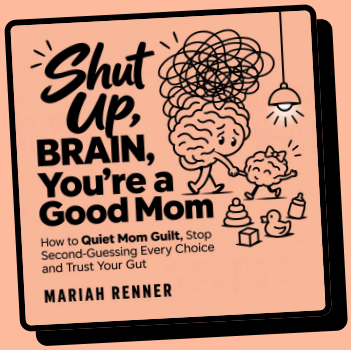
your free companion kit

Need or Grade Kit



The questions and sentences from this book, written down, so they're there the next time your phone starts handing out grades at bedtime.



THE PRINTABLE COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

Shut Up, Brain, You're a Good Mom

How to Quiet Mom Guilt, Stop Second-Guessing Every Choice and Trust Your Gut

MARIAH RENNER

PRINT WHAT YOU NEED · SKIP THE REST

start here

How to use this kit



These are the book's questions and sentences on paper, so they're there when you need them. Print what you need. Skip the rest.

One sound for everything

But guilt has pretty much the one sound. How loud it is tells you how bad you feel. It doesn't tell you which message you got.

Think of a smoke alarm that goes off for a fire and also for toast. You wouldn't take the battery out. There might be a fire one day. But you'd stop running out to the parking lot every time it beeped. You'd go and look at the kitchen first.

Eyes open, hands busy

Everything I'll ask you to try works with your eyes open and your hands busy. If you're driving, just listen and try it once you've parked. You can have a child talking over half of it. Most of us will.

You care whether your child is all right. I don't want to talk you out of that.

Find your page

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No need to go in order

You don't have to work through this book in order. If what you're carrying feels heavier than guilt, the help pages start on page 12. For an ordinary guilty moment, one question is plenty.

You'll meet two moms in this book, Megan and Priya. They're composites, stitched together from many families, so no real mother has to hear her worst lunch read aloud.

Practice the sentences

A free practice page for the book's questions and sentences: **kalderno.com/goodmom/practice**

This kit and more, free:
kalderno.com/goodmom

Print a page, cut out a card, keep one on the fridge.

The sentences I'm keeping

When guilt goes off: _____ **After a hard minute:** _____ **Any time:** _____

tool 1 of 8 · when guilt goes off

The Need or Grade? card



There's a shorter question. I call it Need or Grade? Guilt tells you the alarm went off. Need or Grade tells you what, if anything, to do about it.

FRONT

Need or Grade?

"Right here, what's needed is…"

BACK · YOUR OWN MOMENT

1. Hear the grade first. Let it say its piece. "A good mom would…"
2. Now let that go unfinished.
3. Take a breath.
4. "Right here, what's needed is…"
5. What comes? It might be something to do.

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it by your bed

A need

If something came, you've got a next step. It's usually smaller than the grade made it sound.

"Right here, what's needed is for me to put this down and hear the rest."

A grade

Nothing comes, except, "I'm not as good at this as she is."

You didn't find a need. You found a grade.

The grade wanted a whole new you by morning. The need wants a story heard to the end.

Or nothing

If nothing came, that's an answer, too. You don't have to invent a need so the feeling has something to do.

And yes, "Nothing. I just feel judged" counts as an honest answer.

Leave the grade unfinished

Take one of those sentences that starts, "A good mom would…" Don't argue with it. Just leave it unfinished for a moment.

What have you noticed? Something you saw or heard, if you can. What did you notice?

It still stung

I should say, leaving a grade alone doesn't mean you've decided you don't care. You do care. That's why it stung.

It just means you've noticed this particular sting didn't come with any instructions.

Try it here

Right here, what's needed is _____

_____

☐ **a need** ☐ **a grade** ☐ **nothing came**

Today

Try finishing the sentence once today. Practice it with made-up moments: **kalderno.com/goodmom/practice**

tool 2 of 8 · after you yell

The second take script



That's the second take. She names what she did. She owns it. The next ordinary thing she says sounds different from the shout.

FRONT · SAY IT TO YOURSELF

"I yelled."

Put a period there. Give it a second.

Not "I yelled because you were waving that cup." Not "I yelled and that makes me exactly the kind of mother I said I'd never be." Just, "I yelled."

BACK · THEN SAY IT TO THEM

Now you can talk to them.

"I shouted. That was too loud. I'm sorry. Let me say that again."

