

# THIS WAS MY MUM-LIFE CRISIS

A SELF-  
HELP(ISH)  
BOOK BY  
KATIE LEE

"What do you get if you cross the humble wisdom of the Barefoot Doctor with the irreverent wit of Caitlin Moran?  
Katie Lee!"

For Sue

**Praise for the free ecourse on [www.katielee.co.uk](http://www.katielee.co.uk)**

“What do you get if you cross the humble wisdom of the Barefoot Doctor with the irreverent wit of Caitlin Moran...Katie Lee! All so timely, relevant and funny, just so helpful in knowing that we all share same feelings and experiences. Thank you, keep 'em coming!” ~ Lia

“Ha ha ha – this is hilarious.” ~ Caroline

“This stuff is great, Katie. It’s yoga without the yoga speak. I’m going to pass it on to lots of people. Love stuff like this when it’s written with humour.” ~ Ruth

“The way you write has me full-on chortling at my desk! Thanks for making me smile today!” ~ Tracey

“I’ve just finished reading the first bit AND AM ENJOYING IT SO MUCH! Just had to stop and tell you. Especially as I want to read all the others at once. This is a book. A musical? A film. A new HBO drama.” ~ Julia

## WELCOME!

Is this book for you? Good question! I'm glad you asked. Luckily, I have prepared a simple questionnaire.

- Do you own a uterus?
- Has it been inhabited?
- After you gave birth, did you ever think some variation on, "hmm, it feels like someone keeps deleting my self-identity to make space for information about nipple thrush.
- Do you feel like you've lost yourself since giving birth? Maybe down the sofa?
- Have you ever felt guilty about your childcare arrangements, felt stretched at work, been embarrassed to leave work early, questioned your choices, wondered what happened to that 20-something with the great tits?
- Do you just want this list of questions to end?

If the answer to any of those questions is "yes" this could well be the book for you.

Over the years, I've spoken to so many high-achieving professional women who have experienced the same nose-dive in their confidence after having a baby. It happened to me too. In fact, it seems like it happens to a lot of women and yet I wasn't prepared for it at all. Ante-natal classes taught me about the beautiful home-birth experience I could expect (in my dreams). They taught me what an episiotomy was ("ha ha ha, what do you mean they use scissors?!") But they didn't tell me that my self-esteem might die the day a roomful of strangers gathered round to peer up my privates.

So I wanted to write something that would (hopefully) provide a bit of a lifeline to women going through this strange dip in self-esteem that I and so many women I speak to experienced. Talking to them helped me identify the mind-crap we all seem to have in common. And from that, and my own experience of rebuilding a happier, more self-confident identity for myself, I created seven simple steps.

### **Seven steps to supreme self-esteem**

This is the book version of an email course I wrote a few years ago for the [www.katielee.co.uk](http://www.katielee.co.uk). I wrote it for the sheer fun of it on a long train ride. I wrote it because I had a bee in my bonnet about women and childbirth and self-esteem. The course was originally seven emails, and these now form the chapters in the book. You can dip in each day, or you can read it all in one go.

It's not an exhaustive look at the myriad things that can affect self-esteem after babies, the bewilderment, the sleep deprivation, the loss of control. It doesn't go into detail about how unprepared you might feel for the strange things strangers feel totally OK with telling you. It doesn't talk about those days that you start off feeling great until an encounter with someone professing to know better leaves you broken, confused and angry. I haven't covered the many reasons why self-esteem can take a nose dive because that's a whole book in itself, and the answer is different with everyone.

But after many hours spent talking to women and interviewing business owners, freelancers, stay at home mums and all the variations in between, certain themes just kept on coming back. Not everyone goes through a dip in confidence after giving birth. Some people remain totally intact, their self-identity untarnished. But if, like me, you were left reeling after your first child, wondering if you could pick yourself out of a line up and say, "That's her, that's me, she did it," this book is for you.

### **About the author**

I'm a writer and business owner. For a while there, I'd even have described myself as a technology journalist and entrepreneur after co-founding Shiny Media, the UK's first commercial blog network. Ten years later, I worked out I'm happier just being a writer and business owner: it's simpler and I get to spend more time at home in slippers and elasticated trousers. Plus, I meet fewer bona fide psychopaths now.

I am not a therapist. But I got to ask for the help and advice of my friend, psychotherapist and Clean Language specialist, Susan Smith ([www.thestresshacker.com](http://www.thestresshacker.com)) Some of the course is inspired by Sue's own coaching techniques (including the Core Values section), which I was lucky enough to experience first hand. Other bits were born out of the many chatty conversations we regularly have on the phone or in a curry house, such as What Would Kevin Do? And some parts were just the things I worked out on my never-ending journey towards supreme self-esteem.

