



The Practice of Coming Back

A humane guide to stress, burnout, and building steadier days

Small returns count.

SHAD EDDIE MONGRUE

Free preview · Introduction and Chapter 1
shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com

SHELF 09 OF 32 · MENTAL WELLNESS & BURNOUT · CORE BOOK

The Practice of Coming Back

A humane guide to stress, burnout, and building steadier days

SHAD EDDIE MONGRUE

Shad Eddie Mongrue Books Gallery · shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com

The Practice of Coming Back. Free preview edition: Introduction and Chapter 1. © 2026 Shad Eddie Mongrue. All rights reserved. Published by the Shad Eddie Mongrue Books Gallery, shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com.

This book is for education and general information. It is not personal financial, legal, tax, medical, mental-health, nursing, investment or other professional advice. Talk with a qualified professional about your situation.

Every statistic, study finding and documented example is numbered and listed in the Sources, with a link to the page it came from. Each was checked word for word against its source in October 2026. Stories marked "composite example" are illustrations drawn from common situations; their names and details are not real people. Stories marked "documented example" come from the cited sources.

Research credits: see "Research Credits" at the back of the book. Cover and design: Shad Eddie Mongrue Books Gallery.

Contents

INTRO	An Invitation
CH. 1	A Life With More Room
CH. 2	Notice What Is Still Good
CH. 3	Read the Signals
CH. 4	Pause Without Disappearing
CH. 5	Make the Load More Livable
CH. 6	Rest Is Part of the Work
CH. 7	Let Other People In
CH. 8	Practice in Real Life
CH. 9	When Helpful Ideas Go Wrong
CH. 10	A Steadier Way Forward
RESEARCH	What the Evidence Says
PRACTICE	Your 30-Day Practice Plan
REFERENCE	Glossary
LETTER	Keep Going
BACK	Sources and Research Credits
BACK	About the Author

An Invitation

Some days, you can answer the messages, make the meal, finish the shift, and still feel as if you have been carrying a full room on your back. Other days, the smallest interruption seems to take the last bit of patience you had. If that sounds familiar, you do not need to turn it into a verdict about your character. It may be a signal to pause and look at what you are carrying, what support is available, and what your body and attention have been trying to tell you.

This book begins with a simple idea: caring for your well-being is not a self-improvement contest. You do not have to become a more efficient person before you deserve rest, help, or a pleasant afternoon. Well-being matters because life is more than what you get done. It touches how you relate to people, how you move through ordinary hours, and whether there is room for curiosity, ease, or a laugh that arrives before you have earned it.

Stress can be hard to read when it builds gradually. You might call exhaustion laziness, or treat a short temper as proof that you are failing. It can help to look at the pattern rather than scold yourself for having one. The World Health Organization describes burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed, with dimensions that include exhaustion, mental distance or cynicism about work, and reduced professional efficacy.¹ That language is a way to understand a work-related experience, not a label to apply to every hard season.

That distinction matters. WHO includes burnout in ICD-11 as an occupational phenomenon, not a medical condition, and says the term should be used for work rather than other areas of life.^{1,2} A difficult stretch at home, grief, illness, loneliness, or anxiety may call for care too, but it is not automatically burnout. You are allowed to take your experience seriously without rushing to name it. If symptoms feel severe or persist, qualified support can help you sort through what is going on.

There is also a reason not to make the whole answer an individual project. Work can protect mental health or contribute to worsening it, and workers have a right to a safe and healthy work environment.³ Sometimes a useful

next step is a personal pause or a clearer boundary. Sometimes the pressure comes from workload, limited control, schedules, money, caregiving, or conditions that need a wider response. This book will help you notice what is yours to try while making room to name what is not yours to fix alone.

The practice of coming back is not about returning to a perfect version of yourself. It is about finding a next step when you have been pulled away from steadiness: noticing a signal, taking one breath, asking for help, changing a routine, or beginning again after a plan does not fit. Small moments of pleasure and connection do not erase hardship. They can simply be part of an honest life that contains more than hardship. You do not have to feel hopeful every day to begin.

Reasons to fall in love with this subject

- **It makes room for the whole of your life** A kinder relationship with well-being leaves space for rest, relationships, and ordinary pleasures—not just productivity. You can care about getting through the day and still care about how you are living it. That is not indulgence or a reward for finishing everything; everything, inconveniently, keeps making more everything. The book invites you to notice what makes a day feel more human without pretending that a small pleasure solves a serious problem.
- **It treats signals as information, not a character test** Exhaustion, irritability, distance from work, or difficulty concentrating can be invitations to look more closely, not evidence that you are weak. Naming what you notice can help you ask better questions: Is this a short-lived tired spell? Is the strain tied to work? Is something else going on? The aim is not to diagnose yourself from a page. It is to replace automatic blame with a more useful kind of attention.
- **It holds the person and the conditions together** You can practice a steadier response and still recognize that some pressures call for changes in workload, time, support, or workplace conditions. Those ideas belong in the same conversation. This book will not ask you to breathe your way into accepting what needs to change, or to treat every constraint as a mindset problem. You deserve practical tools, and you deserve to have the limits around you taken seriously.

