

A COMPANION WORKBOOK · THE STOIC CAREGIVER

The 3 a.m. Worry Workbook

For the Nights the Worry Won't Stop

The 3 a.m. brain is not your daytime brain. It makes every worry bigger and every solution feel just out of reach. This is a set of simple steps for the nights the loop won't quit, to get the worry out of your head, onto the page, and parked until morning, so you can rest.

Esther C. Kane, CAPS, C.D.S.

Retired Occupational Therapist · Founder, SeniorSafetyAdvice.com

TheStoicCaregiver.com | SeniorSafetyAdvice.com

START HERE

Why 3 a.m. Is Different

If you are reading this at 3 a.m., you already know the feeling. The house is quiet, everyone else is asleep, and your mind will not stop running the same worry in a loop you cannot switch off.

Here is what is actually happening. In the middle of the night, the calm, reasoning part of your brain is mostly offline. What is left is the part that scans for danger. So every worry feels larger, every worst case feels closer, and every problem feels like it has to be solved right now. **None of that is true. It is just the hour.**

This workbook will not solve your worries at 3 a.m., because almost nothing can be solved at 3 a.m. What it will do is get the worry out of your head and onto the page, where your brain can finally stop guarding it, so you have a real chance at rest.

HOW TO USE THIS AT NIGHT

Keep it on the nightstand with a pen. Use the dimmest light you can. You do not have to do every page. Even one step, one slow breath or one worry written down, is enough to break the loop.

The one thing to remember tonight

Your only job at this hour is rest. Everything else can wait for daylight, and it will still be there, more manageable, when the sun is up and your whole brain is back online.

THE METHOD

The 3 a.m. Sequence

Five steps, in order. The first two calm your body and quiet the loop. The last three take the worry off your shoulders and hand it to the morning. Move through them slowly. There is no rush at this hour.

1 Come back to your body

The loop lives in your head. Your breath and your body are here, in the present, where nothing bad is happening right now. Start there. The next page shows you how.

2 Name the worry

Write down exactly what is looping. The mind rehearses a worry because it is afraid to forget it. Putting it on paper tells your brain it is safe to let go.

3 Ask the 3 a.m. question

"Is there anything I can actually do about this, right now, tonight?" At this hour the honest answer is almost always no. That is not helplessness. That is permission to stop.

4 Park it for morning

Give the worry a home. Write the one thing you will do about it in daylight, or write "nothing," if that is the truth. A worry with a place to go stops chasing you.

5 Release and return to rest

It is written down. It is handed off. Say so, in your own words, and turn your attention back to your breath and your pillow.

THE WHOLE IDEA IN ONE LINE

You do not have to solve it tonight. You only have to set it down.

STEP ONE

Come Back to Your Body

Before any writing, settle your body. When you slow your breathing, your body reads it as a signal that you are safe, and it begins to stand down. The long exhale is what does the work, so make it slower than the breath in.

BREATHE IN

4

slow counts

HOLD

4

counts

BREATHE OUT

6

slow counts

Repeat four or five times. There is nothing to do but count.

Then anchor into the present, in the dark

Notice, slowly, one at a time:

4 things you can feel: the weight of the blanket, the pillow under your head, your feet, your own breath.

3 sounds you can hear, near or far, without judging them.

2 slow breaths, longer on the way out.

1 hand placed on your own chest, feeling it rise and fall.

IF YOUR MIND WANDERS BACK TO THE WORRY

That is normal, and it is not a failure. Gently bring your attention back to the count. You may have to do it many times. Each time you do, you are teaching your body that it is safe to rest.

What 3 a.m. Tells You, and What's True

The night brain lies in a very particular way. It makes everything urgent, everything your fault, and everything doomed. When you can name the lie, it loosens its grip. Read these when the worry insists it is right.

At 3 a.m. it feels like	In daylight, the truth is
I have to figure this out right now.	Nothing on your list can be fixed at this hour. The only task tonight is rest.
If I let myself sleep, I am failing them.	You cannot care for anyone running on no sleep. Rest is part of the work, not a break from it.
This is all going to fall apart.	The worst case is not a forecast. It is a tired brain rehearsing fear in the dark.
I am the only one, and I cannot do this.	You are doing it, even now, even tonight. Tomorrow you can ask for one piece of help.
I should have done more today.	You did what one human could do. Guilt at 3 a.m. is not a fair judge of anything.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

What a Worry Page Looks Like Filled In

Here is one night, handled. Yours will be different. The point is the pattern: name it, ask the question, park it, and let it go.