## THIS WAS MY MUM-LIFE CRISIS

Here's what I remember about going back to work properly after having my first daughter.

1. I felt weird, lumpy and my centre of gravity had shifted thanks to giant, milk-filled mammaries and a recently acquired layer of cake-based flabbage.
2. I was in constant fear of not just leaking a bit of milk, but actually flooding the local area.
3. My vagina still hurt.

I'd barely had a full night's sleep in nine months and whenever I did sleep, I ground my teeth so much I literally shattered my front tooth (hello, sexy mouthguard!) So you can imagine I went into those early client meetings feeling serene, relaxed, in control and ready to take on the world. I was back! I was still fabulous! I was... wait a second, is that dried biscuit or poo on my top?

The first big meeting I had with a potential new client was like a bad episode of Ally McBeal. It was a farce of epic proportions, and prat-falling her way through the whole thing like a lactating Bridget Jones was me. I thought I was meeting a friend of a friend for an informal coffee, but as I left the house, it occurred to me for the first time that the person had referred to another person and a booked meeting room. Two people and a room. Then I remembered that she'd mentioned her boss was trying to make it. Two people, a room and a BOSS?

**That's not an informal coffee that's a 20-minute PowerPoint and "any questions?"**

I didn't have a PowerPoint! Even worse, I didn't have a laptop, having dropped and killed mine the night before while working on it as I walked down the stairs (that old story). As I pondered this with increasing alarm, it dawned on me that I was going to

be late. I'd left the house at the time I should have been getting on a train. That meant I'd be at least 10 minutes late. For the boss. I would have run to the train station, but there was no way I'd catch the earlier train before my vagina fell out.

At Elephant & Castle I panicked, thinking I could jump on a magic new tube I'd just invented in my hysterical mind that would get me there 10 minutes faster than the one I always take. I got lost in the concrete maze of Elephant & Castle's underbelly. I decided just to get on the next train. Then I changed my mind and got off. Then, at the last minute, I changed it back again, jumped onto the train as the doors shut, caught my foot on the edge of the tube, fell forwards and landed in a sprawled heap of hair and shame at the feet of a carriage full of London commuters.

"Hi!" I said, looking up at them all with (I thought) considerable aplomb. One person laughed. Everyone else stared a London stare. The shits. Anyway, the short version is that I arrived late, which no one seemed to notice (this is London, people are always late for meetings), I got into the tiny meeting room, saw there was no computer or projector, acted all collected and asked if there was a room with a PC, got taken to a board room, located a SlideShare presentation online I'd made for a different client and winged it. They invited me back for another meeting.

What's weird about that experience is how it affected me afterwards. Through the years I've often felt out of my depth, suffering from the Imposter Syndrome experienced by so many people. But I also know I'm good at busking. And yet, I did not come out of that meeting thinking, "Phew, I totally shat miracles today, I really am a jammy madam." I just thought, "By golly, what a total shambles! You are like some crazy, wobbly, mum-brained moron. I don't even know who you are."

I was shaken. I came home feeling I would never get another client again and that my years of successfully running businesses had all just been a giant fluke. That one, mildly comical experience led me to make some huge decisions about my life that were totally wrong for me.

It took me a long time to get over it. Here's what I learned along the way.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Adult Audit

#### *Introducing your Inner Family*

Have you heard of Transactional Analysis? The theory goes that inside us all dwells three identities — an Inner Parent, an Inner Child, and an Inner Adult — all locked in a furious battle for supremacy, much like the plot of *The Highlander*. In an ideal universe our “Adult” would always be in charge, but it’s not always that simple. Loosely speaking our Inner People can usually be identified by the following traits:

#### *Inner Child*

This is the part of you that might procrastinate when there’s a deadline; who leaves late because she didn’t leave enough time to get ready. Who worries about things or lacks confidence. Your Child might be hiding upstairs in the loo reading a book while your other half thinks you’ve just popped up to grab a nappy. Or at least mine is. Some people’s Inner Child is destructive or attention seeking, others are reclusive, retreating into themselves. Maybe you become detached, or you can’t be bothered



to feed yourself properly. The Inner Child is often the sulky one who feels put upon. The Child throws a pretty ace pity party.

### ***Inner Parent***

This part of you can be a real piece of work. She's the one who mentally beats you up for being late or forgetting something; she's the one who criticises you or judges. Inner Parent can give a really boring lecture, she's the one who thinks you could do better. The Parent is, frankly, a bit of a dick.