- **It makes small experiments feel worthwhile** A practice does not have to be dramatic to be worth trying. You might pause before answering a message, take a short walk, or ask someone to check in after a difficult conversation. The useful question is not whether you did it perfectly. It is what you noticed, whether it fit your circumstances, and what you want to adjust. A small experiment gives you information; it does not hand down a grade.
- **It makes connection part of care** When you are strained, it can be tempting to retreat until you have sorted everything out. Yet asking a trusted person for one specific kind of help can be a beginning, not a confession of failure. Support might mean listening, sharing a task, helping you find professional care, or simply keeping you company. This book takes seriously that caring for yourself can include letting other people be part of the process.
- **It lets you begin again without a ceremony** Plans change. A routine that worked last month may not fit this week, and a practice you tried may turn out to be unhelpful. That does not cancel the effort you made. You can review what happened, make a smaller adjustment, and return to the question of what would help now. A steadier way forward is flexible enough for real life, including the days when real life forgets to be convenient.

BY THE END OF THIS BOOK, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

- Notice physical, emotional, and situational signals of strain without treating them as personal failure.
- Explain what burnout means in an occupational context and distinguish it from a medical diagnosis or other kinds of distress.
- Use a brief grounding or breathing practice with realistic expectations about what it can and cannot do.
- Identify one demand, boundary, conversation, or source of support that may make a load more livable.
- Build flexible routines for rest, movement, transitions, and connection around the constraints you actually face.
- Make a specific request for help and consider when professional or urgent support may be appropriate.
- Try a small response, notice what happens, and adjust without grading yourself.

How to use this book

You can read the chapters in order, or begin with the part that feels closest to your current day. If you are running on fumes, start with the chapters on reading the signals, pausing, or letting other people in. If work demands are taking up most of the room, begin with the chapter on making the load more livable. You do not need to complete every exercise to get something useful from the book.

When a practice catches your interest, make it small enough to try in your real circumstances. Choose one situation, one response, and a time to notice what happened. For example, you might practice taking a slow breath before a familiar stressful task, or ask someone you trust for a specific check-in. If the practice feels awkward, impossible, or makes things worse, that is information. Adjust it, set it aside, or seek another kind of support.

Try not to turn this book into a new standard you can fail to meet. You may skip around, repeat a chapter, or put the book down and return later. The point is not to keep a perfect wellness schedule. It is to build a flexible way

of noticing strain, finding support, and choosing a next step that fits the day you are actually having.

HOW THIS BOOK HANDLES EVIDENCE

This book is educational, not personal medical or mental health advice, and it cannot diagnose or treat you. Evidence and statistics are identified with numbered citations that refer to the facts behind them; a citation supports only the claim attached to it. Illustrative composite examples are fictional and are not presented as documented cases, while documented examples use only the information available in the cited facts. Research has limits, and individual experiences vary. Do not use a self-help practice to replace needed professional care; if you are struggling to cope or symptoms do not go away, consider talking with a qualified professional.⁴

A Life With More Room

A COMPOSITE EXAMPLE · NAMES AND DETAILS ARE ILLUSTRATIVE

Maya gets home after a day that seemed to have no edges. Her phone keeps lighting up on the counter. The laundry is waiting. A message from her sister asks how she is, and Maya starts typing, Fine, just busy. She deletes it. Busy is true, but it is not the whole story.

She pours a glass of water and stands by the window. A neighbor's dog trots past with a stick nearly as long as its body. Maya laughs, briefly and unexpectedly. The laundry is still there. Her workday has not become lighter. Her sister still deserves an answer. But for a few seconds, Maya is not only a person managing a list.

That small pause does not fix the hard parts. It does make room for one ordinary pleasure, and perhaps for a more honest reply. Well-being is not a prize you earn by getting everything done. It is part of how you live while life is happening: how you rest, connect, notice, and participate. A laugh at the window can belong in a difficult season without pretending the season is easy.

Well-being is a way of living, not a score

It is easy to treat well-being like another task on the list. Sleep better. Be more patient. Exercise. Keep up with friends. If you are already stretched thin, that list can sound like a second job with excellent branding. The trouble is not that these things never matter. It is that a checklist can make care feel like one more test you are failing.