"I shouted. I'm sorry. Let me try again."

Come back to your child, not back through every mistake you've ever made, with an apology that has no "but" in it

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it where the shouting happens

No "but" on the end

What she leaves out is, "But I did ask you to be careful."

Stuck on the end of "I'm sorry," it gives him some of the shout to carry.

If you catch yourself halfway into the lecture, you haven't missed your only chance. "I'm sorry I shouted, but you had the…" You can stop right there. "No. I was too loud. I'm sorry."

Still cross?

What if you get as far as the period and you're still cross? Well, yes.

You can wish the milk had stayed in the cup and be sorry you shouted, both at once. The sorry part is ready to say.

Your child needs a loving, reliable parent who comes back when something's gone wrong and tries to put it right.

And not somebody who can deliver a beautiful apology on the first take.

Hours later

Sometimes you catch up with yourself hours later. Put the bit you mean right up front.

"When you were washing your hands this morning, I got loud about the soap. I'm sorry I shouted."

For a baby

The words can be smaller for a baby.

Come back close enough to be seen. Soften your voice. "I'm here."

An older child

"I said I'd watch your trick, and I forgot. I'm sorry. I can watch now if you still want me to."

If that's her answer, let it be no.

Keep the leaving time

You can take back the yell and keep the leaving time.

"I'm sorry I yelled. We still need to go. Do you want a hand with your coat?"

Giving in isn't quite the same as saying sorry.

Nothing back required

And he doesn't have to tell you he understands.

That's a kind thing she can do without asking him for anything back.

Part two, putting it down: page 5.

tool 2 of 8 · the second take script, part two

You Already Said Sorry. You Can Put It Down.



Except the bit where she took it seriously happened at the table. The apology you made at lunch was the serious part, and it's done.

Anything left to do?

Before you try to put something down, it's worth checking whether you're still holding it for a reason.

Get the tape. If you can't find the tape, tell her.

Available, not going after her

There's a difference between being available to your child and going after her.

If Megan feels a rush of love for the boy behind the door, she can stop after "I love you." It works quite nicely said to the back of a head.

1 The fact, what you did, what you're doing

1. Look at what's in your hands. Say the fact, quietly if you like. "I shouted."
2. Say what you did about it. "I went back and apologized."
3. Now say what you're actually doing. "I'm folding these ridiculous little pants."
4. Finish the fold. One leg over the other. There.

The fact: _____

What I did about it: _____

What I'm actually doing: _____

You can still feel sad. You can also be done folding the pants.

2 So let the scene keep going.

"I yelled."

"I came back to his chair. I said I was sorry."

"I asked him for the towel in my ordinary voice."

There. That happened, too. "I know how that scene ends" will do.

3 Give that scene its actual ending, too.

"We went down the slide twice. There just isn't a picture."

It's possible there's no job here at all.

There's room for "I'd have liked a picture of that," too.

A hard night

You're allowed to be the person in the house who could use some care. "I'm having a hard night. Could you sit with me for a bit?" is enough to say without first coming up with a reason that satisfies you.

Get into bed and pull it around your own shoulders. You can be a little warmer while you're sad.

The same thing again?

If you keep having to apologize for the same thing, notice that. You can mean every word on Monday and still owe your child a different experience on Tuesday.

"I'm getting loud with him a lot. I need some help."

More on asking for help: page 13.



Today Today, if you catch yourself fishing for a nod, let the nod go.

tool 3 of 8 · for the phone at night

The I got what I came for card



And you can get from “What might help?” to “What’s wrong with me?” in the time it takes to play one very short video twice.

FRONT

I got what I came for.

Take the useful sentence. Leave the grade.

BACK · WITH THE PHONE IN YOUR HAND

1. Look at the thread you’ve been reading. Say the bit you can use.
2. Now notice the next post waiting for your thumb.
3. You don’t need that post to sign off on this one. Say, “I got what I came for.”
4. And leave it unopened.

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it next to your charger

A finish line

A usable next step is a finish line. Unanimous approval isn’t.

You can do that halfway through an interesting disagreement.

Ask it on the phone, too

Need or Grade? “Right here, what’s needed is a way to say goodbye at the park.”

“One wave to the slide, and then we’re going.”

Nothing to take?

“Good for her. This is making my night worse.” She can leave right there.