A lot of this stuff will have come from your childhood – from parents, teachers and other care givers who built in some unhelpful judgments and messages when you were small. Other stuff you'll have picked up from society in general, from relationships you had in your formative teenage years and from your own expectations of yourself.

### ***Inner Adult***

I've got a lot of time for this lady. Your Inner Adult is your supreme being, the person you really want to be. She's the one who strides into a meeting with poise and purpose; she arrives on time and hits her deadlines. As a parent she's calm, measured and self-confident. She's also impeccably dressed, never leaves the house in odd shoes and is in total control of her offspring. I made that last bit up. No one is in control of their offspring.

The important thing to remember about the Inner Adult is that she is great. She wants you to do well, she has your best interests at heart. Your Inner Adult can indulge in child-like fun and provide parental discipline. But she does it all without any nonsense – no guilt, no judgment, no stress. She's the uber You.

Most importantly, your Inner Adult is whoever you want her to be.

### ***Who are you anyway?***

The Parent and Child modes are like old programs that need upgrading. Sometimes you still run them, but they're no use to you, they're obsolete. Problem is, running your Adult program relies on you having a very clear and focused image of who your Inner Adult is. What does she look like, how does she behave? Do you know?

After you've had a baby, you can lose sight of your Adult and you can switch into a program that's more easy to locate: your Inner Child. I certainly did. And Child-like behaviour such as escaping, hiding or feeling reluctant to get something done, often leads to the Inner Parent popping up to shout and judge. And when that happens, self-esteem plummets even further. You get stuck in this Parent-Child mode, switching constantly between the two.

But just by realising and acknowledging that I'd slipped into Parent-Child, I got a sense of relief I wasn't going mad: I could get out of this trap my mind had laid for me. And so can you.

### ***Do you know when you're in Parent-Child mode?***

Once I stopped to think about it, I spotted all kinds of Parent-Child behaviour. For example, my Inner Parent is extremely judgmental, both of other people but also of me. If I make a mistake I very easily start "beating myself up" mentally. Meanwhile, I know I'm running my Child mode when I start hiding from boring chores, not checking the train times before I leave or worrying that a client is cross with me.

Here's an example: I quite often stay in the house when I really want to get out. I always put it down to having a limited working day that means I want to squeak out

every minute of work time, even if it means not stepping out of the house to do basic jobs like buying a birthday card. But this was actually more to do with my Inner Child panicking and worrying, when in fact my Adult knows that I can get my work done AND make time to pop out. On further reflection, I realised I'm not great at prioritising something that involves me going out on my own – even though I actually enjoy it when I do.

This is prime Child behaviour: my Adult is fine about going out alone to run an errand, but my Child wants someone to come with her or do it for her. This is not how I like to think of myself. What's more, behaving like that doesn't even make me happy.

### ***Run an audit***

But what about you? This first thing to do if you think you might be stuck in Parent-Child mode is to spend some time identifying your own examples of your Parent-Child behaviour. Start to build a list. To begin with, aim to get a minimum of 10 for each. Write down any behaviour that you would like to change or think about more. Include everything.

This first task isn't particularly arduous, but I really think it's a huge part of getting back to Supreme Self-Esteem. So spend some time listing your Parent-Child behaviour and you'll immediately start to recognise when you're moving away from Adult mode.

MY CHILD...

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MY PARENT...

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### ***Find your Adult***

Now you need to identify your Adult. Do you know who she is? More importantly, do you know who you want her to be? Now is the chance to sit and think about the uber You. When you shut your eyes and imagine the most heroic version of yourself, what are you doing? How do you feel? Maybe your Adult goes running regularly or maybe she enjoys watching a film without guilt while the baby is napping because she knows she's had a long week and she needs a break?

It's important to identify your Inner Adult, whoever she is. You might find that you're not entirely sure any more, so take the time to sit and write it down on paper.

As an example, my Adult wears grown-up clothes (i.e. priced slightly out of my normal comfort zone) and can walk into a room full of strangers with confidence. Before I go into a room full of strangers, I remind myself of this fact.

Don't think too hard about it, just get a picture of who you are in your mind and jot down as many Adult behaviours as you can. You can make the list as normal or as thrilling as you like. Maybe there are things you'd like to change, or things you used to do pre-baby but lost along the way.

Maybe your inner Adult goes clubbing once a month come hell or high water, dammit. Maybe she doesn't accept any dinner invites from toxic friends. Perhaps she goes for a run before 7.30 three times a week because she knows she'll never look back and wish she hadn't. Or maybe she doesn't because she just hates bloody running and she loves her body just the way it is thank you very much.

MY ADULT ...

