

# When I Feel Small

Understanding Involuntary Age Regression and the Inner Child



**Sister Abigail Hester, OFC**

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by  
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Published by the Order of Franciscan Clareans  
[franciscanclareans.blogspot.com](http://franciscanclareans.blogspot.com)

Cover art by [Your Artist or “AI-generated under license” if applicable]

Printed in the United States of America  
First Edition – 2025

ISBN: [Leave blank or add when ready]

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## Introduction: When the Child Shows Up Without Warning

I didn’t choose to regress. I didn’t set out one day and say, *“Let me become smaller, softer, more afraid, more helpless.”* It just happened. One moment I was speaking like an adult, the next I was holding my knees to my chest, overwhelmed by feelings I didn’t have words for. It wasn’t cute. It wasn’t fun. It was real. It was raw. And it terrified me.

This is the truth for many of us who live with **involuntary age regression**—a sudden, often disorienting return to a younger emotional or psychological state, usually triggered by stress, trauma, or overstimulation. It is not a performance. It is not a kink. It is not always even recognizable to the outside world. But for those who experience it, it is deeply embodied, often unavoidable, and sometimes painfully misunderstood.

In our society, “acting like a child” is often used as an insult. But for some of us, our brains revert to younger states as a protective mechanism. The brain, so clever and resilient, doesn’t forget what it learned in childhood: that sometimes, when the world is too much, it is safer to be small. Sometimes our bodies know before we do that the only way to survive is to return to a younger place within ourselves.

This book is for you if:

- You’ve ever felt yourself “slip” into a younger emotional state without intending to.
- You’ve been told you’re childish, dramatic, or “too sensitive,” but deep down, you’re just trying to survive.
- You’ve dissociated, shut down, or felt an inner child take over when the world got too loud or unsafe.

- You care for someone who experiences this, and you want to understand, not fix.

We'll explore the **science**, **psychology**, and **spirituality** behind involuntary age regression. We'll talk about the **inner child** not as a metaphor, but as a living part of you that still longs for safety, nurture, and expression. We'll face the **stigma**, the **shame**, and the **survival strategies**. And we'll do it gently—because if you're like me, you've had enough people telling you to grow up. You don't need to be forced into adulthood. You need to be held where you are.

As a Christian, a survivor, and a spiritual caregiver, I believe Jesus didn't just tolerate the little ones—he welcomed them. And that includes the little one in you. This is not a book of judgment. It is a book of **permission**. Permission to feel small. Permission to heal. Permission to come home to the parts of you that never got to grow safely in the first place.

If no one else has told you this: your experience is real. You are not broken. You are not alone. The child within you is sacred—and they deserve to be understood, not silenced.

So take a breath, get comfortable, and let's begin this journey—not with forced maturity, but with **gentle curiosity**, **radical compassion**, and **healing honesty**.

Welcome.

— **Sister Abigail Hester, OFC**  
*Order of Franciscan Clareans*

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## Chapter 1: What Happens When We Regress

Imagine you're sitting in a conversation, everything seems fine—and then someone raises their voice. Suddenly, your body tenses. You feel the urge to curl in on yourself. Words disappear. You can't make eye contact. You want to cry but you don't know why. You are no longer responding like an adult—you are reacting like a child. That is regression.

**Involuntary age regression** is not a sign of immaturity. It's a *response*. It is the nervous system crying out, *"This isn't safe. I need to go back to when I was smaller—because back then, at least I knew how to hide."*

People who experience involuntary regression don't pretend to be younger—they *become* younger, emotionally and cognitively. The language may change: simpler sentences, baby talk, or silence. The posture may shift: knees to chest, rocking, thumb-sucking, or hiding. The needs shift too: comfort, protection, reassurance. And perhaps most painfully, the shame often sets in just as quickly.

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## What Age Regression Is—and Is Not

Let's be clear: **involuntary age regression is not childishness, attention-seeking, or kink.** It is not something we do to be cute. It is something that happens *to us*, often as a result of:

- Childhood trauma or neglect
- PTSD or complex PTSD (C-PTSD)
- Dissociation or derealization
- Neurodivergence (especially autism, ADHD, and sensory processing disorders)
- Emotional overload

Sometimes, regression feels like being a toddler. Sometimes, like a scared 7-year-old. Sometimes, you don't know what age you are—you just *know you're not the you* who usually runs the show.

