



HOLIDAY *Boundaries*

A workbook for the conversations nobody wants to have

Presented By
GreatLivingToday.com



How to use this workbook

There is a good chance you picked this up in November, already tired, already dreading a specific conversation with a specific person. This workbook is built for that.

Work through it in order the first time. Parts One and Two are about deciding, and they take about an hour if you sit down with a cup of coffee and do not rush them. Part Three is the scripts, and that is the part you will come back to, so keep it somewhere you can find it in a hurry.

You do not have to finish this in one sitting and you do not have to do it perfectly. Even the person who only fills out three pages will walk into December clearer than the person who filled out none of them.

What this workbook will not do

This will not change your family. It will not make your mother-in-law easier or your brother more considerate, and it will not stop anyone from being disappointed in you.

What it will do is help you decide, in advance and in writing, what you are actually willing to do this year, and give you the words to say it out loud without a two hour buildup of dread beforehand.

Some of the conversations in here will go badly. That is not a sign that you did it wrong. A boundary is not a negotiation tactic and it does not need the other person's agreement to be real.



Before you start:

Write the name of the one person you are most dreading this season. You do not have to do anything with it yet. Just put it on paper.



PART ONE

*Where the pressure is
actually coming from*



The holiday pressure audit

You cannot decide what to cut until you can see everything that is currently on the table. Write it all down, including the things that feel too small to count, because the small things are usually what tip the month over.

What it is	Who is asking	When	Have I already said yes?

Include parties, dinners, school events, church events, work obligations, travel, hosting, cooking, gift shopping, decorating, cards, and the visits you have not been asked about yet but know are coming.



Count your yeses. Write the number here:

Dread and joy

Go back through your list and score every item twice. This is the page that shows you the pattern, and the pattern is almost never what you expected.

What it is	How much I dread it (1 to 5)	How much I'll enjoy it (1 to 5)
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Some things score high on both. Those are the ones worth keeping and shortening rather than cutting.

What scored a five for dread and a one or two for joy?
Write those here. This is your cut list.

Why I say yes

Check every reason that is true for you. Be honest, because nobody is reading this.

- ☐ I don't want to be talked about
- ☐ It's tradition and I'm the one who would be breaking it
- ☐ I feel guilty
- ☐ I'm afraid of the argument that comes after the no
- ☐ Someone will be hurt and I'll have to sit with that
- ☐ It's easier than explaining
- ☐ I've always done it
- ☐ If I don't do it, nobody will
- ☐ I want to be the person who shows up
- ☐ I said yes last year and now it's expected
- ☐ I'm afraid of what it says about me
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

The honest question:

Which of these reasons is running the most of your December?



What I want this December to feel like

Answer this before you make a single decision, because it is much harder to protect something you have not named.

By the end of December, I want to feel...

The moment I most want to be present for is...

The thing I always mean to do and never get to is...

If December went perfectly, on the twenty sixth I would say...

One tradition I actually love is...



Keep this one:

Take a photo of this page. When December gets loud, this is the page you look at.

What last year cost me



This page is uncomfortable and it is the one that makes the rest of the workbook stick. Think back to last December and answer honestly.

Last December, I was most exhausted by...

I spent money I did not have on ...

The conversation I avoided was...

What I said yes to and regretted...

What I missed out on because I was too busy...

What am I not willing to repeat this year?





PART TWO

*Deciding before the
invitations arrive*



Yes, no, negotiate

Take every item from your earlier pressure audit and move it into one of these three columns. Everything has to land somewhere, and nothing is allowed to stay undecided.

YES, fully in	NO, not this year	NEGOTIATE, yes with changes

The negotiate column is where most things belong. Shorter, later, smaller, at your house instead of theirs, without the overnight stay, or every other year instead of every year. For each item in your negotiate column: What is the change you need? Write it next to the item.



My non-negotiables

Short list. Five things maximum, because a list of fifteen non-negotiables is not a list of non-negotiables.

These are the things you are not trading, no matter who asks and no matter how they ask.

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

Examples if you are stuck: Christmas morning at home. Nobody stays overnight. We leave by eight. I am not hosting this year. My kids are not being made to hug anyone.

Say it out loud:

Read your list to yourself once. If any of them made you flinch, that is the one you most needed to write down.

***A boundary does not need
anyone's agreement to be real.***



How much I can actually hold

Most overcommitting happens because we count events instead of counting recovery. This page counts both.

In a normal week, I can handle evenings out before I start to resent them.

After a full day with a lot of people, I need to recover.

The most gatherings I can do in one weekend is .

I am currently committed to events in December.

The difference between those two numbers is .

The math:

If the difference is not zero, go back to your yes, no, negotiate page. Something has to move into the no column.