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Once you've got your initial quick list, keep adding to it as you think of more over the coming weeks. You'll start to spot all sorts of little things. I'm in Adult mode when I take the sheets off the bed to wash and Child mode when I put clean ones back on at 11.30pm feeling extremely sorry for myself. If my husband's reading this, what I really meant was "when I hide downstairs until I know my husband has pretty much made the bed on his own." Love you, honey.

### ***Adult on board***

So, now you've done your Parent, Child and Adult lists, you can let battle commence. It's like Rock, Paper, Scissors except it doesn't matter what shape you play – the Adult always wins.

It works like this: if you recognise you're doing something off your Parent-Child list, select something from your Adult list to stop that behaviour in its tracks. For example, if you know you've got a deadline but you're playing on Facebook instead, consciously switch into Adult mode. Pick something off your Adult list – I sometimes put on red lipstick or do a couple of Sun Salutations – and then get back to work. Tell yourself, "Sandra, you are a grown woman. You get your work done and then you get to play." Obviously if your name isn't Sandra, you should use your actual name – unless you fancy a change.

If you start on a spot of unhelpful self-loathing, you're probably in Parent mode and you might want to stand like Wonder Woman until the feeling passes. Wonder Woman was most certainly an Adult.

### ***A slight problem regarding your motivation***

Now, there may be a slight snag for you in keeping your Adult in Charge: your motivation. Are you motivated by Carrot (reward) or Stick (punishment)?

I'm motivated by Stick not Carrot. If I'm trying to hit a deadline and it's something boring, I like to let the pressure build until I start panicking. I've tried to put my Adult in charge to work first, party later, but the simple fact is my motivation comes from a fear that my Inner Parent is going to be furious, or the client is going to send a stiffly worded email. And fear of my Inner Parent puts me firmly into Child mode. The sad fact is, rewarding myself just doesn't motivate me.

So how do you cope with being a Stick person and avoid slipping into Parent-Child behaviour? If you're a Stick person, try my workaround. If I have to get my work done but I'm procrastinating, I go out for a nice dog walk or listen to a podcast while I do some jobs round the house. Then I get back to my desk knowing I have no choice but to work. My Stick in that situation is that I won't finish in time if I don't, or I'll be late picking up my kids. That way, I get to do Adult behaviour the whole way through - I simply have to stay in Adult mode to get everything done on time.

If you're motivated by Carrot then good for you! Of course, I'd love to be a Carrot person, but I'm not. I've tried. Thankfully, my Inner Adult is ok with this and isn't going to tell on me to my Inner Parent.

### ***Are you Carrot or Stick?***

Do you know which one motivates you? Is it Carrot or Stick? Reward or Pain? It's easy to work it out. Here's what Susan Smith says:

“Imagine for a moment you have a deadline you’re struggling to meet. Now imagine you lack the will power, faith and self-discipline to hit that deadline. That’s right, you missed your window. Doesn’t feel good, does it?

Now take yourself out into the future to that post-deadline time. Yes, you’re celebrating! Even if it’s only in a minor way: you’re languishing in the bath, or out doing something nice. Maybe you’re just sitting reading a book and relaxing, enjoying the fruits of your labour. What does the scene look like, knowing you hit that deadline? How great does it feel?”

- Susan D Smith, [www.thestresshacker.com](http://www.thestresshacker.com)

Which one made you feel the most motivated? Fear of feeling crappy about failing to meet a deadline or happiness over the promise of a reward? If it’s the former you’re a Stick person, you’re motivated by punishment. If it’s the latter you’re a Carrot person, you’re motivated by rewards. Whichever it is, you don’t need to worry because your Adult is in charge and she is excellent. If you don’t believe me, wait until you’ve read the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Instant Forgiveness**

#### ***Inner Bully go home***

Do you beat yourself up for failing to get jobs done around the house? Do you ever come home from a night out (remember those?!) thinking, “Oh god, why did I say that?!” Do you look back on things you did and cringe? Do you ever call yourself an idiot, a numpty, a lazy person, a fool, a fatty? When you’re running around trying to locate 100 lost items so you can actually leave the house before midday, do you ever say, “Oh my god, I hate myself?”

**If you do, it’s time to stop.**

#### ***Instant Forgiveness***

From today onwards – and for the rest of your time on Earth – you will be practising Instant Forgiveness. Those mean things you used to say to yourself, out loud or just in your mind? They're gone.



Here's the new rule: you have to forgive yourself immediately. In fact, you're not allowed to be mean to yourself at all. In the moment when you hear your mind starting to formulate an insult, you stop. If you like, you could try saying to yourself "that's ok, I forgive you" or something equally beneficent.