And that's the key: regression is often a **protective part of the self** taking over when the adult self is overwhelmed or unavailable.

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## What It Feels Like

Here are some ways people describe involuntary regression:

- "I feel like I shrink inside my own body."
- "I can't talk right anymore, and I just want my blanket."
- "I need someone to tell me they're here and I'm okay."
- "I hide under the table and I don't even know why."
- "I feel like I'm 4 years old and I'm going to get in trouble."

These moments can last minutes or hours. For some people, regression passes quickly with grounding tools. For others, it becomes a significant aspect of life that needs understanding, care, and space.

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## Inner Child, Protector, or Part?

In some therapeutic approaches (like Internal Family Systems or trauma-informed therapy), regression is seen as the re-emergence of a "**younger part**" of the self. This part may carry the wounds of childhood, and when it surfaces, it does so not to sabotage—but to *protect*.

Even in more secular psychological terms, regression is a form of **emotional time-travel**. The brain encounters something overwhelming and pulls an old file from childhood: *This is how we used to cope—let's do that again*. The problem is, what helped you survive as a child might not serve you as an adult—but it's still trying to save you.

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## There's Nothing Wrong With You

Let's pause right here and say it again:

**There is nothing wrong with you.**

Involuntary regression is a **survival strategy**, not a sign of failure. The problem isn't that you regress. The problem is that you live in a world that doesn't know how to honor the needs that arise when you do.

You don't need to "grow up." You need to feel **safe, soothed, and seen**—so that you don't have to regress to get those needs met.

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## Chapter 2: Causes and Triggers

**"It came out of nowhere."**

Except it didn't. Not really.

Involuntary age regression often *feels* like it appears without warning, but in truth, our bodies and nervous systems are reacting to *something*—even if our conscious minds don't yet understand what. Sometimes it's a loud voice. Sometimes it's a certain smell. Sometimes it's the way someone looks at you when you make a mistake. And sometimes... it's just Tuesday, and you're tired, and you've held in the tears for far too long.

In this chapter, we'll explore the **root causes** and **common triggers** of involuntary regression—not to blame or pathologize, but to increase awareness, offer self-compassion, and provide insight into the deeper needs behind each regression episode.

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### Childhood Trauma and Emotional Neglect

Many people who experience involuntary regression have lived through some form of childhood trauma—whether it's overt abuse, chronic neglect, emotional invalidation, or growing up in an unsafe environment.

When a child experiences overwhelming stress without support, their brain learns to protect them by disconnecting, dissociating, or reverting to earlier developmental strategies. If comfort wasn't available, the child learned to self-soothe in whatever way they could. For many of us, those protective instincts never fully left.

Trauma isn't always dramatic. Sometimes it's the silence after you cried and no one came. Sometimes it's learning to smile while breaking inside. Sometimes it's growing up too fast—and finding that your inner child never really got to be a child at all.

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## PTSD, C-PTSD, and the Survival Brain

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) often include symptoms like flashbacks, emotional dysregulation, and dissociation. Involuntary regression can be understood as part of this dissociative response. When the nervous system detects danger—real or perceived—it activates survival mode.

Regression is one form of that survival instinct. Instead of fighting or fleeing, the body may default to a **freeze** or **submit** response: becoming smaller, softer, or helpless as a way of avoiding further harm.

This is not weakness. This is biology.

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## Neurodivergence and Sensory Overload

Many autistic and ADHD individuals experience age regression as a coping mechanism for **sensory overwhelm**, **executive dysfunction**, or **emotional flooding**. If you're neurodivergent, you may experience regression:

- After too much stimulation (noise, light, crowds)
- During transitions (changing tasks or environments)
- When routines are disrupted
- When emotions escalate quickly (meltdowns, shutdowns)

In these moments, regression provides a way to self-regulate. It's the brain's way of saying, "*I can't do this right now. I need to go back to something simpler.*"

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## Repetition of Emotional Patterns

Sometimes, regression is triggered not by a traumatic event but by an *emotional echo* of the past. A raised eyebrow from a teacher might mimic the judgment of a disapproving parent. Being ignored by a friend might trigger the same panic you felt when you were abandoned as a child.