Her boy knows what Megan sounds like when she’s being kind.

A worry about health or safety

A particular worry about your child’s health or safety is a different kind of question.

That’s something to ask his doctor about. You can have a proper concern without putting it to a vote, and you can stop reading even if the last comment you saw was the one that worried you.

What you know

Try saying one small thing you know about your child that no search result could have told you.

The person in the video hasn’t met the person you’re taking to the park.

One thing I know: _____

When it’s someone you like

This is harder when it’s someone you like.

You can be grateful for that and still decide you’ve had enough of her tonight. You can go back another day when you have a question.

A good idea stays good

Yesterday’s good idea hasn’t gone bad because somebody at the park has something to add to it.

There’s nothing wrong with borrowing someone else’s gentle phrase.

Before the next search

What I came for: _____ **The bit I can use:** _____



Tonight When you find the bit you can use, stop there. Say, “I got what I came for.”

tool 4 of 8 · a decision you can reuse

The for-now default worksheet



I call what Priya has a for-now default. It's a decision you trust yourself to use more than once. Yesterday's judgment is still her judgment. It doesn't expire when she meets someone who does it differently.

"On nights like this, the kids watch a show while I cook."

1 My default

On nights like this: _____

We: _____

Worth a look if: _____

2 Another one

On nights like this: _____

We: _____

Worth a look if: _____

Nights like this

Try filling in the "nights like this" bit for your own house. What could you tell with your key still in the door?

"When I get in from work and dinner needs to go straight on" is one you can spot.

When the debate starts up

At the stove, when you hear the debate start up, "But what about the show?", answer it once, "We decided this for nights like tonight," and go straight back to the next thing in the pan.

That's the decision in front of you.

It can bend

She doesn't have to like every single thing about her own arrangement, either.

And a default can bend for one rough day without anybody having to rewrite it.

Worth a look

There are good reasons to reopen a decision.

Work hours change. A child tells you they don't like something you thought they enjoyed. A safety concern comes up that matters more than keeping to the arrangement.

Not a verdict

That's worth a look. Not a verdict on the whole arrangement. A look.

It was her own daughter, hovering in a doorway, telling her something she couldn't have known from the stove.

One real change

Try naming one real change that would make you revisit a settled routine. What would you hear from your kid? What difference would you notice in the evening? Leave somebody else's raised eyebrow off the list.

"If she starts asking to help." **"If he stops wanting to watch."**

If _____ **If** _____

Tonight

If you'd like something to try tonight, pick one routine you've already settled and let it run without a fresh vote.

tool 5 of 8 · two places, one afternoon

The I wish sentence



You can miss one part of your life while you're living another. Missing isn't failing.

FRONT · SAY IT OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"I wish I'd heard you sing."

Let the sentence end there. Give yourself a second before you add anything.

BACK · HEAR THE DIFFERENCE

Now hear this one. "I wish I'd heard you sing, so I should never have gone to work."

The first sentence names a cost Priya feels. The second pretends wishing gives her back the hour, the paycheck, and the choice.

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it in your bag

Your sentence

If you'd like something to carry into tonight, take one tradeoff from today and put it in a sentence that starts with "I wish." Let it end before "so I should have."

I wish _____ **I wish** _____

Money, childcare, available hours, somebody else's say over when you can leave: those things can limit a choice. They don't get to tell you how you're supposed to feel about it.

Don't shrink it

You don't need to talk a thing down until it's small enough to have missed. You can let it be lovely. That's why you wanted to go.

Ruth's sentence

Try Ruth's sentence aloud, too.

"I wish I had a paycheck with my name on it."

Telling, not solving

"I know. I'm not asking us to work it out tonight. I was telling you what I missed."

Leaving on time

"I'm sorry I went home when I said I was going home" gives nobody anything they can use.

Not every job is like Priya's. Some mothers leave on time and it does cost them. It's a real cost, and it needs practical attention.

But "we need to look at the budget" and "I'm not worth much right now" are different sentences, and only one of them comes with figures you can add up.

At your desk

Let the answer be a task, not a verdict.

If it can wait, a one-line note to herself, "Reply at nine," lets her turn the phone face down.

At your own front door

1. Look at the door you're about to open. Leave the last line of the meeting where you said it.
2. You don't need an entrance that makes up for the whole day. Pick one hello you mean. "Hey. I'm glad to see you."
3. Take that line inside.