Try a wider question: What would give this day a little more room? The answer may be practical, not inspirational. You might need to sit down while you eat, step outside between errands, ask someone to listen without solving anything, or stop answering work messages after dinner. These are

not proof that you have mastered life. They are ways of making a human day more livable.

Work can be part of a meaningful life, and it can also affect health in difficult ways. The World Health Organization says work can protect mental health or worsen it, and that workers have a right to a safe and healthy work environment³. That matters because the point is not to become endlessly productive while feeling terrible. Your well-being is worth attending to even when nobody can measure its effect on your output.

It also means the answer is not always a private habit. A walk or a quiet moment may help you meet the next hour; it cannot make an unsafe workplace safe or give you control over an unpredictable schedule. You can care for yourself and still recognize that some conditions need to change around you. Those ideas belong together.

Make room for what is good without denying what is hard

Noticing what is good does not require you to call a hard situation good. You can be worried about money and enjoy a warm cup of tea. You can miss someone and feel glad when a friend checks in. You can be exhausted and appreciate the quiet after the house settles. The feelings do not cancel each other out.

This is different from forced gratitude. Forced gratitude tells you to look on the bright side before you have had a chance to say what hurts. A more honest practice lets the whole picture stay in view: what is painful, what is uncertain, and what still offers a little comfort or meaning. You are not trying to win an argument against your own feelings.

Small pleasures can be modest enough to fit a real day. The first sip of coffee. A song you recognize. The clean pillowcase you finally got around to changing. A colleague who makes a task less lonely. These moments do not need to be profound to count. They may offer a brief point of contact with the present, rather than a demand that you feel better on schedule.

If you find nothing pleasant today, that is information, not a failing grade. You do not have to manufacture delight. You might instead notice something neutral: the floor under your feet, the light changing, the fact that

you made it through a difficult conversation. On another day, a small good thing may be easier to spot. Let the practice be an invitation, not an order.

Connection is part of the picture

Well-being is not only what happens inside your head. It also takes shape in the give-and-take of everyday life: whether you feel able to tell someone the truth, whether there is room to ask for help, whether you can be present for a conversation without trying to perform being fine. Even a small act of connection can make a day feel less sealed off.

You do not need a crowd, a perfect family, or a best friend who always knows what to say. Connection can mean sending a simple message, walking beside someone without filling every silence, or asking a coworker to share a tricky task. Sometimes it means letting another person know you cannot take on one more thing. Clear limits can be a form of care for a relationship, not a rejection of it.

Supportive work relationships are associated with worker engagement and innovation, and can improve performance⁵. That finding concerns work, but it also points to something worth noticing in ordinary settings: how people treat one another affects the conditions in which they do things together. You are not a machine that happens to have feelings. You are a person among other people.

And support need not make everything easy. Someone may care about you and still misunderstand what you need. You can try being specific: I do not need advice right now; could you listen for ten minutes? Or: Could you take this one errand while I handle the appointment? A clear request gives the other person a better chance to respond. If they cannot, that does not mean your need was unreasonable.

Let ordinary life count

A life with more room is not necessarily a life with fewer responsibilities. Many adults cannot simply set aside caregiving, work, bills, or health concerns. Room can also mean having a little more choice inside a crowded day: deciding what can wait, taking a brief pause before replying, or making a transition between work and home instead of carrying every demand straight across the threshold.

You might make a small ritual out of that transition. Put your keys in the same place, wash your hands, change clothes, or take a few breaths before opening the next message. The ritual does not have to be calming every time. Its job is simply to mark that one part of the day has ended and another is beginning. If a routine becomes one more thing to maintain, simplify it or let it go.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services notes that work plays a significant role in people's lives and affects physical and mental well-being in both positive and negative ways⁵. So it makes sense that a demanding job can spill into evenings, relationships, and rest. It also makes sense to protect time that is not organized around work, even if that protection has to be small or negotiated with others.

The question is not whether you can make every day peaceful. Most days are too mixed for that. The question is whether you can make occasional space for rest, interest, affection, or simple enjoyment, while also respecting the things that remain difficult. A steadier life is often built from both kinds of attention: noticing strain and noticing what helps you feel present in your own life.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Research spotlight

A 2025 analysis of people during treatment found that higher positive affect at one assessment predicted greater perceived friendship and lower loneliness at the next. Greater perceived friendship, in turn, predicted higher positive affect later; loneliness did not show that same relationship in the analysis⁶. The reported effects were generally small and reflected subtle changes around each person's own average, rather than dramatic transformations⁶. This is a reason to take small moments of positive feeling and connection seriously, not a promise that noticing good things will resolve loneliness or difficult circumstances. The findings describe relationships over time in a treatment context. They do not show that a particular practice will work for everyone, or that pleasant moments can replace practical support, professional care, or changes to harmful conditions.