These are **emotional flashbacks**—sudden, intense emotional responses without a clear memory attached. They’re like time machines that drop you into the past without warning. You may not remember what happened to you at age five, but your body remembers how it felt.

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## Common Triggers of Involuntary Regression

Here are some frequently reported triggers:

- Being yelled at or criticized
- Feeling ignored, abandoned, or excluded
- Overwhelm from noise, crowds, or conflict
- Making a mistake or failing to meet expectations
- Seeing or hearing something related to past trauma
- Illness, fatigue, hunger, or pain
- Being around people in authority
- Feelings of helplessness or powerlessness
- Holidays, family gatherings, or anniversaries of trauma

Every person’s triggers are unique. The key is to notice the patterns and ask yourself with compassion:

**What was I needing in that moment that I didn’t receive?**

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## You Are Not Overreacting

Let’s say this together:

**I am not overreacting. I am reacting to something real.**

Even if you don’t have the memory. Even if you can’t explain it. Even if it seems “small” on the outside.

Your regression is not about the present moment—it’s about what the moment *reminds your body of*. You are not crazy. You are responding in the only way your inner child knows how.

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## Chapter 3: Involuntary Doesn’t Mean Wrong

**“I didn’t mean to act like that...”**

*“Why do I always mess everything up?”*

*“I hate that part of me.”*

If these words sound familiar, you're not alone. One of the hardest parts of involuntary regression isn't the experience itself—it's the **shame** that follows. We live in a world that values strength, independence, and control. So when you find yourself suddenly small, emotional, needy, or “immature,” it's easy to feel like you've failed.

But here's the truth:

- Involuntary doesn't mean wrong.**
- Unchosen doesn't mean shameful.**
- Regressing doesn't mean you're broken.**

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## You Are Not Broken—You Are Brilliant

What if we reframed regression as a **brilliant survival strategy**?

What if instead of blaming ourselves, we said:

- “*That part of me kept me alive.*”
- “*That younger self knew how to protect me when no one else did.*”
- “*I'm still here because of her.*”

Involuntary regression isn't a mistake. It's your nervous system reaching into the toolbox of your past and pulling out something it trusts: an old, well-worn pattern that once worked.

It may not always be helpful now, but that doesn't make it wrong. It makes it **wise**—and deserving of care, not criticism.

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## The Shame Spiral

Shame is the voice that says:

- “You're too much.”
- “You're not lovable when you're like this.”
- “No one will accept you if they see that side of you.”

And unfortunately, society often echoes that voice. Adults are expected to be composed, rational, and responsible at all times. There's no space for regression in workplaces, relationships, or churches—not unless you've already cleaned it up, hidden it, and rebranded it as “healing.”

But that kind of repression isn't healing—it's **abandonment** of your inner child.

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## What If You Spoke Kindly to Yourself?

What if, instead of spiraling into shame, you practiced saying:

- “It’s okay that I needed to go small for a while.”
- “I see you, little one. I’m not mad at you.”
- “You don’t have to grow up to be loved.”

This is not self-indulgence. This is **self-parenting**—offering the comfort you may never have received when you were young. And every time you respond to regression with gentleness instead of judgment, you rewrite your story just a little bit.

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## The Theology of Regression

If you come from a faith background, you may have been taught to strive for spiritual maturity. But Jesus didn’t say, “*Unless you become more competent, more stable, more rational...*” He said:

“Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”  
—Matthew 18:3

That doesn’t mean we should stay stuck or helpless. It means that *childlikeness is sacred*. Trust, vulnerability, neediness—these are holy things. Not punishable defects.

In fact, involuntary regression may open a doorway to the very tenderness, dependence, and longing for love that the Spirit longs to meet.

