative effect of those small choices, made over months and years, is the gradual emergence of a different person. A person who does not flinch as much. A person who can stay with herself when something hard happens. A person who can stay with another person when they are having a hard time, without abandoning either of them. A person who can stay with a feeling long enough for it to move through her, instead of needing to numb it before it lands.

Staying is what creates the conditions for everything that comes next. You cannot vision a life if you cannot stay in the body that would live it. You cannot build what you want if you keep abandoning yourself before the building gets uncomfortable. You cannot become someone who chooses differently if the leaving is still automatic.

The pivot of this whole journal is right here. Notice the pattern, meet the parts, read the body, reckon with the loop. And then, when you have done all of that work and the urge to leave fires anyway, choose to stay.

It will not feel good at first. It will feel like death and then it will feel like fear and then it will feel like grief and then, eventually, it will feel like something else. Something quieter. Something that lasts.

PROMPT 01

What does leaving yourself look like for you, in the small daily way? Be specific. Numbing with food, scrolling, drinking, working, picking fights, going silent, getting busy, anything else?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

What does staying with yourself feel like in your body? Have you ever practiced it on purpose?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

Describe a recent moment when you stayed when you usually would have left. What was the situation? What did it cost you to stay? What did you discover by staying?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

What conversation have you been avoiding by leaving yourself before it could begin?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 05

What feeling have you been managing through leaving instead of feeling?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

Who in your life have you been abandoning because you cannot yet stay with the version of yourself who would not abandon them?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

What part of you most insists that leaving is the only option? Talk to her. What is she afraid would happen if you stayed?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 08

This week, pick one small situation in which you usually leave yourself. Practice staying. For a minute. Then for two. Write about what happened.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

What does staying require of you that leaving did not? Be specific about the cost.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

What does staying give you that leaving never could? Be specific about the return.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 11

Who is the version of you who can stay? Describe her. What does she know that the leaving version does not?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 12

Write a promise to yourself about staying. One sentence. The kind you could come back to on the days when leaving feels easier than the work.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

SECTION SIX

Visioning from the Self That Stayed

What becomes possible from a regulated body.

Visioning from the Self That Stayed

Most of the manifestation work being sold in this culture is being sold to a nervous system that cannot use it.

You cannot manifest from a body that is dysregulated. You cannot manifest from a self that is still abandoning itself daily. You cannot manifest from a recognition system that mistakes chaos for chemistry and unavailability for love. What you will manifest, if you try, is more of what your wounded parts have been reaching for. More of what felt like home. More of the loop.

This is why so many trauma survivors have tried manifestation and come away disappointed. The framework is not wrong. The order is wrong. You cannot vision a life that your nervous system has not yet learned how to inhabit.

But once you have done the work of staying, something new becomes possible.

The visioning that emerges from a self who has learned to stay is different from the visioning that comes from a self who is still leaving. The first kind of visioning comes from the regulated body asking, honestly, what do I actually want? What kind of life would this body, this version of me, this person who has stopped abandoning herself, actually want to build? The second kind comes from the wounded parts trying to manufacture a future that will finally make them feel safe.

You can tell the difference between the two by where they live in the body. Wounded visioning lives in the chest. It is urgent. It is grasping. It wants the thing now because it cannot tolerate the wanting. Self visioning lives lower in the body, in the belly or in the whole torso, and it is patient. It can hold the wanting without needing to resolve it instantly. It knows the wanting is information, not emergency.

This section is about beginning to vision from that quieter place. Not from the parts that have been trying to manufacture safety through achievement, partnership, money, status, or accomplishment. From the Self underneath the parts. The you who is here now because you have done the work of staying.

What does she want? Not what should she want. Not what would impress people. Not what would prove she is finally okay. What does she actually want?

If you cannot answer yet, that is fine. The question itself is the practice. You may not have asked it of yourself, honestly, in a very long time.

PROMPT 01

Set aside the should. What do you actually want your daily life to feel like? Not look like. Feel like. In your body, when you wake up, when you go to bed, in the middle of the afternoon.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

Who do you want to be in five years? Not in terms of accomplishments. In terms of internal state. What kind of person?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

What did you used to want, before life and trauma and survival rerouted you? What did your earliest wants look like? Are any of them still alive?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 04

What would your regulated self build, that your dysregulated self could never imagine? Let yourself imagine it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

What kind of love do you actually want? Not the kind that feels like home. The kind that feels like safety, like sustenance, like a life you could build inside of.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

What kind of work do you actually want to do? Not the work that would prove you are worthy. The work that would feel like a true use of who you are.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

What kind of friendships do you want? What would the inside of them feel like?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 08

What kind of body do you want to live inside? Not the appearance of the body. The experience of being in it. What does the body of your future self feel like?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 09

Where do you want to live? What is the room you want to wake up in? Describe it in detail.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

What would you stop tolerating, in the life you actually want? Make the list.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 11

What would you start saying yes to, in the life you actually want? Make the list.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 12

Write a paragraph in present tense, as if you are already living the life your regulated self wants. Not in five years. Now. Describe a single day inside that life. Notice what your body does as you write it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

SECTION SEVEN

Building What Comes Next

Translating vision into daily aligned movement.