What's looping in my head right now

Mom seemed more confused today. What if she's getting worse and I'm missing something the doctor should know?

And I still haven't called about the home aide.

Is there anything I can actually do about this right now, tonight?

☒ No. Nothing until morning.

☐ Yes, one small thing: _____

I'm parking this until

Tomorrow morning

The one thing I'll do about it then

Write down what I noticed so I don't forget it, and call the aide agency before lunch.

It's written down. It's handed off. I can rest now.

Get It Out of Your Head

Write what is looping. Do not fix it. Just move it from your mind to the page.

What's looping in my head right now

Is there anything I can actually do about this right now, tonight?

- ☐ No. Nothing until morning.
- ☐ Yes, one small thing:

I'm parking this until

The one thing I'll do about it then

It's written down. It's handed off. I can rest now.

Another Night, Same Steps

Use a fresh page whenever you need one. The pattern works every time.

What's looping in my head right now

Is there anything I can actually do about this right now, tonight?

- ☐ No. Nothing until morning.
- ☐ Yes, one small thing:

I'm parking this until

The one thing I'll do about it then

It's written down. It's handed off. I can rest now.

Whenever the Loop Returns

Print or copy this page as many times as you need. Keep a small stack by the bed.

What's looping in my head right now

Is there anything I can actually do about this right now, tonight?

- ☐ No. Nothing until morning.
- ☐ Yes, one small thing:

I'm parking this until

The one thing I'll do about it then

It's written down. It's handed off. I can rest now.

FOR THE MORNING

The Morning Parking Lot

This is where last night's worries come to be dealt with in daylight, when your whole brain is back. Move each parked worry here, and give it one real, doable step. Many of them will look far smaller in the morning than they did at 3 a.m. Some will have solved themselves.

The worry I parked last night	My one real step today

A SMALL DAYTIME HABIT

If the same worry keeps showing up on this page night after night, that is your signal. It is the one worth a real conversation, with your parent's care team, a professional, or someone you trust, in the daylight when help is actually available.

When You're Still Awake

Some nights you do everything right and sleep still does not come. That is not a failure, and fighting it only makes it worse. Here is what helps when you are still awake.

Stop trying to sleep.

The effort itself keeps you awake. Give yourself permission to simply rest, eyes closed, without the job of falling asleep. Rest alone still restores you.

If your mind is racing, get up.

Leave the bed for a few minutes. Sit somewhere dim and quiet. Do something slow and dull until you feel heavy again, then go back. The bed is for rest, not for wrestling.

Return to the breath.

In for four, out for six. You are not trying to force anything. You are just keeping your body company until it is ready.

A GENTLE, HONEST WORD

If sleepless, worried nights have become most nights, or if the heaviness you feel in the dark is starting to follow you into your days, please treat that as worth attention, not something to push through alone. Tell your own doctor. Caring for yourself is not separate from caring for your parent. It is what makes the caring possible.

ONE THING TO REMEMBER

The Worry Will Look Smaller in the Morning

Almost everything that feels enormous at 3 a.m. is more manageable by daylight. The worry did not shrink. Your whole brain simply came back to help you carry it.

Tonight, you do not have to solve anything. Come back to your body, write the worry down, hand it to the morning, and let yourself rest. That is the entire job at this hour, and you are capable of it.

This workbook is part of **The Stoic Caregiver**, a three-volume series of sixty short lessons for the real moments of caregiving, including the 3 a.m. worry, the impossible decision, and the ordinary day that quietly breaks your heart.

Find the books, free samples, and the companion podcast at **TheStoicCaregiver.com**. For practical safety and care guidance, visit **SeniorSafetyAdvice.com**.

This workbook is provided for general informational and reflective purposes only. It is not a substitute for individualized medical, psychological, legal, or professional care advice, and it is not a treatment for any sleep or mental health condition. If worry, sleeplessness, or low mood is persistent or distressing, please consult your own physician or a qualified professional. © 2026 Esther C. Kane. All rights reserved.