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## Living With the Child Inside

You do not need to kill off your regressed self to be functional in the world. You need to **befriend them, listen to them, and build a relationship** with the little one who shows up when you’re scared.

They’re not ruining your life. They’re *begging you to protect them*. And maybe for the first time, you can.

That’s what this book is about:

- Honoring your regressions.
- Finding your voice again.
- And learning that you don’t have to choose between being a grown-up and being loved when you feel small.

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## Chapter 4: Daily Life and the Little Within

### ***“How am I supposed to adult... when I suddenly feel five?”***

One of the hardest challenges of living with involuntary age regression is simply **functioning**. Bills still need to be paid. Work deadlines still loom. Kids (or pets) still need care. But when the child inside suddenly comes forward—needing comfort, attention, or safety—it can feel impossible to keep up the adult performance.

This chapter is about **real life**: dishes in the sink, texts you haven’t replied to, and that creeping guilt when you need a nap and a stuffed animal more than you need to answer emails. It’s not about fixing regression or hiding it—it’s about learning how to **honor the child within while still caring for the life you’ve built around them**.

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### **The Two Selves**

If you experience regression often, you may notice a split between your:

- **Adult self:** competent, responsible, exhausted
- **Little self:** scared, soft, overwhelmed

It’s tempting to think of them as enemies—especially when one seems to sabotage the other. But they’re not enemies. They’re parts of the same whole. One carries your present responsibilities. The other carries your past wounds. And both want to be loved.

Daily life gets easier when these parts learn to **cooperate**, not compete.

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### **When “Little Me” Shows Up**

You may not get a warning before you regress, but here are some ways to **recognize** when it’s happening:

- You suddenly can’t make decisions or complete tasks
- You feel like crying for no clear reason
- You want to hide, be held, or curl up
- You start using baby talk, whispering, or going silent
- You feel unsafe, even if nothing dangerous is happening

Instead of forcing yourself to “snap out of it,” ask:

 *What do I need right now? Comfort, connection, safety? Can I pause? Can I breathe?*

Even a **10-minute break**—to hold a comfort object, drink something warm, or rest in a safe space—can help stabilize you without judgment.

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## **Creating a Regression-Safe Environment**

You don't have to build a nursery. But you *can* create small spaces and rituals that help your inner child feel safe.

### **Ideas for daily support:**

- Keep a soft blanket, plushie, or sensory toy nearby
- Have calming music, lullabies, or white noise playlists available
- Designate a small cozy corner in your room for decompressing
- Use a gentle scent (like lavender or vanilla) that your younger self finds soothing
- Practice saying affirmations like: *“You are safe now. I’ve got you.”*

Regression isn't always convenient—but it's not dangerous. The more safety your little one feels, the less often they'll need to take over unexpectedly.

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## **Telling People (Or Not)**

You are not obligated to tell anyone about your regressions. But sometimes, letting a **trusted person** in can help immensely. Whether it's a therapist, partner, friend, or chosen family member, you might say something like:

“Sometimes, when I’m really overwhelmed or triggered, I feel like a younger version of myself takes over. It’s not something I can control, but it’s something I’m learning to manage with care and compassion.”

If they're supportive, they might ask how they can help. Maybe it's giving you space. Maybe it's offering a hug. Maybe it's just not making fun of you when you need to hold your plushie during a hard conversation.

Not everyone will understand. But the right people will not only accept you—they will protect the little you that surfaces.

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## **Planning Around Regression**

Regression is unpredictable, but with gentle planning, you can still live a full life. Try:

- **Block scheduling:** include rest, comfort breaks, and margin for stress
- **“Adult time” vs. “Little time”:** let your inner child know, “I’ll be back for you after this meeting”
- **Regulated transitions:** use rituals (like a soft song or grounding breath) to move from little space to adult space

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### **It's Okay to Need Help**

Maybe you need reminders. Maybe you need notes or visuals to stay on task. Maybe you need a caregiver or partner who helps you feel anchored. That’s not weakness. That’s *honesty*. Needing support isn’t a flaw—it’s what makes us human.

Even grown-ups need holding sometimes. And if your grown-up self is too tired to hold you, it’s okay to ask for help—from people, from community, from God.