This person being mean to you is your Inner Parent. Your Inner Parent is not in charge of you: your Inner Adult is in charge. And your Inner Adult is nice to you. Your Inner Adult knows you are only human, that sometimes you make mistakes. Maybe your Inner Adult knows you didn't get your work finished on time for reasons outside your control, in which case it's not helpful to hector yourself. Or maybe your Inner Adult knows it was your fault because of some naughty Inner Child behaviour. But, you know what? That's gone now; that happened. Next time, your Inner Adult will be in charge and it won't happen again. Time to move on without rebuke.

It may very well be that you have an awful lot of Inner Child behaviour that you need to look at. But being mean to yourself about it isn't helpful. For me, being kind to myself in this way was a totally novel experience. I still occasionally mutter abuse, but now I notice it. But because I'm not allowed to be mean to myself, I don't berate myself for being an arse. I just say, "nope," and move on.

Send your Inner Bully on its way. It's of no use to you. It doesn't help you achieve, it doesn't make you a better person. Think of the time you waste formulating self abuse. Think of the agonies you put yourself through when it's already too late to change it. Think of the times you beat yourself up as a teenager when now you know you were just young and inexperienced. Think of those moments when you were a child and you thought you weren't good enough. Think of all those things and forgive yourself. Say, "That's done now, I forgive me."

Just say, "nope," and move on.

***Fluff and nonsense***

Now, some people actually don't advocate this kind of fluffy self-kindness. They think a bit of tough self-love is actually a Good Thing. I can totally see where they're coming from. If you're a person who lets your Inner Child rule the roost too much, maybe a spot Inner Parenting might actually be helpful. But for how long?

Personally, despite being a long-time advocate of the "just pull yourself together" approach, I don't actually find being mean motivating. Calling yourself a fat, lazy arse might get you out on your run, and that's great today, but tomorrow you're still living with an abusive woman.

**If your best friend was living with someone like that, you'd tell her to move out.**

If you want your Inner Child to stop eating cakes on the sofa when you should be going out for a run, you just need to make sure your Inner Adult is in charge, not your Inner Parent. It's OK to speak firmly to yourself, but it shouldn't involve a "fat bitch" or a "stupid cow": that's just bad manners.

It may be that you're motivated by Stick not Carrot (see previous chapter), but that's not the same thing as bullying yourself. Having clear consequences that help to motivate you into action has nothing to do with branding yourself an idiot.

So from now on, there will be no "negative self-talk". No calling yourself names, not to yourself, not to anyone. That means no emails saying, "I'm such an idiot, I totally forgot to reply to your email" and no, "What a moron, I've locked my keys in the house" and definitely no, "God, I ate a whole pack of biscuits, I am THE WORST."

**From today for seven days (and forever after) you have to practise Instant Forgiveness.**

Anything that makes you cringe, makes you annoyed or disappointed, anything you "hate" about yourself: it all has to be forgiven. Now, this moment. Stage an intervention with yourself. Your inner cult leader is a total arse and must be stopped.

From now on your new prophet is your Inner Adult who respects you and who knows we are all just humans, doing our best.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Your Core Values**

#### ***What matters to you?***

What really matters to you? Do you know anymore? Some people find themselves lost in the role of 'mother' which has brought up all sorts of Stuff and Feelings. You might also be compromising on a lot of things right now from work, to family life, to friendships and relationships. This is a nice, simple exercise to remind you what your bottom line is. If you need to make Big Decisions about your Life, this can help you find a bit of direction.

#### ***How to locate your Core Values***

(Hint: they're nowhere near your pelvis)

1. Go through the list below
2. Choose eight that feel most important to you
3. Do it again, picking just five of those eight - which are the most important?

4. Take that final five and select the top two.

Peace	Integrity
Wealth	Joy
Happiness	Love
Success	Recognition
Friendship	Family
Fame	Truth
Authenticity	Wisdom
Power	Status
Influence	Justice

Et Voila! Your core values.

Now, when you're trying to make decisions about your family, your life and your work, you can go back to your core values and see what it is that might be making you stuck.

***Defining the value***

If Success is a core value and you've opted not to take a promotion so you can be home more with your children, you might feel pretty crappy about that. But now you can look at what success really means to you. Does it mean a promotion or does it mean not drinking any alcohol before 5pm? If it's the former, then you might need to reassess your decisions (whilst enjoying a nice lunchtime glass of Riesling).

Meanwhile, if one of your core values is Peace, you may find you can't have a stressful, noisy job AND be a parent. There will be no peace. Or maybe you get your peace kicks elsewhere and now know you have to schedule in regular yoga classes, meditation, boxing, life drawing, welding or whatever else you find peaceful.