"I looked for you," her daughter says.

"You wanted me there," Priya says. "I wish I'd heard you. Tell me about your song."

"I know, love. You kept looking."

Hand it over whole script



Remembering is work. You don't have to be grateful enough to do all of it. Resentment is information about the arrangement.

1 Who notices it first?

Talk through an ordinary week out loud, and for each job, ask who notices it first. You're not adding up who does more. You're finding out where each thing starts.

The job	Who notices it first?

2 Pick one

Then pick one to hand over whole, from the moment it turns up to the moment it's done. A good first choice is the one that nags you most often for the least reason.

3 Hand it over whole, in one sentence.

"Could you take the school messages, right through to the replies?"

Mine: _____

Then stop at the period.

Priya's sentence

"Can you own the school messages this month, including the forms and replies? Tell me if there's a date I need or something only I can sign. Otherwise I'm going to stop checking."

When you hear "You should've asked"

"Thank you for taking it. The asking is part of the job, though. By the time I ask, I've already noticed, worked out what's missing and remembered when it's due. I'd like some of that part to be yours."

Not a ranking

"I know you do a lot. I'm not asking us to rank our days. I'm asking who can take this one thing from message to reply."

Keep it handed over

At the end of the month they'll sit down for ten minutes. If it's working, the inbox stays his, no fresh vote every month.

Leave it with him a minute.

"Yes, I know the date. It's Thursday. I still need you to handle the reply."

If every form comes back

"We agreed you'd do the replies. I'm still getting them to finish. Is there a part you can't do?"

Nobody to hand it to?

Or, if there's nobody to hand it to, give one thing an honest no. "I'm sitting out the decorations this time." Then stop at the period.

That's a shortage of help. It isn't a failure to ask nicely enough.

Local help, with the numbers: page 13.

Afraid to ask?

There's also a difference between a partner who gets prickly about being asked and one you're afraid to ask.

The book's words for that, with the hotline: page 12.

tool 7 of 8 · when you want your lap back

The I love you, and card



It's the speed of the no that gets her. Megan counts as a person in that sentence. She doesn't need a reason the space would be good for her little boy before she can ask for it.

FRONT

"I love you, and I want to sit by myself."

BACK · RIGHT THERE ON THE COUCH

1. Look at your kid. Say quietly, "I love you."
2. Notice the seat you'd like to have to yourself. "I want to sit by myself."
3. Now put "and" between the two. "I love you, and I want to sit by myself."
4. Listen to that. Both things fit in one sentence.

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it by the couch

Lines you can use

"I'm keeping my lap to myself for a bit. You can sit beside me."

"Not on my lap just now, love."

"I'd like this chair to myself" is quite clear.

You don't need his agreement to keep your seat, either.

Offer only what's on offer

If what you want is an inch between your body and the next body, be careful what you offer in the rush to say something nice.

You can be interested in what he's building over there without becoming part of the building.

When it can't be yet

It can be a tremendous relief just to leave the sentence at "I can't have time alone yet." That's quite enough to be disappointed about without adding "and I'm wrong to want it."

The minute

Your hands are free. You put them on your knees and leave them there.

That doesn't make the minute with your hands on your knees a waste. And it doesn't make a minute all you ought to need.

Ten minutes, offered

You can leave the door of the dishwasher shut. "Yes, please. Will you stay with him? I'm going to sit in the other room."

It was still your time to read it.

Ten minutes to yourself

Try naming one thing you'd do with ten minutes to yourself, without turning it into an errand. Give it a moment. Not what would get you a bit ahead on tomorrow. What would you like?

With ten minutes to myself, I'd _____

"I'd sit here and finish my tea" is a whole answer.

Today Wanting your lap back doesn't mean you want your child gone.

tool 8 of 8 · when someone is watching

Real, Repair, Release card



Real: notice what needs you. Repair: own your part. Release: let that be enough.

FRONT

Real.
Repair.
Release.

BACK · NONE OF IT SAID OUT LOUD

Real	notice what needs you.
Repair	own your part.
Release	let that be enough.

"We're fine right here, thanks," Priya says.