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### **Final Thought: Integration, Not Erasure**

You are not one or the other. You are both.

The adult who knows how to pay bills.  
The child who cries when the toast burns.  
The grown-up who shows up for others.  
The little one who still aches for a lullaby.

You don’t have to choose between them. You were never meant to. Your task is not to banish the child within—but to make space for them at the table of your life.

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## **Chapter 5: Grounding, Soothing, and Integration**

### ***“How do I come back to myself?”***

When involuntary regression happens, it can feel like being swept out to sea—suddenly adrift, without anchor or direction. You may lose your adult voice. You may lose your sense of time. You may even forget how to take care of your basic needs. Coming back to center—without force or shame—is an act of deep compassion.

In this chapter, we'll explore **gentle, trauma-informed techniques** for grounding yourself during or after regression. We'll also talk about what it means to **soothe the little one inside you**—not to silence them, but to care for them. And finally, we'll explore the sacred work of **integration**: weaving the child self and adult self into a relationship of trust.

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## **Grounding: Finding Your Way Back to the Present**

Grounding doesn't mean "snapping out of it." It means **bringing yourself gently back to safety and awareness**, one sense at a time.

**Try these grounding techniques:**

### **1. 5-4-3-2-1 Method**

- Name **5** things you can see
- Name **4** things you can touch
- Name **3** things you can hear
- Name **2** things you can smell
- Name **1** thing you can taste

This technique reorients your brain to the present moment.

### **2. Temperature Change**

- Hold an ice cube
- Wash your hands or face with cold water
- Wrap up in a warm blanket

This shift can help the nervous system reset.

### **3. Move Your Body**

- Rock side to side
- Tap your feet
- Press your palms together
- Curl and uncurl your toes

These small movements signal that you are *here*—in your body, in the now.

### **4. Breathe With Rhythm**

Try "box breathing":

- Inhale 4 counts
- Hold 4 counts
- Exhale 4 counts

- Hold 4 counts  
Repeat 3–5 cycles.

Even just one slow breath can begin to re-regulate your system.

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## **Soothing the Regressed Self**

Once grounded, it's time to **comfort the part of you who felt scared or overwhelmed**. This is the emotional equivalent of picking up a child who just had a nightmare.

Ask yourself:

*What did I need in that moment?*

*What is my little one still needing now?*

**Soothing strategies:**

- Hug a plushie or pillow
- Wrap up in a blanket like a cocoon
- Drink something warm and gentle (milk, tea, cocoa)
- Listen to lullabies or calming nature sounds
- Say comforting phrases:

*“I’m here. I’m not mad at you.”*

*“You are safe now.”*

*“You did nothing wrong.”*

If you’re religious or spiritual, you can add:

*“Jesus sees you. You are held in Love.”*

This is how we begin to **re-parent** the inner child with softness instead of shame.

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## **Journaling with the Inner Child**

Journaling can be a powerful way to connect with the child part of yourself after a regression episode. Try a dialogue format:

- **Adult You:** “Hey little one, I saw you came out today. What were you feeling?”
- **Little You:** “I was scared. I thought we were in trouble.”

- **Adult You:** “Thank you for speaking up. I’ve got us now.”

You can even let your inner child draw pictures, write letters, or choose stickers. This can build trust over time.

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## **Integration: Becoming Whole**

Integration means:

- Your adult self *acknowledges* the little self
- Your little self *trusts* the adult to show up
- Both parts exist in harmony—not in hiding

You may never fully stop regressing—and that’s okay. But you *can* develop a relationship where the child in you doesn’t have to take over in fear... because they know someone is finally there to listen, protect, and hold them.

Integration is a practice, not a finish line. It’s learning to say:

*“I am not two people—I am one person with many parts. And all of them matter.”*

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## **A Final Blessing**

May you learn to pause instead of panic.

May your adult self grow strong, not to suppress the child, but to hold them close.

May your inner child feel seen—not just managed.

And may every return to center be a return to love.

