

The Evolution of *The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal* and How to Use This Book

I believe it's your birthright to live the life you desire. This is why I created *The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal*.

The life I desire is marked by a deep connection to my child and to my partner. It's a life filled with joy and meaning. It's a life in which I feel supported and nurtured by an incredible community of women—young and old. I experience regular, meaningful, heartfelt connections with people I care about. I am continually open to growth—as a woman, a mother, a partner and a spiritual being. I enjoy supporting and serving others in a way that feeds me rather than drains me. I feel that I always have enough time in my life for those things that are most important to me. My life flows, I trust my intuition and I expect good to come to me. I feel peaceful. I am loving, and I feel loved.

This is the life I desire.

It was only after I became a mother that I was finally able to articulate this.

When I was pregnant, I had so many unanswered questions running through my mind—probably more than at any other time in my life.



How would I feel about going back to work after the baby came? If and when I went back to work, how would I ever find a caregiver I trusted enough to watch my child? How would I find balance in the midst of all of this? How would the baby change my marriage?

As my belly expanded, I began to feel like a host for an alien (I was!).
*Would I ever get my body back? What kind of parent would I be?
Would becoming a mom change how I felt about myself?* The list went on and on.

Having a baby is **so** life changing; it brings up questions and insecurities many of us didn't even know we had! The only way I can describe the transition is: becoming a mother changes a woman *on a cellular level*—it truly affects how you see and feel about everything in your world.

After having my son, Jonah, in March 2002, I discovered—and experienced firsthand—a startling and disturbing truth about mothers everywhere.

I suddenly became aware of how little we cared for ourselves (especially in relation to how much energy we give our children) and how changed and disconnected most of us felt from *ourselves* after becoming parents. Whether this question of identity lasts until your child turns six months old or continues into the high school years, mothers everywhere are wondering, *Now who am I?*

I had been introduced to the powerful message of “self-care” through author/life coach Cheryl Richardson’s book *Life Makeovers* in 2000, when I facilitated a *Life Makeovers* group for some friends. Some of the women in the group were mothers, while others (including me) were not.

I knew from that experience that if anyone needed to make time for self-care, it was mothers.



After Jonah turned six months old, I felt a growing sense of urgency to reach out to mothers and create a dialogue around the topic of self-care. In January 2003, I launched the first Personal Renewal Group (PRG) for mothers in Austin, Texas. The group, which was limited to twenty participants, filled immediately.

The idea behind the PRG was to create an ongoing forum for mothers to share and explore meaningful themes that weren't typical playgroup discussion topics, such as how to create life balance and reconnect with "who you are."

My experience with my own playgroups (which were very vital and nurturing to my well-being) was that conversation tended to focus on the children's physical and developmental needs. Turning to a friend in a weekly playgroup and asking, "Tell me about your personal support system" or "What in your life right now is draining you or fueling you?" is clearly not the norm; in fact, many moms might feel this type of conversation is awkward in such a setting.

Paradoxically, through my work with clients as a career coach and in my own life, I've observed that what people want most in this age of isolation is meaningful connection and community with others.

Based on this observation, I believe that one of the most effective ways to grow (personally and spiritually) and become emotionally whole is by sharing with others at similar life stages in an empowering, supportive and nurturing group setting.

In 2003, at the urging of many PRG members who wanted to share the self-renewal program and exercises with their friends throughout the U.S. and Canada, I created *The Mother's Guide to Self-Renewal*, so that women everywhere could use the *Guide* and form their own Personal



Renewal Groups in their community. (See the end of the *Guide* for more information and visit www.reneetrudeau.com to learn how to start or join a group.)

My intention for the *Guide* is that it will serve as a catalyst for your healing, growth and personal empowerment.

I have seen women experience profound shifts when they consciously gather in small groups and share from their hearts on topics that deeply affect them, and I believe the *Guide* can serve as a tool to help foster community and connection among mothers of all ages throughout the world.

As we've all discovered, there are many universal life themes that surface throughout the motherhood journey, so the playground for exploring these topics is expansive and fertile.

I hope you will carve out time in your life to invest in yourself and let the *Guide* support you in creating and living the life you truly desire—the life you deserve.

*The most precious gift you can give your child(ren) and partner is to love and nurture yourself first. Self-care is **not** about self-indulgence, it is about self-preservation.* It is not about pampering, it is about owning your personal power. It is about nurturing your potential and living the life you were meant to live.*

Warmly,
Renée

***Self-care is not about self-indulgence,
it is about self-preservation.**

—Audre Lord





How to Get the Most from the *Guide*




- 💧 **Start or join a Personal Renewal Group (PRG).** Motherhood can be an isolating experience. This is why the *Guide* is designed for women to use in a small group setting. While you can gain tremendous value from working on the themes and exercises on your own, being with a group and sharing your thoughts is what facilitates a change in how you **experience life and act on a daily basis.**
- 💧 **Be open.** Some of the concepts and insights in the book may be new to you. If so, keep an open mind and be willing to look at things in a new way. If the concepts are familiar to you, be open to taking the themes to deeper levels.
- 💧 **Focus on what speaks to you and dive in.** Depending on the age of your kids, your life stage and where you are on your personal growth journey, some themes will resonate with you more than others. Explore those topics/issues that bring tears to your eyes or make your heart swell.
- 💧 **Schedule the time to do the work.** Each month when you explore new topics and work on the exercises, you're investing in yourself. The payoffs will be worth the investment (I promise!) if you'll take the time to follow through on the work.



 **Be honest.** Your willingness to be truthful with yourself and others when exploring the *Guide*'s themes will support you in making progress on your path. Our willingness to be vulnerable is what allows us to access our own wisdom.

 **Let the theme permeate your month.** The *Guide* is set up in a month-by-month format so you have a theme to work on and explore each month. Make the theme come alive for you! Talk about it with friends. Surround yourself with visual reminders—exercises, collages, pictures or quotes—by taping them up on your computer, your refrigerator or your bathroom mirror. Email other PRG moms about the topic or start a PRG listserv or an online group. Share the information with a close relative, your partner and friends.

 **Be easy on yourself.** If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by a particular chapter or exercise, that's okay. Give yourself permission to skip that section, come back to it later or go as slowly as you need to. You may not be ready to explore that theme quite yet. For many women, the months and years after having a child can be very overwhelming, and quite a few women experience anxiety and depression (see the end of the *Guide* for resources on managing depression). Be gentle with yourself and talk about your feelings with a friend, your PRG, or your ob-gyn, midwife or family doctor.

MANDALA ARTWORK

Throughout the *Guide* and on each chapter's title page, you'll see circular artwork. These intricate designs are called "mandalas." Mandala is Sanskrit for sacred circle. Drawing and coloring mandalas is a widespread practice that often heightens personal insight, healing and self-expression. Coloring mandalas can be symbolic of undertaking a journey to the center of our being; often that which seemed dark or hidden and mysterious is illuminated. This exercise also helps many become more focused and feel more peaceful when they're struggling with personal issues.