Cut along the dashes Fold on the dots Keep it in your coat pocket

1 Real, with somebody watching

1. Keep your child in view. Imagine the other grown-up has gone to get cake. Same room. Same kid.
2. Notice one thing your child is actually doing.
3. Try for something you could point to. "She's leaning."
4. Now finish this quietly. "If it were just us, I'd…"
5. Give yourself a moment. Listen to the difference between that answer and the one you were about to perform.

Trusting what you notice can mean taking it seriously enough to ask.

2 Repair

"I called you silly. I'm sorry. Want me to wait here with you?"

That girl can give a perfectly honest nod.

3 Release

She and the woman can have an awkward minute.

Take away the eyebrow.

It's the same answer she'd have had in an empty hall.

A mitten

A mitten is a thing you can pick up. "What must they think of me?" gives you quite a lot to carry and nowhere in particular to put it.

The whole memory

They don't have to choose the most flattering bit of the afternoon. They don't have to stop at the worst bit, either.

One thing for tomorrow: _____

Tonight

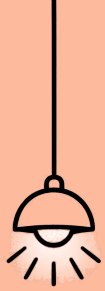
I'm not asking you to go to bed convinced you nailed it. I'd just like you to get to go to bed.

Today

Try standing by one ordinary, good-enough choice today without giving a speech for the defense. If you'd like words, "We're fine right here, thanks" will do.

the book's own words and numbers

When You Need More Than This Book



Get help right now

Now here's the part I want to say plainly, once, so you have it.

If a thought feels like a wish or a plan, starts to make sense to you, or you can't be sure you'll keep yourself or your child safe, get help right now. Call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. If anyone is in immediate danger, call your local emergency number, that's 911 in the US.

You don't have to run a guilt test first. You don't need to finish listening to this, or find the person in your family who usually knows what to do. "I need help now" is a place to start that call.

If you can't tell which kind of thought it is

And if you can't tell which kind of thought you're having? You don't have to sort that out alone. If you're not sure you're safe, use the numbers I just gave you, now. If you know you're safe but the thought keeps frightening you, call your doctor or midwife today rather than waiting for your next appointment. Saying "I'm having thoughts that scare me and I can't tell what they mean" is not an admission that you're dangerous. It's how they find out, and they hear it more often than you'd guess.

If someone at home frightens you

There's also a difference between a partner who gets prickly about being asked and one you're afraid to ask. If bringing things up gets you threats, shouting meant to scare you, money or your phone kept from you, or punishment later, that isn't a wording problem either. You can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or go to thehotline.org. If your partner checks your phone, use a phone or computer they can't see, like a friend's or one at work or the library. You don't need to be sure what to call it first. If you're in danger right now, call your local emergency number, that's 911 in the US.

Losing touch with what's real

One more set of signs belongs here, because from the inside they don't feel like guilt or worry. Rarely, usually in the first weeks after birth, a mother can lose touch with what's real. She may be very confused, hear or see things other people don't, go days barely sleeping even when the baby sleeps, or become certain of something unusual that nobody can talk her out of. She often can't see the change herself. A partner or sister is frequently the one who notices. This needs urgent medical help. Call your local emergency number, that's 911 in the US, or go to the nearest emergency room.

About to lose control

Or there are moments when you feel you're about to lose control. In that moment, make your child safe first. Put the baby on her back in her crib, or make sure an older child is somewhere safe, and go into the next room for a few minutes. A crying baby in a safe crib is all right. Call someone who can come over or stay on the phone. Afterward, tell your doctor about the anger the way you'd tell them about dread. It's something they can help with.

One name

Name the person or service you'd tell first. Your midwife. The doctor you've known since before you had children. The sister who'll come and sit on the couch. Just one name, with the number saved in your phone. If you need help now, make the call now rather than rehearsing it.

Name: _____

Number: _____

If the shouting keeps happening

"I'm getting loud with him a lot. I need some help."

You can still ask for the particular help you want.

When You Need More Than This Book

Common, and worth telling a doctor

Postpartum depression and postpartum anxiety are common and treatable. Unwanted, scary intrusive thoughts are common in new parents, too. A thought can come into your head that you didn't ask for and wish very much you hadn't had. Having one does not make you a bad mother. A doctor or midwife can help you talk about what you're experiencing, including the part you're frightened to say out loud.

And this isn't only for the months after a birth. The child in the next room might be old enough to put on her own school shoes and have firm opinions about which socks go with them. Persistent low mood, dread, or scary thoughts are worth taking to a doctor then, too. You don't have to work out what to call it before you go.