If Power and Influence are your two core values, you might be satisfied with chairing the PTA, but you might equally be feeling powerless and irrelevant at home with a three-month-old all day every day. And if Wealth is a core value, you probably shouldn't have had children.

### ***Are you being true to your Core Values?***

If you value Power, Influence, Wealth, Success and you know that the PTA and a rejected promotion aren't going to cut it, are you currently being true to those values?

We know that modern working mothers spend more time with their children than full-time housewives did in the 1950s, and yet many parents are opting to turn down a promotion and work fewer hours. This despite the fact that in many companies the more senior you are, the less likely anyone is to notice or question your decision to work from home two days a week - or the fact that you took a long lunch to watch a gymnastics display. (For more on being a working mother, check out Laura Vanderkam's excellent book *I Know How She Does It*.) Meanwhile, if Friendship ranks high and you never make time to see your mates any more, is it time to get something booked in the diary?

### ***Your inner core***

One of my core values is Authenticity. Discovering this was something of a lightbulb moment for me. It explained why I have struggled with certain work projects in the past: I didn't feel I could do them and still feel authentic. Meanwhile, this nonsense flowed out of me and onto the page. It also explains why I'm really bad at fibbing, dammit.

So look at your core values and think about what kind of shape they're in right now. If you're not being true to who you are, now is a good time to think about how to turn things around. Without guilt, without judgment, without feeling like a failure - safe in the knowledge that your Adult knows that respecting your core values is the key to a happy mother. And a happy mother is everyone's favourite kind.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Laugh it up

#### *Laugh? I nearly weed*

When was the last time you laughed till you cried? Full on belly laughing with wheezing, gasping, snot and tears? I don't know about you, but I noticed that after having children it started happening less and less.

Why? Well partly because cracked nipples and night sweats weren't nearly as lolsome as you might imagine, and partly because talking to a group of other new mothers about baby reflux when you've had two hours' sleep and twenty stitches up your noo-noo just doesn't quite hit the funny bone. Plus, I was no longer an insufferable, happy-go-lucky twenty-something.

**This is an easy one to fix: think about the last few times you really laughed.  
Whatever it was, do it again.**

I realised I had one friend in particular who could push my pelvic floor to its limits, leaving me both paralysed with laughter and alarmed about an imminent underpant mishap. But I hadn't actually seen her in about six months. I am waiting for her as I



write this. I have made a point of booking coffees or lunches or phone calls with all my favourite humans – the ones that really make me laugh until I become seriously alarmed I might never inhale again. I also bought tickets to Book of Mormon and went to see a favourite funny TV show being filmed with a favourite funny friend. In short, I've been laughing a lot more. And I feel great.

When you're powered entirely by cake and caffeine and you can't remember the last time you had a poo in peace, it can be easy to let basic human encounters take a back seat. Make a point of having something lovely in your diary to look forward to. Something that will bring on the belly laughs. So go book something right now!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### What would Kevin do?

#### *What if you were a man?*

I'm a big fan of the "What would X do" game. When I find myself in a situation where I know I want to get out, or make a difficult choice, or do something that doesn't sit well with how I like to think of myself, or even just be better, I often ask myself "What would Imperia do?" or "What would Daphne-Celeste do?" (but with names of actual friends instead of those amazing ones I just made up).

Sometimes it's just a mind trick to help me realise it's ok to put yourself first in a situation. Sometimes the game is more of a way to stop some Inner Child behaviour (the Adult Katie unloads the dishwasher before slumping in front of the TV. The kill-joy). But the most useful version I play is when I make myself into a man and learn to give less of a crap about things.

Sadly, there's no sexy male version of the name Katherine that I know of, so I had to pick between Keith and Kevin. Keith sounds like he has a moustache so I opted for Kevin, who is wiry and wears ill-fitting grey suit trousers and creased shirts. In retrospect, I should have opted for Keith. I look great with a moustache (must get that seen to).

Anyway, Kevin may work in accounts, but he earns good money and no one ever expected him to apologise for anything. For all his lack of sex-appeal, Kevin's life seems pretty straightforward. So when I ask myself, "What would Kevin do," it helps me to make a choice that I might feel guilty about if Katie made the same decision.

So if you ever feel yourself agonising over a decision or feeling bad about something, just stop and ask yourself "what would Kevin do?" There's a chance Kevin might feel the same way as you, but if Kevin... no, you know what, I'm too depressed about Kevin now.

**Screw it, I'm switching to Keith.**

In my mind, Keith now has a beautiful moustache and a manly gait and he looks like [Ron Swanson from Parks & Recreation](#). Kevin has turned into Gareth from the Office.

