

That Voice Is Not My Voice Workbook

A gentle way to use this resource

Begin anywhere. Read one section at a time, choose only what fits, and skip, adapt, pause, or stop as needed. Try one practice before adding another. Reflection is an invitation, not a requirement.

Created by Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC | My Reflective Collective

Educational wellness material. Not therapy, diagnosis, medical advice, crisis care, or a substitute for individualized professional support.



Before you begin

Take a moment to notice where you are starting. There is no correct answer and no requirement to complete every prompt.

What is most present?	What would feel supportive?
[ ] Tension or restlessness [ ] Heavy emotion [ ] Numbness or shutdown [ ] Racing thoughts [ ] Low energy [ ] Something else: _____	[ ] More steadiness [ ] More clarity [ ] Comfort or rest [ ] A practical next step [ ] Connection or support [ ] Something else: _____

A simple rhythm

1. Notice	Name what is happening without judging it.
2. Choose	Select one prompt or practice that fits your energy and circumstances.
3. Try	Use it gently for a clear amount of time. Smaller still counts.
4. Check	Notice whether you feel even slightly steadier, clearer, safer, or less alone.

Low-energy option

Read only the headings. Circle or note one sentence that feels useful. Then choose one action that takes five minutes or less. You can return later; stopping is allowed.

A trauma-informed educational wellness worksheet for reflection, choice, self-care, and support.

Use this at your own pace. Skip, adapt, pause, or stop. You are allowed to choose what fits your body, culture, privacy, energy, safety, access needs, and real-life limits today.

A printable reflection and practice resource

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

THAT VOICE

IS NOT MY VOICE

Reclaiming Your Inner Voice After Growing Up With Criticism, Fear,

and People-Pleasing

A TRAUMA-INFORMED REFLECTION & SKILLS WORKBOOK

For gently separating an internalized critical parent voice from your own values, needs, choices, and identity.

MyReflectiveCollective.com

Pause - Reflect - Learn - Practice

Educational wellness resource - Not a substitute for individualized mental health care Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC - MyReflectiveCollective.com - Pause - Reflect - Learn - Practice

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Important Disclaimer & Safety Information

This workbook is intended for educational, reflective, and wellness purposes only. It is not psychotherapy, medical treatment, psychological diagnosis, crisis intervention, or a substitute for individualized care from a qualified mental health or healthcare professional.

Some exercises involve childhood experiences, difficult memories, family relationships, trauma responses, and self-critical thoughts. You are encouraged to move slowly and use choice throughout this workbook.

- You may skip any exercise.

- You may stop if you feel overwhelmed, numb, flooded, panicked, or disconnected.
- You may return to an activity later - or decide it is not useful for you.
- You do not need to remember every detail of the past in order to heal.
- Consider completing difficult sections with a therapist or another qualified support person.

CRISIS SUPPORT

If you are in the United States and are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are worried you may harm yourself or someone else, call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. If there is an immediate danger or medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

About "hearing a parent's voice" Many people use this phrase to describe remembered criticism, an internalized critical voice, or thoughts that sound like a parent's familiar wording or tone. If a voice feels as though it is coming from outside your own thoughts, seems externally audible, gives commands, is difficult to reality- test, or is accompanied by severe confusion or a sudden change in perception, discuss this promptly with a qualified mental health or healthcare professional.

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

YOUR PATH THROUGH THIS WORKBOOK

Contents

Understanding the Voice 4

Why the Brain Keeps Bringing Up Dad 5

People-Pleasing as Protection 6

1. Name the Voice 7

2. Their Voice / My Voice 8

3. Three-Question Reality Check 9

4. Close the Internal Courtroom 10

5. 90-Second Nervous-System Reset 11

6. Whose Approval Am I Seeking? 12

7. Permission Slips 13

8. Reclaim an Activity 14

9. The Good-Enough Experiment 15

10. Build a Supportive Inner Voice 16

11. Update the Protective Part 17

12. Five-Minute Rumination Boundary 18

13. Catch the People-Pleasing Sequence 19

14. Practice the Pause 20

15. What Is Actually Mine? 21

One-Minute Rescue Card 22

Journal Prompts & Weekly Reflection 23

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

PSYCHOEDUCATION

Understanding the Voice

A familiar critical voice can be learned without being chosen.