Building What Comes Next

Vision without movement is fantasy.

The last piece of this work is the building. Translating what your regulated self has visioned into the daily small choices that, accumulated over time, become a different life. Not because you forced your reality to bend to your thoughts. Because you became a person whose actions were aligned with what she actually wanted, and the actions did what actions always do, which is build the life they are aimed at.

The building is slow. This is the part most manifestation frameworks do not tell you. The building is small daily decisions made over months and years. The building is not a single ceremonial choice. It is ten thousand quiet ones. The walk you take instead of the scroll. The conversation you have instead of the avoidance. The meal you cook for yourself when no one is watching. The text you send to the friend you have been meaning to reach. The boundary you hold when holding it costs you something. The yes you give to the thing your body wanted. The no you give to the thing your old pattern would have grabbed.

Each small choice is a vote. A vote for the version of you who is becoming. A vote against the version who has been keeping you trapped in the loop. Over time, the votes accumulate. The new version starts to outvote the old one. The pattern starts to break. The life starts to look like what your regulated self visioned.

This is not magic. It is not law of attraction. It is not the universe responding to your energy. It is you, becoming, through the daily work of choosing what your healed self would choose, in the moments when the old self is still trying to make different choices.

Your job is not to know the whole path. Your job is to make the next aligned choice, today. And the next one tomorrow. And the next one the day after.

This section is about that work. The translation of vision into movement. The daily practice of becoming the person who is already living the life you visioned. The closing of the gap between who you are and who you are becoming, one small honest choice at a time.

You have done the rest of the work. You have noticed the leavings. You have met your parts. You have learned to read your body. You have reckoned with your patterns. You have chosen

to stay. You have visioned from the self who stayed.

Now you build.

PROMPT 01

What is one aligned choice you could make today that the version of you who is becoming would make? Make it. Then come back and write about what happened.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 02

What is one daily practice that would move you toward the life your regulated self visioned? Pick one. Just one. Commit to it for two weeks.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 03

What is one thing in your current life that does not fit the life you are building?
Name it. You do not have to change it yet. Just see it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 04

What is one thing you have been waiting to have the time, money, energy, or courage to do? What would the smallest first step look like?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 05

Make a list of the small choices you can make this week that vote for the version of you who is becoming.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 06

Make a list of the small choices you have been making that vote for the version of you who is still trapped in the loop. Be honest. No shame.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 07

What is one relationship in your life that you want to invest in? What would investing look like this week?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

PROMPT 08

What is one relationship in your life that you have been over-investing in, that has been costing you? What would scaling back look like?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 09

What does your body need today that you have been ignoring? Give it that thing.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 10

What would your healed self do at 3 p.m. this Tuesday? Imagine the specific moment. Then, on Tuesday, do it.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 11

When you feel the old pattern firing this week, what is the sentence you can say to yourself to remember who you are becoming?

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

PROMPT 12

Write a letter from the version of you who has been living the life you visioned for one year. Tell yourself what to focus on this week. Tell yourself what does not matter. Tell yourself what is working. Sign it, and date it one year from today.

Before writing, I notice my body feels:

After writing, I want to remember:

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 18 horizontal lines.

A CLOSING NOTE

If you have made it to this page, you have done real work.

I want to name a few things you may need to hear.

You will not be done after this journal. The work of coming back to yourself does not have a finish line. What you have done by working through these prompts is to begin a practice that will continue to deepen for the rest of your life. The journal is a doorway. The work is what you do after you walk through it.

You may notice, as time passes, that the answers you gave to some of these prompts no longer fit. That is good. It means you are changing. Come back. Write new answers. Watch the difference.

You may notice that some of the work was easier than expected and some was much harder. That is also good. It means you have a real sense now of where the leverage is, in your own particular system, and where you can return for deeper work.

You may notice that you are different from the woman who picked up this journal. Not because you have been fixed. Because you have been seen, by yourself, in a way that is rare and that changes things.

You did this work.

Whatever happens next, you did this.

That is enough.

— Carrie

RESOURCES

If you want to go deeper into any of the frameworks this journal touches, here are some places to start. None of these are required reading. They are offered as doors, in case you want to walk through one.

ON CPTSD AND TRAUMA RECOVERY

Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving by Pete Walker

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

What My Bones Know by Stephanie Foo

ON INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS AND PARTS WORK

No Bad Parts by Richard Schwartz

Self-Therapy by Jay Earley

ON SOMATIC AND NERVOUS SYSTEM WORK

Waking the Tiger by Peter Levine

The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy by Deb Dana

My Grandmother's Hands by Resmaa Menakem

ON ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts by Gabor Maté

Quit Like a Woman by Holly Whitaker

ON SHAME AND WORTHINESS

The Gifts of Imperfection by Brené Brown

Daring Greatly by Brené Brown

CRISIS RESOURCES, US

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988

Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741

SAMHSA National Helpline: 1-800-662-4357

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carrie Davidson is a registered nurse, recovery and life coach, writer, and artist. She lives and works in North Carolina. The Small Leavings Journal is her first guided companion for women doing the long, slow work of coming back to themselves.

You can find more of her writing at carriedavidson.com.