So where was I? What would Keith do? If Keith felt his life going slightly askew, he would probably book himself [a week's fishing holiday to restore sanity](#). He might go straight from work to his poker game, safe in the knowledge that the kids will still finish childhood with a net profit in bedtime kisses. He wouldn't martyr himself or put his own sanity so far down the family pecking order that he was stressed and unhappy.

### ***This isn't about men***

Before anyone starts sending me emails saying this exercise is all about man-bashing, let me just say: this has nothing to do with men. This isn't a judgment on how the man in your life behaves. Because I don't want to bombard you with 5000-word rants (seriously, this is the edited version of the course), I've cut out the huge intro that talks at length about how I think the vast majority of so-called gender differences –

especially the myth of multi-tasking – are fabricated by society to maintain the status-quo (you can imagine how hilarious this section was) and how I believe this is harmful to both genders.

The reason I think this exercise is useful is because it frees you from many of the constraints that you place on yourself when you create your mental image of yourself as a “woman” or a “mother”. You could argue that society does not judge men so much for spending Saturday mornings pursuing a sport or hobby, or that often men don’t feel the same guilt about taking some time to themselves if they know they need it. But there will always be exceptions to this and anyway, like I said, this isn’t about men.

The point is, we all create these roles for ourselves, and sometimes it helps to get out of that framework and think about how things look from the other side. Another way to do it is to think, “if this were my friend or my daughter, what would I tell her to do?” Or, if you prefer you can just ask yourself “what would I do if no one at all (including myself) would judge me for it? You could pretend to be the British one from Girls or Kim Catrell, or Ilana from Broad City or Mary Beard, or any other excellent female who doesn’t give two hoots. Personally, I’m sticking with Keith. He can make a canoe [with his bare hands](#).

## CHAPTER SIX

### No need to explain

#### *Sorry but you need to stop*

This one is a challenge: it's time to stop apologising or explaining.

This exercise goes hand in hand with Instant Forgiveness (which you're still doing, right?), because so often the apologies come along with a little personal insult.

"Sorry, I'm being a total idiot, but I've forgotten what time the appointment is."

If you have a troublesome Inner Parent, chances are you spend a lot of time apologising. And if you spend a lot of time being rude about yourself and apologising, there's a good chance you also over explain. I used to do this a lot after having children, but I realised it was taking up my time to give explanations and taking up their time too. But most importantly, it was absolutely none of anyone's business.

Now, if I feel myself saying, "I'm so sorry, I've got to cancel the conference call because [insert child-based reason]" I stop and write something like "Can we do this call at 9am tomorrow? I can't make this time now."

I'm sure you'll know how annoying it is when your friend Desdamona gives too many excuses for not being able to accept a dinner invite:

“I’m really sorry but I’m so tired at the moment and I’ve got to be up early for a meeting, plus I promised Frank I’d make him dinner tonight as it’s my turn and there are some bits of chicken that need eating up.”

The longer the excuses go on, the more unimportant they all sound and the more irritating it becomes. Far nicer if Desdamona had simply said, “Oh, I can’t make Saturday, what a shame! I can get out next Wednesday night though. Are you around?” If Dez had spent all week looking forward to sitting in her pyjamas watching Gogglebox repeats that evening, that’s a legitimate excuse! She’s allowed to spend time merrily slobbering about the place – and it’s not an excuse she needs to share with anyone.

If you can’t make a meeting, you don’t need to tell the client it’s because you’ve got to get to nursery to pick up your son. You don’t need to take up people’s time giving them excuses they don’t need to hear (and probably don’t particularly want to hear either). If you can’t make a meeting, you don’t need to tell the client it’s because you’ve got to get to nursery to pick up your son. You don’t need to take up people’s time giving them excuses they don’t need to hear (and probably don’t particularly want to hear either).

## ***Bad manners***

Clearly this exercise comes with some caveats. I don't want to start a land war in Asia by mistake. If you accidentally trample a child during the morning school stampede, you should obviously apologise. And if you make a terrible error at work that has caused untold grief, you should say you’re sorry. If you are British, you can continue unnecessarily apologising to the cashier when you pay for things in shops or when someone treads on your foot. But in general, try to cut back the apologies to about 20% – and definitely no calling yourself names.

In fact, people rarely care if you need to shift a meeting, for example. No offence, but it's unlikely they've spent the morning in quivering anticipation at the thought of seeing you or hearing your voice. I don't always apologise if I'm late sending something, either – usually it's an arbitrary deadline I've set for myself anyway ("I'll send this over first thing" when in fact I know that's pushing my luck). And anyway, no one wants to hear about how the dog ate your homework, or how you're more stretched than they are.