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## **Chapter 6: Support Systems**

***“Who will hold me when I can’t hold myself?”***

Involuntary age regression is often lonely. Many people who experience it don’t talk about it—not because they don’t want to, but because they fear judgment, misunderstanding, or even ridicule. We live in a world where neediness is often mocked, vulnerability is seen as weakness, and the idea of “becoming like a child” is treated with suspicion.

But you were never meant to navigate this alone.

Support is not a luxury—it's a **lifeline**. Whether that's a therapist, a caregiver, a friend, a faith community, or even a well-loved plush toy, building a network of safety is essential for healing and integration. In this chapter, we'll explore how to find (or create) the support systems that can walk with you—especially when you feel small.

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## Therapy and Professional Support

If you experience involuntary regression regularly—especially if it interferes with daily life—working with a **trauma-informed therapist** can be transformative. Look for someone trained in:

- Inner child work
- Parts work (like Internal Family Systems)
- Somatic experiencing
- Dissociation and grounding
- PTSD or C-PTSD

Therapists can help you:

- Understand your triggers
- Develop gentle coping tools
- Build communication between adult and child parts
- Learn to soothe yourself with compassion

You are not “too much” for therapy. You deserve someone who sees the whole you and affirms: *“Of course this happened. Let's figure out what you need.”*

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## Telling Trusted Friends or Partners

Coming out about your regression can feel like coming out all over again. It's intimate, scary, and uncertain. But sometimes, sharing this part of yourself with the right person can bring deep connection.

You might say:

“There's something I experience sometimes, especially when I'm overwhelmed or triggered. I go into a younger state of mind—like a child version of myself comes forward. It's not something I do on purpose. It's part of how I've survived.”

Be clear about what you *do* and *don't* need. For example:

- “You don't have to fix it, just sit with me if I'm quiet.”

- “Please don’t laugh or call it cute—it’s not play for me.”
- “It helps if you use a soft tone and remind me I’m safe.”

If they respond with kindness, you may have just built a bridge your little self never knew could exist.

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## Caregiver Dynamics (Non-Kink, Comfort-Based)

Some people find it helpful to form **caregiver/little** dynamics that are *not sexual*, but purely nurturing and supportive. This could be a friend, partner, or community member who:

- Checks in with your “little” self
- Offers affirming words or sensory tools
- Helps you ground when you’re regressed
- Provides structure or calming routines

This is especially helpful if you struggle to meet your needs alone. A good caregiver doesn’t infantilize you—they respect you and your inner child as worthy of dignity and care.

If you are in a romantic or platonic relationship, you might even create a **regression care plan** together—so your partner knows what to expect and how to support you without feeling overwhelmed.

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## Spiritual and Community Support

If you belong to a spiritual or religious community, it may be worth exploring how your faith can support this journey. Look for:

- Clergy or chaplains trained in trauma or inner healing
- Support groups (especially queer-affirming or neurodivergent-affirming spaces)
- Online communities that welcome childlike parts without shame

In the **Franciscan Clarean** tradition, we believe the child within is sacred—not something to grow out of, but something to grow with. We see Jesus not only welcoming the little children—but calling *all of us* to reclaim childlike trust, wonder, and softness.

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”  
—Matthew 18:5

That includes the child inside you.

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## Online Communities (With Caution)

There are online spaces that welcome regressors—both voluntary and involuntary. These can be powerful sources of solidarity, advice, and gentle connection. Look for:

- Age regression support groups (non-sexual, trauma-informed)
- C-PTSD or DID/OSDD communities that honor inner child work
- Queer and neurodivergent communities that affirm softness and regression

**But use caution.** Not all spaces are safe, respectful, or appropriate. If a group is focused on infantilization or kink, and that's not your experience, *you don't have to stay*. You have the right to protect your story and seek out people who see regression as part of healing—not performance.

