THE BUSY MOM'S

HOLIDAY SURVIVAL GUIDE

A practical guide to protecting your energy, easing the mental load and enjoying the season without losing yourself.

LESS PRESSURE. MORE PRESENCE. A LITTLE MORE PEACE.

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WELCOME, MAMA

You deserve to enjoy the holidays, too.

The holidays can be beautiful—and a little chaotic. Between decorating, shopping, cooking, wrapping, coordinating schedules and managing everyone’s emotions (including your own), it is easy to reach the end of the season feeling completely drained.

This guide is here to help you do things differently. You’ll find realistic ways to protect your energy, lighten the mental load, nourish your body, set boundaries and make room for the moments that matter.

You do not need to complete every exercise or follow every suggestion. Choose what helps. Small, consistent shifts are more useful than another perfect plan to keep up with.

A note to remember
You were never meant to do it all at the expense of yourself. The goal isn't a flawless holiday. It's a season where you get to be part of the memories, too.

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01 / PROTECT YOUR ENERGY

Your time and energy are valuable.

Every invitation, tradition and expectation does not need to become your responsibility. Before you say yes, pause long enough to check whether the commitment fits your capacity and what matters most to your family.

A simple boundary check

- Does this add joy, connection or meaning—or mostly stress?
- Am I saying yes because I want to, or because I feel obligated?
- Do I realistically have the time and energy for this?
- What would I need to give up to make room for it?

> **Try this**
> Create a short **peace list** of three things that help you feel grounded. Keep it somewhere visible and return to it when the season starts to feel overwhelming.

My peace list

1. One thing that helps me feel calm:

2. Someone I can reach out to:

3. A small reset I can take anywhere:

Boundary scripts you can borrow

- “Thank you for thinking of us. We’re keeping our schedule lighter this year.”
- “I’d love to help, but I can’t take that on this time.”
- “We’re going to head home early tonight. We need a quieter evening.”
- “That doesn’t work for our family this year, but I hope you have a wonderful time.”

02 / THE MENTAL LOAD

You don't have to carry it all.

The holiday workload isn't only the visible tasks. It's remembering, planning, anticipating, coordinating and keeping track of what everyone needs. That invisible mental load can be exhausting—even when it looks like you're simply “getting things done.”

Try a holiday mental-load edit

- **Delegate:** Give family members clear responsibilities. They can own a task from beginning to end.
- **Simplify:** Decide which traditions matter most and which can take a year off.
- **Share the planning:** Put dates, meals, gift lists and responsibilities somewhere everyone can access.
- **Release:** Let “good enough” be good enough. Not every detail needs your attention.

> **A useful question**
> If I stopped managing this, who else could learn to take responsibility for it?

My mental-load reset

One responsibility I can hand over:

One tradition or task I can simplify or skip:

One thing I'm doing only because I feel I should:

One person I can ask for practical help:

03 / YOUR ENERGY

Create your holiday non-negotiables.

Rather than fitting your well-being into whatever time is left, decide what helps you function well and protect a little space for it. Your non-negotiables do not need to be elaborate. They need to be realistic.

Examples to consider

- A consistent bedtime or a little extra sleep when possible.
- Regular meals and snacks so you are not running on empty.
- A short walk, stretch or kitchen dance break.
- Fifteen minutes of quiet or uninterrupted time.
- One evening or block of time with no extra commitments.

My three non-negotiables

1. I feel more like myself when I:

2. I need to protect time for:

3. To make room for these, I will say no to or reduce:

Remember
Rest is not a reward for finishing everything. The list will always be there. You are allowed to pause before it is finished.

04 / MOM GUILT

You are allowed to disappoint people.

Sometimes the hardest part of setting a boundary isn't saying no. It's managing the discomfort when someone else doesn't like your answer. But someone else's disappointment does not automatically mean you've made the wrong decision.

You might disappoint someone by not attending every gathering, changing a tradition, buying fewer gifts, asking someone else to host or choosing rest over another commitment. Your needs still matter.

> **A new way to think about it**
> You can care about someone else's feelings without taking responsibility for making everyone happy.

Let go of perfect

Your kids are unlikely to remember whether every detail was flawless. They are more likely to remember the laughter, the connection and how it felt to spend time together. Aim to be present, not perfect.

When guilt creeps in, try this reminder:

> **“I'm not trying to be a perfect mom. I'm aiming to be a present one.”**

What expectation can I release this year?

What am I afraid might happen if I let it go?

What would I tell a friend who was putting this much pressure on herself?

05 / NOURISHMENT

Enjoy the holidays without the food guilt.

Food is part of celebration, connection and tradition. You do not need to earn a treat, compensate for a meal or follow an all-or-nothing plan. Aim for habits that help you feel nourished and energized while leaving room for enjoyment.

Simple ways to support your energy

- Eat regular meals rather than skipping meals to “save up” for a party.
- Include foods that satisfy you and help you feel fueled, such as protein, fibre-rich foods and colourful produce.
- Keep water nearby and drink regularly throughout the day.
- Enjoy the foods you love without labelling them good or bad.
- Notice how you feel physically and emotionally, without judgment.

> **A gentle reminder**
> One meal does not define your health. You can enjoy holiday food and return to your usual nourishing routines at the next meal.

A mindful check-in

What foods help me feel satisfied and energized?

How can I make regular meals easier on busy days?

What holiday food or tradition do I want to enjoy without guilt?

06 / NOTICE THE SIGNS

Your body is giving you information.