The exit plan

Decide these things now, while you are calm, because you will not be able to decide them at eight o'clock in a room full of people.

The event	I'm arriving at	I'm leaving at	My reason for leaving is

Your reason does not have to be dramatic and it does not have to be a lie. "We've got an early morning" is enough. Decide it now so you are not inventing it under pressure.

Also decide: who is your exit partner? That is the person who knows the plan and helps you leave when you said you would.

My exit partner:



The signal:

Agree on a word or a text you can send when you are ready to go. Write it here:

Who I need to tell, and by when

A decision that lives only in your head will get overruled by the first person who asks. This page turns your decisions into a dated list.

Who	What I need to tell them	By when	Done
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐

Work backward. Gift arrangements need to be settled by early November. Which house you are going to needs to be settled before anyone books travel. Hosting decisions need to go out before someone else assumes you are doing it again.



Start with the hardest one:

Which conversation on this list are you dreading most? Do that one first. Everything after it will feel easier, and the ones you put off get harder every day you wait.



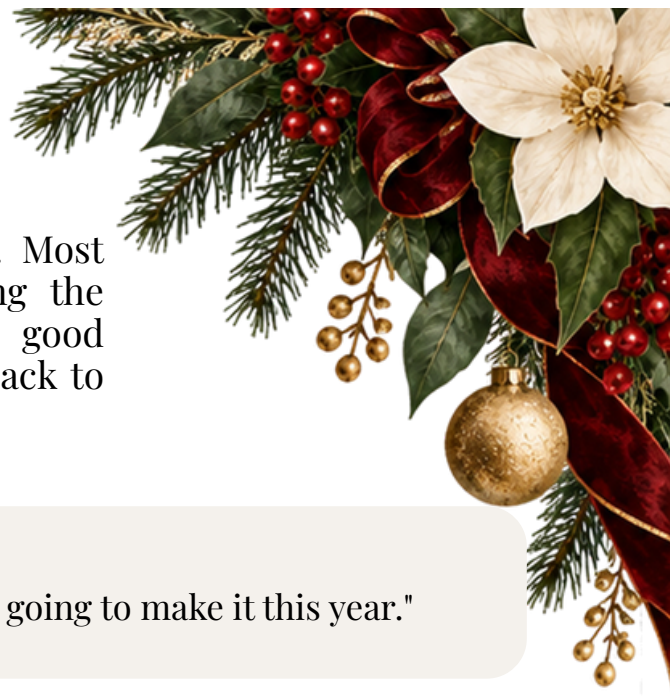
PART THREE

The Scripts



Saying no the first time

A no does not need a reason attached to it. Most people over-explain because they are hoping the other person will agree that the reason is good enough, and that quietly hands the decision back to the person asking.



The clean no

"Thank you for thinking of us. We're not going to make it this year."



The warm no

"That sounds lovely, and I'm going to pass this time. I hope you all have a wonderful night."



The no with a door left open

"We can't do the party, but I'd love to see you in January once things settle down."



The no you send in writing

"Thanks so much for the invitation. We won't be able to come this year, but we're thinking of you all."

Make it yours

"Thanks for the invite. We're keeping things this year, so we're going to sit this one out."

If they push back:

Repeat the same sentence. Do not add a new reason, because a new reason gives them something new to argue with.



When they ask again

The second invitation is usually a test of whether the first no was real. Changing your wording is what signals that it was not.



The same invitation, asked twice

"I know, I wish we could. It's still a no this year."



A different event from the same person

"I'm at my limit for December. I'm not able to add anything else."



When the ask comes with pressure

"I hear that you're disappointed. My answer hasn't changed."



When they go around you and ask your partner or your kids

"We already answered this one together. It's still no."

Make it yours

"I've thought about it and my answer is the same. I'm not able to ."

If they push back:

Silence is a complete response. You do not owe a third version of the same no.

Leaving when you said you would

Decide your departure time before you arrive and say it out loud when you walk in the door. Leaving is almost impossible to negotiate at nine o'clock and completely reasonable to announce at six.



Announcing it on arrival

"So glad we made it. We're going to head out around eight."



Building it into the RSVP

"We'll be there. We can stay for about two hours."



The drop in

"We can't do the whole evening, but we'll come by for dessert."



Leaving in the moment

"We're going to take off. Thank you for having us, it was really lovely."

Make it yours

"We'd love to come for

We'll need to leave by

If they push back:

"I know, we wish we could stay longer. We do have to go." Then stand up. Standing ends more conversations than words do.

Gifts

Gift expectations are easy to change in early November and nearly impossible to change on December twentieth. If you want a different arrangement this year, this is a conversation that has a deadline.