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### When You Have No One

Sometimes, the people you need just aren't there yet. You may feel isolated, especially if you're still coming to terms with this part of yourself. In these moments:

- Write letters to your inner child
- Record voice notes to yourself saying "You're safe now"
- Light a candle and imagine the loving gaze of someone who sees your whole self—past, present, and future
- Remember: *you are not wrong for needing support*—you are worthy of it

You are not alone. This book is one voice among many saying:

**Your regression does not disqualify you from love. It makes your healing even more holy.**

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## Chapter 7: The Spirit of the Child: Faith and Regression

***"Let the little children come to me..."***

*What if one of those children... is you?*

In a world that worships strength, independence, and competence, involuntary age regression can feel like a spiritual failure. You may wonder: *How can I be so weak? So vulnerable? So small?* But scripture tells a different story. The sacred is not reserved for the self-assured and self-contained. In fact, Jesus says the kingdom belongs to the little ones.

This chapter is for those who want to explore the **spiritual meaning of regression**. Whether you're a Christian mystic, a Franciscan soul, a trauma survivor with questions about God, or someone rebuilding faith from the ruins, this chapter is an invitation: not to fix your regression, but to **find God in it**.

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## ✨ **Becoming Like a Child**

In Matthew 18:3, Jesus says:

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

He wasn't speaking to children. He was speaking to adults—to disciples, to religious insiders. And he wasn't saying, “Become naive” or “Become helpless.” He was inviting them to return to:

- Wonder
- Trust
- Vulnerability
- Receptivity

Involuntary regression brings us to those very states—*not by choice*, but through the raw honesty of trauma and survival. What if that space isn't a spiritual weakness, but a *sacred threshold*?

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## 🌸 **The Inner Child Is a Temple**

In many contemplative traditions, the “inner child” is not just a psychological part—it is the **wounded heart of the soul**, the most tender place where God can dwell.

When we regress, we meet the child who was hurt, overlooked, silenced, or shamed. But we also meet the part of ourselves that:

- Still longs for connection
- Still trusts, even after betrayal
- Still hopes for rescue
- Still desires to be held

That is not weakness. That is divine resilience.

Your inner child is not in the way of your spirituality. She *is* the way.

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## **Francis and Clare: Lovers of the Childlike**

St. Francis of Assisi was often called a *fool for Christ*—not because he was foolish, but because he abandoned the armor of adulthood. He sang to the birds, wept in caves, begged for bread, and danced barefoot in the streets. He became *small* so he could be *free*.

Clare, too, chose a life of radical dependence—not on humans, but on Love. In the Monastery of San Damiano, she created space for sacred simplicity, tenderness, and quiet trust.

Their spirituality echoes this truth:

**To become like a child is to open yourself fully to divine love.**

So when your regression makes you feel like you're failing at faith, remember Francis, dancing with joy, and Clare, cradling her soul like a sleeping child. You are not off course—you are walking with saints.

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## **Regression as Prayer**

You don't have to say formal prayers to be close to God. In moments of regression, your **very body becomes the prayer**.

- Tears are prayers.
- Curling up in a blanket is prayer.
- Saying “I’m scared” is a prayer.
- Whispering “Help me” is holy.

The child within you has always known how to pray: by longing, by reaching, by weeping without words. And in every one of those moments, God is not distant. God is right there, closer than your breath, saying,

*“I see you. I’ve always seen you. You’re not bad. You’re not broken. You are my beloved child.”*

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## **Creating Sacred Spaces for Your Regressed Self**

You can make space for your inner child to meet the divine in daily life:

- Light a candle and imagine God sitting with you, gently rocking you in their arms
- Read Psalm 131: *“I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother...”*
- Draw, color, or build something childlike—offering it as a sacred act

- Sit in silence and imagine Jesus saying to your regressed self:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* (Matthew 11:28)

This isn't playacting. This is **healing worship**. This is reclaiming the part of you that the world tried to shame—and placing her tenderly in the arms of Love.

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### A Blessing for the Inner Child

May the God who made you see the child within you with delight.  
May Jesus, who welcomed the little ones, welcome your regression with tenderness.  
May the Spirit, who groans with you in silence, hold the tears you cannot name.  
And may you know this, always and always:  
**You are a beloved child of God—even when you feel small. Especially then.**

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## Chapter 8: Becoming One: Integration and Growth

***“I don’t want to fight with myself anymore.”***

There comes a point in every healing journey when the question shifts from *“How do I get rid of this?”* to *“How do I live with this—peacefully, gently, and with grace?”* For those of us who experience involuntary age regression, this shift is sacred.