Sometimes a parent can leave the room, the home, or your life entirely - and their voice seems to remain. You may notice thoughts such as "I am doing this wrong," "I should explain myself,"

"Someone will be disappointed," or "I should have known better."

A helpful distinction

An internalized critical voice is often experienced as your own thought process carrying a parent's familiar words, tone, expectations, or emotional pressure. You can recognize that the parent is not literally speaking in the room, even though the thought feels powerful or intrusive.

This can happen because a child's brain is built to learn from the people it depends on. When a caregiver is harsh, unpredictable, humiliating, frightening, or controlling, the brain may begin predicting the caregiver before the caregiver says anything.

- "What mood is he in?"
- "What did I do wrong?"
- "How do I keep him from getting angry?"
- "What version of me is safest right now?"
- "Should I explain before he accuses me?" Over time, prediction can become automatic. The parent no longer has to be present for the old warning system to activate.

The goal of this workbook Not to erase every thought about your parent. The goal is to notice old messages without automatically treating them as instructions, evidence, or truth.

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

UNDERSTANDING

Why Is My Brain Still Thinking About Him?

_____
_____ A brain does not only remember people we loved. It also remembers people we had to monitor.

If your younger self had to watch a parent's face, tone, footsteps, silence, anger, disappointment, or criticism, your nervous system may have learned that paying close attention was protective.

Thinking about him now does not mean you miss him, want contact, approve of him, or secretly agree with him.

A possible old survival equation If I can predict him fi maybe I can prevent criticism. If I can keep him happy fi maybe I will be safer. If I criticize myself first fi maybe I will not be caught off guard.

Those strategies may have made sense when you were dependent on an adult. They can become

exhausting in adulthood because your brain may continue checking for a danger that is no longer physically present.

When I notice myself thinking about my parent, what am I usually doing, feeling, or afraid

_____
_____ might happen?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ What might my brain be trying to protect me from?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Try this reframe

"My brain learned him because it had to. I can teach my brain that I do not have to keep organizing my adult life around him."

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

UNDERSTANDING

People-Pleasing Was Often a Protection Strategy

People-pleasing is often described as a personality problem. For many survivors of chronic criticism or intimidation, it began as a relationship-safety strategy.

If approval made home calmer and disagreement made home more dangerous, the nervous system may have learned to scan other people for signs of disappointment.

- Apologizing before you know whether you did anything wrong
- Over-explaining ordinary choices

- Changing your answer after someone looks disappointed
- Feeling responsible for another adult's mood
- Needing reassurance after making a decision
- Replaying conversations to make sure you were "good"
- Feeling guilty when resting or saying no

Important

You can appreciate why people-pleasing developed without allowing it to run your life now.

Compassion for the protective pattern and boundaries with the pattern can exist at the same time.

My people-pleasing tends to show up when...

_____
_____
_____
_____ The adult response I want to practice instead is...

_____
_____
_____

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 1

Name the Voice

Create distance between you and the thought.

Step 1

Notice the sentence exactly as it appears. Example: "I am selfish."

_____
_____

Step 2

Add the words: "I am noticing the old critical voice saying..."

Step 3

Name the category: criticism, fear, shame, perfectionism, or people-pleasing.

_____

_____

Step 4

Ask whether the thought is current information or an old rule.

Step 5

Return to the next thing you actually want or need to do.

Examples

- "I am noticing the old critical voice saying I am selfish." • "The old family rule says I should not disappoint anyone." • "My threat system is predicting criticism again." What did I notice when I tried this?
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____ What would I like to practice next time?
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

Gentle reminder

The goal is not to make the thought disappear on command. The practice is noticing the thought, choosing how much attention it receives, and strengthening your ability to act from the present.

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 2

Their Voice / My Voice

Separate inherited messages from your own adult beliefs.

Step 1

Write one phrase your parent repeated or communicated.

_____

_____

Step 2

Notice how old you feel when that message appears.

Step 3

Write what your adult self believes now.

Step 4

Make your response realistic rather than artificially positive.