A thought you didn't ask for

It helps to know what an intrusive thought tends to look like. It arrives out of nowhere and horrifies you. You're carrying the baby downstairs and a picture flashes up of her falling, and you grip the rail. You don't want it. You'd give a great deal to make it stop, and you might start avoiding the stairs or the bath because of it. That horrified reaction is the opposite of wanting to act, not a sign of it.

A thought like that is something to tell your doctor or midwife about soon, today if it keeps coming back. It does not mean you're dangerous, and it's not an emergency in itself.

When the essentials alone are too much

And say you've taken all the optional things off your week and the essentials alone are too much. That's a shortage of help. It isn't a failure to ask nicely enough. It may still be worth finding out what exists near you. In most of the US you can dial 211, or look at 211.org, and ask about family resource centers, help paying for childcare, or free programs for kids. The school office or your child's doctor's office may know what other families nearby actually use. What's out there varies a lot from place to place, and some of it has a waiting list. Asking still counts, even if the answer for now is "not here."

Here are some words for the call.

"I haven't been feeling like myself. The dread isn't lifting, and I'm having thoughts that scare me. I need help."

"You know how I keep saying I'm fine? I've been leaving a bit out."

Use the part that's true for you.

You can stop pouring the tea. You can read the next bit off your phone. If you start crying, you haven't used up your turn to talk.

Tell them about seven. "It's a little easier right this minute. When I woke up this morning I felt afraid, and that's been happening most mornings."

"Sorry, she's here with me. I do want to talk."

If you've raised it with a doctor before and it's still happening, raise it again. "I know we talked about this. It's still happening, and I need help with what to do next."

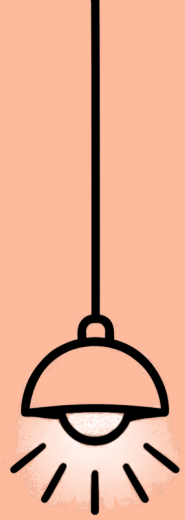
It can help to have the sentence you most want to get across written down. Just the thing you know you're likely to leave out. Put that bit in your pocket.

Places to start in the US

If you don't have a regular doctor, or you're worried about cost, there are places to start in the US. The National Maternal Mental Health Hotline, 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262), is free and confidential, open around the clock, by call or text, in English and Spanish. Postpartum Support International has a helpline at 1-800-944-4773 that can point you to local help and to free online support groups with other parents. It isn't a crisis line. Federally funded community health centers see people with or without insurance and charge on a sliding scale. You can search for one at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov. Numbers and hours change, so check each organization's website for current details. Outside the US, ask your local health service. And if the appointment you're offered lands at school pickup, or isn't soon enough, say so.

if you keep anything, keep this much

Real: notice what needs you. Repair: own your part. Release: let that be enough.

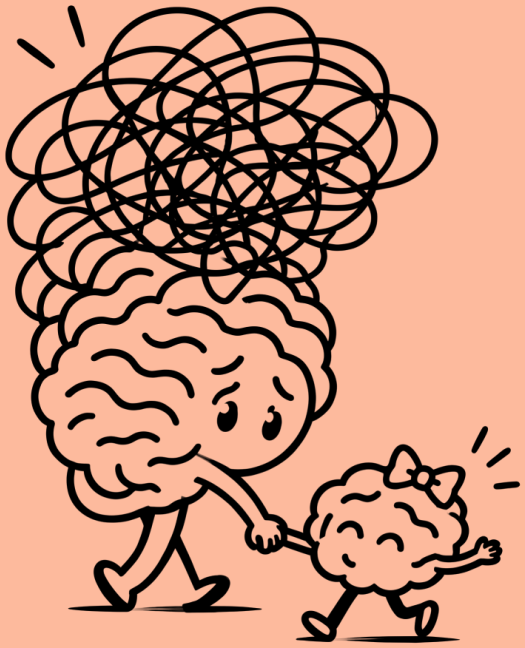


It's enough to stay where you meant to stay, with the person you meant to stay beside.

You don't have to sound especially sure of yourself. You can trust a call and still change it when you learn more.

And for what it's worth, from one overthinker to another: you're a good mom. You were before you pressed play.

Mariah MARIAH RENNER



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