You can probably work out for yourself when people are likely to be crying out for that report or weeping at a postponed meeting. Give it a go for one week. Every time you write an email, go through it before you send deleting any:

Apologies

Self-abuse

Explanations

If you're like me, you'll be surprised at how often you do it, and how little you actually need to... After all, what would Keith do?

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Positive Selfishness

#### *Positive selfishness*

In the last chapter, I wrote about Desdemona - the woman I made up who declined to come to your house for a meal because she already had plans to watch Gogglebox repeats in her jammies.

**Today, I want you to become that woman.**

When you become a parent you may find yourself switching into Parent mode. (Just to be clear, your Inner Parent is not the same thing as your Inner Adult being a parent. \*Is\* that any clearer? I'm not sure. I sometimes wish these therapists had come up with better names. I would have called them Inner Bully, Inner Brat and Inner Supreme Being. Or maybe Brian, Tabatha and St John.)

Anyway, it's no surprise that your Inner Parent often gets involved in the parenting. But you may find that your Inner Parent isn't quite the parent you'd hoped for. My Inner Parent is extremely judgmental – the last thing I want to inflict on my children.



When you're constantly running around being a parent, you can lose sight of who your Inner Adult is. This might leave you frustrated by some of your behaviour or disappointed in yourself. At worst, it could even leave you feeling inadequate as a parent and not good enough for the job. Ideally, you would take time out to spend time in "Adult" mode, finding space for yourself.

### ***Parent mode overload***

If you're anything like me, you probably read those articles that tell you to make time for yourself with an attitude of scorn and derision: "yeah right, easier said than done! If, by some miracle, I find a moment to myself today, I'll be spending it brushing my teeth before collapsing into bed."

But then I learned to frame it differently in my mind, and my attitude changed.

I often used to rush back from meetings to be home by bedtime when I actually just wanted to hang out with friends or go to a yoga class, or sit in a park reading a book.

### **But then I thought about what Keith would do.**

Keith would prioritise his needs because he would understand that doing so made him a better parent. In this simple equation:

Adult mode + wine = one happy mother.

But it was MORE than not prioritising myself. I would rush back from a rare journey out (working from home is sometimes like being under self-enforced house arrest) because I hoped that my husband would absolve me from any guilt and say, "oh, no DON'T rush back – I've got this! Go out, have fun!"

But often he didn't. That's because my husband, like Keith, knows how to say, "I need a break, I'm going to go to do something fun after my meeting." My husband

mistook me for an Adult who can make a call on something as important as her own sanity. The fool.

So now, I operate a policy of Positive Selfishness: I will use paid childcare time to exercise or go for a walk; I will meet up with friends who make me laugh until my teeth hurt. I won't do things I don't want to or don't have time for. I will make time for myself – even if it's just 10 minutes to sit in the Wendy House on my own (no one else uses the bloody thing) – because when I do I like myself more, I am more like the mother I want to be.

More than any of the other steps on this course, this is the one I struggle with the most. But Positive Selfishness is important because not only does it restore your sanity, it also shows your partner and your children that you respect yourself. Put it this way, if this were your child, would you tell her to get out more?

This isn't like normal selfishness. I'm not suggesting you become horribly self-centred. I just want you to spend time in Adult mode, without guilt, without saying sorry, remembering how fabulous you are, honouring your core values and pretending to be a man. Is that too much to ask?

## ***End note***

### ***I hope you've enjoyed this course – thank you!***

I really hope you've enjoyed reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it. If you made it this far, thank you for giving up your time to read it. I wrote it because it's the course I wish I could have gone on when my first daughter was born. I hope that if you found it useful you will share either this ebook or the link to the email course version with some other splendid females you know. They can sign up for free here on [www.katielee.co.uk](http://www.katielee.co.uk).

Please feel free to send me your many compliments and messages of love and support. Thanks to all of you who have already got in touch – especially those of you sharing your own funny stories. They've made me feel a lot better about the train incident.

You can also say hello to me on [@shinykatie](https://twitter.com/shinykatie) and check out my website on [www.katielee.co.uk](http://www.katielee.co.uk).

## **MY PODCAST**

Oh, and if you like this, you might also like my LEAP podcast (Life Exists After Parenthood) in which I interview amazing business people with vulvas, who also have children. You can listen on [SoundCloud](https://soundcloud.com/shinykatie) or [iTunes](https://itunes.apple.com/uk/podcast/leap-podcast/id123456789) (please subscribe and review, apparently it makes a huge difference!) [www.soundcloud.com/shinykatie](http://www.soundcloud.com/shinykatie)

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