Step 5

Read only your side aloud if that feels supportive.

Examples

- Their voice: "You always mess things up." fi My voice: "I am allowed to learn by doing." • Their voice: "You are too sensitive." fi My voice: "My emotions are information, not a defect."

THEIR VOICE MY VOICE

Try to write what you actually believe today - not what you think you "should" believe.

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 3

Three-Question Reality Check

Stop turning every thought into a research project.

Step 1

Ask: Is this happening right now?

Step 2

Ask: Is there something I truly need to do about it right now?

Step 3

Ask: If not, what do I want to return my attention to?

Step 4

Choose one concrete next action.

Step 5

Expect the thought may return; repeat without arguing with it.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 4

Close the Internal Courtroom

Recognize when reflection becomes self-interrogation.

Step 1

Notice repetitive questions such as "Was I wrong?" "What if they think I am bad?"

Step 2

Ask whether new information is being discovered.

Step 3

If not, label it rumination rather than problem-solving.

Step 4

Say: "I have enough information for now."

Step 5

Redirect attention to a sensory or practical task.

Examples

- Healthy reflection: "Did that choice fit my values?" • Rumination: "I need to replay this until nobody could possibly criticize me." What did I notice when I tried this?
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____ What would I like to practice next time?
  _____
  _____

_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 5

90-Second Nervous-System Reset

Help the body recognize that the present is different from the past.

Step 1

Place both feet on the floor if comfortable.

Step 2

Look around and identify five neutral things you can see.

Step 3

Notice four points of physical contact or sensation.

Step 4

Take a gentle inhale and a slightly longer exhale several times.

Step 5

Say: "That was then. This is now. My next task is..." What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 6

Whose Approval Am I Seeking?

Separate present relationships from the old parental audience.

Step 1

Notice the urge to explain, fix, apologize, or change your answer.

Step 2

Ask: Who am I trying to keep happy right now?

Step 3

Ask: Did this person actually ask me to change anything?

Step 4

Ask: Am I responding to the person in front of me - or to my father?

Step 5

Choose what fits your values, not what best prevents imaginary criticism.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 7

Permission Slips

Practice giving yourself permission that used to come from someone else.

Step 1

Pick one ordinary area where you feel you need permission.

Step 2

Write: "I give myself permission to..."

Step 3

Notice guilt or anxiety without treating it as proof you are wrong.

Step 4

Take one small action that matches the permission.

Step 5

Record what actually happened afterward.

Examples

- Rest without earning it
- Change my mind
- Say no
- Not explain myself
- Enjoy something
- Make an imperfect choice What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?
_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 8

Reclaim an Activity

Take back activities that became linked to criticism.

Step 1

Choose one activity that activates the parent voice - cooking, cleaning, driving, art, money, rest, parenting, etc.

Step 2

Write what your parent communicated about that activity.

Step 3

Identify what your body predicts will happen now.

Step 4

Change one small element to make the activity yours: music, pace, recipe, environment, sequence.

Step 5

Afterward, name what was different and what your nervous system learned.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 9

The Good-Enough Experiment

Gather evidence that imperfection is survivable.

Step 1

Choose a low-risk task.

Step 2

Decide what "80% good enough" looks like.

Step 3

Complete the task without excessive checking or reassurance.

Step 4

Write what you predicted would happen.

Step 5

Write what actually happened and whether the feared consequence occurred.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 10

Build a Supportive Inner Voice

Practice guidance without humiliation.

Step 1

Imagine how a safe, grounded caregiver would respond to a mistake.

Step 2

Use warmth plus accountability - not denial or forced positivity.

Step 3

Write one supportive sentence for fear, exhaustion, uncertainty, and mistakes.

Step 4

Choose one sentence to practice for one week.

Step 5

Use it when the critical voice appears, even if you do not fully believe it yet.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____

_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?
_____
_____

_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 11

Update the Protective Part

Thank the old survival strategy without letting it lead.

Step 1

Notice the part that is scanning for criticism.

Step 2

Acknowledge: "You learned to do this for a reason."

Step 3

Orient to your adult age, location, resources, and choices.

Step 4

Tell the protective part what has changed.