A life example

A COMPOSITE EXAMPLE · NAMES AND DETAILS ARE ILLUSTRATIVE

A small opening in a crowded week

Jordan is juggling a busy shift, family errands, and a growing sense that every conversation is another thing to manage. On Monday, a friend asks to meet for dinner. Jordan nearly says yes automatically, then realizes that a full evening out feels like too much. They suggest a short walk instead. The friend agrees, though Jordan still feels tired when they meet.

They walk slowly and talk about ordinary things. For a while, Jordan listens instead of planning the next errand. The walk does not solve the workload. Jordan does not come home suddenly refreshed and ready to reorganize the universe. But the conversation feels good, and Jordan notices that the evening was easier than expected.

Later in the week, the same plan does not fit. Jordan has a headache and cancels, then worries about disappointing the friend. They send a message asking to try again when they have more energy. This time, caring for well-being means resting rather than pushing through. Neither choice proves that Jordan is doing it right. The useful part is noticing what the day can hold, making a clear request, and allowing connection and rest to take different forms.

TRY THIS

Make a little room

Choose a moment when you have a little breathing space and try this as an experiment, not a new rule for living.

1. Pause and name one thing that feels demanding today, without judging yourself for finding it hard.
2. Notice one thing that is pleasant, meaningful, or simply neutral; do not force a bright side if none comes to mind.
3. Ask what would make the next part of the day a little more livable: rest, a clear limit, a practical hand, or a brief connection.
4. Choose one small action that fits your real circumstances, such as sending an honest message or taking a quiet transition between tasks.

5. Afterward, notice what happened. If the action did not help or was not possible, adjust the plan rather than grading yourself.

Myths and honest truths

- **Myth:** If you notice something good, you are minimizing what hurts. **Truth:** You can make room for pleasure, meaning, or connection while still telling the truth about pain and difficulty. One does not erase the other.
- **Myth:** Well-being matters only if it makes you more productive. **Truth:** Your capacity to rest, relate, and take part in ordinary life matters in its own right. You do not need to prove that caring for yourself improves your output.
- **Myth:** A small practice should make a hard day feel better. **Truth:** A pause or pleasant moment may help, may do little, or may not fit that day. It is one possible support, not a cure or a substitute for needed changes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Well-being is part of living, not a performance review.
- A small pleasure can belong beside a real difficulty.
- Connection and clear requests can make daily life feel less solitary.
- Rest and boundaries matter even when they do not solve the whole problem.
- A practice is useful when it fits your life, not when you perform it perfectly.

REFLECT

1. *What is one small thing that gives your day meaning, ease, or interest without requiring you to feel cheerful?*
2. *Where does work or another demand follow you into time you hoped would be your own?*
3. *What specific kind of support, rest, or room would make the next part of your week more livable?*

Nine more chapters are waiting

You've read the Introduction and Chapter 1. The full 92-page book continues with:

CH. 2 Notice What Is Still Good

CH. 3 Read the Signals

CH. 4 Pause Without Disappearing

CH. 5 Make the Load More Livable

CH. 6 Rest Is Part of the Work

CH. 7 Let Other People In

CH. 8 Practice in Real Life

CH. 9 When Helpful Ideas Go Wrong

CH. 10 A Steadier Way Forward

Plus the research analysis "What the Evidence Says", a 30-day practice plan, a glossary, and every source with full research credits.

JOIN FREE OR GO INSIDER

Join the free Reader's Circle at

shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com to read the full book online, listen with AI reading mode in a man's or a woman's voice, and download the PDF. Want every shelf? Reserve an Insider membership.

Sources for these chapters

Numbers in the text (like ³) point to these sources. Every statistic, finding and documented example was copied from its source page, checked word for word against that page in October 2026, and is restated here in plain English. Figures can change as sources update. This book is for education and is not personal financial, legal, medical, mental-health, nursing, investment or other professional advice.

- 1 **World Health Organization.** *Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”*. <https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>
- 2 **World Health Organization.** *Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”: International Classification of Diseases*. 28 May 2019. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- 3 **World Health Organization.** *Mental health at work*. <https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/promotion-prevention/mental-health-in-the-workplace>
- 4 **NCCIH.** *Stress*. April 2022. <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>
- 5 **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.** *Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being*. January 24, 2025. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/reports-and-publications/workplace-well-being/index.html>
- 6 **Elsevier.** Madeleine Rassaby, Samantha N Adams, Murray B Stein, Charles T Taylor. *The power of positivity: Exploring affective and social processes of change throughout a positive valence treatment for anxiety or depression*. 2025 Aug 27. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12452861/>