Opting out between adults

"We're not doing gifts between the grown ups this year. We'd rather just spend the day together."



Setting a spending cap

"Can we do a twenty dollar limit this year? It takes the pressure off everybody."



Proposing that names get drawn

"What if we drew names instead? One good gift each instead of eight small ones."



Keeping it to the kids

"We're keeping gifts to the children this year."



When someone buys for you anyway

"That was so thoughtful of you. I meant what I said about next year, though."

Make it yours

"This year we're doing for gifts. I wanted to tell you early."

If they push back:

"I understand. This is what works for us this year."

Money

Being honest about a budget is not the same as asking for permission to have one. You can name a number without defending it.



Declining to split more than your share

"I can put in twenty five. That's what I have for this."



The trip you cannot afford

"We're not able to do the trip this year. It isn't in the budget."



Being asked to cover someone else

"I'm not able to cover that one. I hope it works out."



The tradition that got expensive

"That restaurant is out of range for us now. Would everyone come to our place instead?"



When someone asks why

"We're being careful this year. That's really all there is to it."

Make it yours

"I can do . Anything past that isn't going to work this year."

If they push back:

"I know. I still can't." You are allowed to have a limit without producing evidence of it."

Hosting

Your home is the one place where you set the terms, so set them inside the invitation rather than in the moment. Nothing on this page is rude when it is said in advance.



Putting an end time in the invitation

"Come at four. We'll wrap up around eight."



Overnight guests

"We'd love to see you. We don't have the room to host overnight, but there's a hotel five minutes away."



Uninvited additions

"We planned for six this year. I'm not able to add more."



Assigning what people bring

"You're welcome to bring dessert. Everything else is handled."



Reclaiming your kitchen

"I've got it, thank you. Go sit down and enjoy yourself."

Make it yours

"We're hosting from to . Here's what would help: ."

If they push back:

"I wish we could. This is what we can manage this year."

The conversation at the table

You are not obligated to participate in a conversation simply because it is happening near you. Redirecting is not rude, and leaving the room is not a scene.



The redirect

"I'm not getting into that today. Somebody tell me about the trip."



The direct ask

"Can we leave that one alone? I'd just like to enjoy dinner."



The quiet exit

"I'm going to go check on the food."



Naming it once, clearly

"I've told you I don't discuss this. If it keeps going I'm going to move to the other room."



When it is about someone who isn't there

"I'd rather not talk about her when she can't answer for herself."

Make it yours

"I'd rather not talk about . Tell me about instead."

If they push back:

Leave the room. You can come back in ten minutes and nobody will have died.

Comments about you

A comment about your body, your job, your drinking, or your relationship is not a question, which means it does not require an answer.



The flat acknowledgment

"Thanks for noticing." Then change the subject without pausing.



A comment about your body

"I'd rather not talk about my body. How's the new job going?"



When you're not drinking

"I'm good with this, thanks." Say it exactly the same way every time it comes up.



Your job, your marriage, your kids, your house

"Things are good. What's new with you?"



When it goes too far

"That one stung. Let's move on."

Make it yours

"I'm not going to talk about . Let's talk about something else."

If they push back:

Repeat your sentence in exactly the same tone.
Consistency is what ends it, not cleverness.

Splitting the day

A schedule decided in November is a logistics conversation. The same schedule decided on December twenty third is a fight. Move this one early.



Setting the plan yourself

"Here's our plan this year. We'll be at our house in the morning and yours in the afternoon."



Alternating years

"We were with you last year, so we're going to the other side this year."



Declining the split entirely

"We're staying home this Christmas. We'd love to see everyone the weekend after."



When the kids are with their other parent

"They're with their dad through the twenty sixth. We'll celebrate together on the twenty seventh."



When both sides want the same hours

"We can't be in two places. We've decided on _____ and I wanted you to hear it from me."

Make it yours

"This year we're doing . This is what works for our family."

If they push back:

"I understand you're disappointed. This is the plan."

Guilt trips and the silent treatment

A guilt trip works by making you responsible for someone else's feelings. You can care about how they feel and still not change your answer.



"You've changed."

"Maybe I have. I'm still saying no to this one."



"After everything I've done for you."

"I'm grateful for you. That doesn't change my answer."



"Fine. Don't worry about me."

"I'm sorry you're upset. I'll call you Sunday."



The silent treatment

"I love you and I'm here when you're ready to talk." Then stop initiating and let it sit.



The message passed through somebody else

"I'd rather hear that from her directly."

Make it yours

"I can hear that you're hurt, and I'm not changing my answer about ."

If they push back:

Their disappointment is real and it is still theirs to carry. Your job is not to talk them out of feeling it.