Step 5

Choose a present-day response.

Examples

- "I understand why you are looking for danger." • "Dad is not in charge of this moment." • "Adult me can handle disappointment." What did I notice when I tried this?

  _____

_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?
_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 12

Five-Minute Rumination Boundary

Give the thought a container instead of your whole day.

Step 1

When rumination starts, decide whether the topic needs attention now.

Step 2

If you still want to process it, set a five-minute timer.

Step 3

Write freely without trying to reach certainty.

Step 4

When the timer ends, close the page and physically change position or rooms.

Step 5

Say: "I can bring this to therapy if it still matters." What did I notice when I tried this?
_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?
_____

_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 13

Catch the People-Pleasing Sequence

Slow the automatic chain between fear and compliance.

Step 1

Write what happened.

Step 2

Write what you immediately feared.

Step 3

Name the urge: apologize, explain, agree, hide, fix, reassure, freeze.

Step 4

Ask what you actually want or believe.

Step 5

Choose the smallest boundary that protects your answer.

What did I notice when I tried this?

_____
_____
_____
_____ What would I like to practice next time?

_____
_____
_____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 14

Practice the Pause

Put time between someone else's reaction and your response.

Step 1

Choose one pause phrase before you need it.

Step 2

Practice saying it aloud in a calm voice.

Step 3

Use it before giving an answer when you feel pressured.

Step 4

Regulate first; decide second.

Step 5

Return with an answer only if and when you choose.

Examples

- "I need to think about that." • "Let me get back to you." • "That does not work for me." • "I have made my decision."
  What did I notice when I tried this?
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____ What would I like to practice next time?
  _____
  _____
  _____

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

INTERVENTION 15

What Is Actually Mine?

Return responsibility to the correct person.

Step 1

Name the situation.

Step 2

List what is yours: choices, words, behavior, boundaries, repair.

Step 3

List what is theirs: feelings, assumptions, disappointment, preferences.

Step 4

Circle anything you are trying to control that is not yours.

Step 5

Choose one action from the "mine" column and release the rest for today.

MINE THEIRS NOT FOR ME TO SOLVE

Gentle reminder

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

KEEP THIS NEARBY

One-Minute Rescue Card

WHEN THE OLD VOICE SHOWS UP

1. There is the old voice.

2. I do not have to argue with it.

3. A thought is not an instruction.

4. I can check what is actually happening right now.

5. Nothing needs to be solved unless something is truly happening.

6. What do I want to do next?

My quickest grounding tools:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

The sentence I want to remember:

_____
_____
_____ If you feel pulled into analysis Try: "I do not have to understand why this thought arrived before I continue with my day."

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

REFLECTION

Journal Prompts & Weekly Check-In

1. What did I have to become in order to feel safer around my parent?

_____

2. What did I learn about mistakes, anger, saying no, rest, or asking for help?

_____

3. Which childhood rules do I no longer believe?

_____

4. When does the critical voice show up most strongly?

_____

5. What situations make me feel younger than my actual age?

_____

6. What does my adult self know today that my younger self could not know?

_____

7. What do I enjoy when nobody is evaluating me?

_____

8. What would change if I stopped needing imaginary permission?

_____

9. What values do I want guiding my decisions now?

_____

10. Who am I when I am not trying to avoid criticism?

_____

Weekly check-in

A moment the old voice showed up:

_____

_____

One time I paused instead of people-pleasing:

_____

_____

One boundary I practiced:

_____

_____

Something I did without asking for approval:

_____

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

_____

Something I am proud of:

_____

_____

What I want to practice next week:

_____

_____

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE | SELF-REFLECTION WORKBOOK

CLOSING

Reclaiming Your Voice

Healing does not always look like never thinking about the person who hurt you.

Sometimes healing looks like remembering them without obeying them; hearing the old message without automatically believing it; feeling discomfort without abandoning yourself; making a choice without asking imaginary permission; and continuing your day.

A final reflection

The old voice may still appear sometimes. But appearing is not the same as being in charge. Every time you pause, orient to the present, and choose according to your own values, you are practicing a different relationship with yourself.