Stress can show up in different ways. You might notice changes in your sleep, mood, appetite, concentration or patience. Recognizing your own early warning signs can help you pause and respond before you feel completely depleted.

Possible signs that you need a reset

- Feeling unusually irritable or tearful.
- Finding small decisions or everyday tasks harder than usual.
- Feeling wired but exhausted, or struggling to switch off.
- Noticing changes in sleep, appetite or concentration.
- Feeling disconnected, resentful or like you have nothing left to give.

My personal stress signals

When I am overwhelmed, I notice this in my body:

My mood or behaviour tends to change by:

The first sign that I need a break is:

When I notice it, one helpful thing I can do is:

If stress feels persistent or unmanageable
Reach out to someone you trust or a qualified health professional. You deserve support; you do not have to manage everything alone.

07 / WHEN THE CHAOS HITS

A five-minute reset for hard days.

The kids are fighting. You're behind on everything. Dinner is burning. Someone needs something—and you feel close to your limit. You do not have to fix the entire day. Start by caring for the next moment.

Your five-step reset

- **STOP:** If you can, pause and step away from the immediate pressure for a moment.
- **BREATHE:** Take five slow, comfortable breaths. Let your exhale be gentle and unhurried.
- **CHECK IN:** Ask yourself: What am I feeling? What do I need right now?
- **SIMPLIFY:** Identify the one thing that truly needs your attention next.
- **RELEASE:** Give yourself permission to let the rest wait, change or be imperfect.

> **Try saying**
> “I can take this one moment at a time. I don't have to do everything right now.”

My reset plan

A place I can step away for a few minutes:

A person I can ask for help:

One task I can let wait when I'm overwhelmed:

08 / BE PRESENT

Make room for the moments that matter.

It is possible to be physically present at a gathering while your mind is running through the next ten things on your list. Mindfulness is not about emptying your mind. It is about gently bringing your attention back to what is happening now.

Try these small presence practices

- Put your phone away for one conversation or activity.
- Take one slow breath before entering a busy room.
- Notice one detail: the lights, the music, a familiar smell or someone's laugh.
- Sit down and enjoy one part of the meal without multitasking.
- When your mind jumps to the to-do list, notice it and return to the moment.

Reflect

A holiday moment I want to be fully present for:

One distraction I can reduce:

What helps me reconnect when my mind is racing?

A little perspective
The goal isn't to make every moment magical. It's to notice the ordinary moments that are already meaningful.

09 / 12 DAYS OF CALM

Small moments. A little more breathing room.

Choose one small prompt each day. Move through them in order, repeat your favourites or adapt them to fit your life.

01	**BREATHE**	Take three slow breaths before your feet hit the floor.
02	**HYDRATE**	Keep water nearby and drink regularly throughout the day.
03	**MOVE**	Dance in the kitchen, stretch or take a short walk.
04	**NOTICE**	Write down three things that made you smile.
05	**CLEAR**	Clear one small surface—not the whole house.
06	**REST**	Give yourself an earlier bedtime or a quiet pause.
07	**LAUGH**	Share a funny moment, story or show with someone you love.
08	**CONNECT**	Text or call a friend just to say hello.
09	**GROUND**	Step outside, notice the air and take a few slow breaths.
10	**REFLECT**	Ask: What is going right today?
11	**INTEND**	Write one intention for the days ahead.
12	**CELEBRATE**	Do one small thing purely because you enjoy it.

Keep it kind
These are invitations, not another list of things to achieve. If a day gets away from you, simply begin again when you can.

10 / YOUR HOLIDAY CHECK-IN

A burnout-prevention checklist.

Use this as a gentle check-in—not another standard you have to meet. You do not need to check every box to be doing a good job.

- ■ I have identified my top three holiday priorities.
- ■ I have said no to at least one unnecessary commitment.
- ■ I have shared responsibilities instead of doing everything myself.
- ■ I have made space for rest and recovery.
- ■ I am eating regular meals and snacks that support my energy.
- ■ I am making sleep a priority where possible.
- ■ I have included movement that feels good to me.
- ■ I am allowing myself to let go of perfection.
- ■ I have communicated a boundary or asked for help.
- ■ I have planned something enjoyable that is just for me.

My one commitment to myself this holiday season:

11 / REFLECT & RESET

Take what matters. Release what doesn't.

Before the season comes to a close, take a few quiet moments to reflect. You do not need to judge how you did. Simply notice what supported you, what drained you and what you want to carry forward.

Journal prompts

What brought me joy this season?

What felt heavier than it needed to?

What am I proud of myself for?

What do I want to release before the new year?

What boundary or habit do I want to carry forward?

What energy do I want to bring into the year ahead?

A closing reminder
You don't need to become a different person in the new year. You can begin by treating the person you already are with more care.

SUCCESS WITHOUT SELF-SACRIFICE

Mama, you were never meant to do it all at the expense of yourself. You deserve to experience the joy, connection and magic of the season without losing yourself in the process.

Protecting your energy isn't selfish. Setting boundaries isn't letting people down. And being a great mom doesn't mean putting yourself last.

This is the conversation I bring to women, leaders and high-achievers through my signature keynotes:

THE ENERGY GAP
Why High Achievers Are Running on Empty and What It Takes to Reclaim Your Energy.

CRAVINGS, CORTISOL & CHAOS
Understanding the Connection Between Stress, Energy, and the Habits That Keep Us Stuck.

For speaking opportunities, event inquiries and more resources, visit **www.katrinahoughton.com**.

Let's change the conversation around success.

Katrina Houghton | Success Without Self-Sacrifice