Saying no to your own grown children

Saying no to your adult children feels different because it is, and it is still allowed. Most of these get easier the second time you say them.



Money

"I'm not able to help with that this year. I wish that I could."



Hosting everyone again

"I'm not up for hosting this year. Would one of you be willing to take it?"



Childcare over the holidays

"I can do Saturday afternoon. I'm not able to do the whole weekend."



Being the go between

"I'm not going to pass that along. The two of you need to talk to each other."



The last minute ask

"I would have needed more notice for that one."

Make it yours

"I love you, and I'm not able to this year."

If they push back:

"I know this is a change. I mean it kindly, and I mean it."



PART FOUR

*Holding the line
when they push*



Say the same thing again

The single most common reason a boundary collapses is that the person holding it keeps offering new reasons. Every new reason is a new door, and the person pushing will walk through whichever one looks weakest.

The method is simple and it feels strange the first few times you use it. You pick one sentence and you repeat it, in the same tone, as many times as it takes. You do not escalate, you do not explain further, and you do not match their energy.

What it sounds like in practice:

"We're not going to make it this year." "I know, and we're not going to make it this year." "I hear you. We're still not going to make it." "I understand you're frustrated. Our answer is the same."

Notice that the sentence barely changes. The words in front of it soften, the answer behind it does not move.

Write your sentence here:

My one sentence for this season is...

Say it out loud three times before you need it. It should fit in one breath, because anything longer than one breath will get interrupted.

The rule:

You may acknowledge their feelings as many times as you like. You may not add a new reason. That is the whole method.



When they get upset

Somebody is probably going to be upset with you this year, and you are going to feel responsible for it. This page is about separating what is actually yours from what only feels like it.

Yours to own: How you said it. Whether you were kind. Whether you gave enough notice. Whether you followed through on what you promised.

Not yours to own: How they took it. Whether they think it was fair. Whether they tell other people. How long they stay upset. Whether they make it about themselves.

Read those two lists again, because most of the exhaustion in a holiday season comes from trying to manage the second list.

Work through the one you are dreading:

The person I expect to be upset is:

What I am responsible for in this situation is:

What is theirs to carry is:

What I will do if they get upset is:

The hard truth:

A boundary that upsets nobody was probably not a boundary. If nothing changed, nothing changed.



After a hard conversation

You said the thing. Your hands were probably shaking a little. This page is for the twenty minutes afterward, when the second-guessing starts and you begin composing the apology you do not owe anyone.

What I actually said was:

What I was afraid would happen was:

What actually happened was:

The part I would do the same way is:

The part I would change is:

Before you decide it went badly, ask yourself this. Did it go badly, or was it just uncomfortable? Those are not the same thing, and almost every hard conversation gets filed as a failure simply because it did not feel good while it was happening.



Do not undo it tonight.

The urge to call back and soften it is strongest in the first few hours. Give it until tomorrow. If you still want to say more then, you can.

The empty chair

Some holidays are hard for a reason that has nothing to do with boundaries. Somebody is not here this year, whether through death, distance, an estrangement, or a relationship that ended. This page is for that, and you can skip it if it is not yours.

Take your time with these:

The person I am missing this season is

The moment I expect to feel it most is

The tradition that reminds me of them is

One thing I want to do to mark that they mattered is

Decide in advance what you need. Grief at the holidays is not a problem to be solved before the twenty fifth, and it does not follow anyone's schedule.

I will give myself permission to

The person I can call if the day gets heavy is

If I need to leave a room or a gathering, I will

You are allowed both:

You can have a genuinely good day and still miss them in the middle of it. One does not cancel the other, and feeling happy is not a betrayal of anybody.





PART FIVE

Closing out the year



What I learned

Do this page in the last week of December while it is still fresh, because by February you will have softened all the details and lost the useful ones.

What worked:

The boundary I am most glad I set was .

The conversation that went better than expected was .

The thing I said no to and did not regret was .

What did not:

The thing I said yes to and should not have was .

The conversation I avoided was .

The moment I gave in was and to what .

What it cost and what it saved:

Compared to last year, this December felt .

The change that made the biggest difference was .



One decision for next year:

Based on this year, the one thing you are changing is:



A letter to yourself next November

Write this to the version of you who opens this workbook again in eleven months, tired and already dreading the same specific conversation. She will not remember what you learned this year.

Use these as starting points, or ignore them and write freely:

- What I want you to remember about this year
- What not to say yes to again, no matter what
- The thing that worked better than you expected
- What you were afraid of and what actually happened
- What to be kinder to yourself about
- What to start earlier next year

[illegible]

Signature

Date

Thoughts



Lined area for writing thoughts.