What do I want my own voice to sound like?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

What do I want to carry forward from this workbook?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ There is another voice being built. Yours.

MyReflectiveCollective.com

Pause - Reflect - Learn - Practice

SAFETY, PRIVACY & EDUCATIONAL USE

MY REFLECTIVE COLLECTIVE - MICHELLE D. ELDER, MSW, LMHC

If there is immediate danger or a medical emergency: Call 911 in the United States or use your local emergency number. For U.S. suicide or mental-health crisis support, call or text 988. For relationship-safety support, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233, text START to 88788, or visit TheHotline.org from a safer device when possible.

Privacy and safer searching If someone may monitor your device, accounts, internet connection, location, downloads, or browser activity, consider using a safer device and a trusted network. Private browsing may reduce locally saved history but does not make activity invisible. Clearing history can also be noticed. A website Quick Exit button changes the page; it cannot erase browser, download, router, account, employer, school, carrier, or device records. Choose only steps that feel safer in your situation.

Do not store identifying or safety-sensitive answers where another person may find them.

Educational scope and professional limits This resource provides general psychoeducation, reflection, and wellness support. It is not therapy, counseling, diagnosis, assessment, treatment, medical advice, legal advice, crisis response, forensic evaluation, or an individualized safety plan.

It does not replace care from a licensed clinician, healthcare professional, attorney, trained advocate, emergency service, or other qualified professional. Laws, court procedures, services, and risks vary by location and circumstance.

Choice, pacing, and inclusion You may skip, change, discuss, dictate, draw, pause, or stop any activity. No exercise can determine what you experienced, diagnose a condition, prove a legal claim, guarantee safety, or tell you whether to stay, leave, report, reconcile, forgive, or pursue court action. Adapt language and activities for culture, identity, disability, neurotype, age, literacy, sensory needs, and personal preference. Automatic translation can make mistakes; confirm legal, medical, emergency, and safety-critical wording with a qualified person.

Copyright and sharing

Created by Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC for My Reflective Collective. Free for personal educational use and supportive discussion. Keep the creator credit and this safety page with the resource when sharing. Do not sell, misrepresent, or present it as individualized clinical or legal advice.

MyReflectiveCollective.com - Pause - Reflect - Learn - Practice

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE - NOT THERAPY OR INDIVIDUALIZED CARE

Immediate danger or medical emergency: call 911 | U.S. crisis support: call or text 988 | Michelle D. Elder, MSW, LMHC

Supportive practices and reminders

Trauma-informed choice

You are in charge of pace, privacy, and participation. Keep your eyes open if that feels safer. Change the words, position, movement, or environment. Skip any prompt that increases distress. You never have to describe a traumatic experience to benefit from grounding or reflection.

A one-minute mindfulness pause

Notice one point of support beneath you. Look around and name three neutral things you see. Notice one sound and one body sensation without trying to change either. Ask, 'What would support me in the next few minutes?' Choose the smallest workable response.

Believable affirmations

Choose language your mind can accept. Try: 'I can take one step at a time.' 'My needs and boundaries matter.' 'I am allowed to pause.' 'I can ask for support.' 'This moment is difficult, and it will not always feel exactly like this.' Edit any statement until it feels honest and respectful.

Practical tips

Pair reflection with water, food, movement, rest, medication as prescribed, or contact with a safe person when needed. Save the most helpful page where it is easy to find. Revisit the resource when you are relatively steady so the choices feel familiar during harder moments.

When more support is appropriate

A worksheet cannot provide emergency care, diagnosis, or individualized treatment. Consider a qualified health or mental-health professional when distress is intense, persistent, worsening, affecting daily functioning, or connected with safety concerns. In immediate danger, contact local emergency services or a crisis service available in your country.

Integrate and choose your next step

Pause after reading. More information is not always more helpful; the goal is to leave with one choice you can actually use.

What stood out?

_____

_____

What is one kind, realistic next step?

_____

_____

What support, boundary, or adaptation would help?

_____

_____

If this did not help

You did not fail. Try making the step smaller, changing from a thinking practice to a body or sensory practice, checking basic needs, or involving a safe person. Strong, persistent, or worsening distress may need professional or crisis support beyond a worksheet.