This final chapter is about **integration**—not “fixing” or “curing” regression, but weaving your inner child and adult self into a relationship of love, trust, and collaboration. Because you are not broken. You are becoming whole.

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### Integration Is Not Erasure

Integration doesn't mean the child disappears. It means they don't have to scream to be heard anymore.

You don't need to banish your regressed self. You need to build a life where **both parts of you have space to breathe**:

- The adult who drives, works, and navigates the world

- The child who cries, clings, colors, and curls up

Neither is a mistake. Both carry wisdom. Both deserve kindness.

Integration is when they stop fighting—and start talking.

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## From Reaction to Relationship

In the early stages, regression can feel like a hijacking. One moment you're fine; the next, you're gone. But over time, with compassion and practice, something miraculous begins to happen:

You learn to **notice** the early signs.

You begin to **pause** and ask, "What's going on?"

You start to **dialogue**—even internally.

And eventually, your inner child learns to *trust you to show up*.

This is a shift from involuntary reaction to intentional relationship. You become the grown-up your child self never had. You don't silence them—you **stay with them**.

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## Internal Dialogues: Building Trust

Integration often begins with inner conversation. Here's what it can look like:

**Adult You:** "Hey, I feel you getting scared. I'm here."

**Child You:** "Don't leave me. I don't want to be alone."

**Adult You:** "You're not alone. I'm staying. We're okay."

**Child You:** "Can we have cocoa and the soft blanket?"

**Adult You:** "Absolutely. Let's take care of us."

This is real work. Holy work. Lifelong work. And every time you respond instead of repress, you are healing a wound that might have been open for decades.

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## Tools for Living an Integrated Life

### 1. Daily Check-ins

Set aside a moment each day to ask: "*How is my little one today?*" You may journal, draw, or light a candle. The point is presence.

## 2. Integration Rituals

Develop ways to transition between adult and child states. A song, a prayer, a soft object you carry. These help you move gently between parts.

## 3. Safe Containers

Create times and places where regression is welcome—so it doesn’t spill out under pressure. Think of it as giving your inner child “recess,” so they don’t interrupt class.

## 4. Boundaries With Compassion

Integration doesn’t mean giving in to every impulse. It means setting limits with love. You can say to your inner child: *“I hear that you want to scream, but we’re in public. Let’s find a safe place together.”*

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## Growing Up Together

The goal of integration isn’t to “outgrow” your regression. It’s to **grow up together**—to become a whole, vibrant self that includes, rather than excludes, your younger parts.

Over time, you may notice:

- Your regressions become gentler, shorter, or less overwhelming
- You recover more quickly and with more grace
- You feel less ashamed and more connected
- You begin to love yourself in ways you never thought possible

That’s what healing is. Not perfection. Not the erasure of your past. But the full embrace of your present self.

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## Final Blessing: You Are Already Whole

You were never meant to be one or the other.  
You are the child and the grown-up.  
The crier and the comforter.  
The one who hid and the one who now steps forward.

This book is not a goodbye—it’s a beginning.

A beginning of tenderness.  
A beginning of trust.  
A beginning of integration.  
A beginning of love that holds you when you feel small...  
...and still calls you *beloved*.

May you walk forward in wholeness.  
May your inner child dance freely.  
May your adult self protect her fiercely.  
And may you know, deep in your bones:  
**You are not broken. You are becoming one.**

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## Conclusion: The Small Self Is Still Sacred

*"It's not about growing out of it.  
It's about growing with it."*

You made it. Page by page, step by step, breath by breath—you stayed with your little self long enough to listen. And that, dear one, is a radical act of love.

We began this journey with a simple truth: **regression happens**. It's not always beautiful. It's rarely convenient. But it is real. It is honest. And most importantly, it is a call to **compassion**—not just from others, but from yourself.

Maybe you came here to fix something.  
Maybe you came here to understand.  
Maybe you came here hoping you weren't alone.

I hope you leave knowing this:  
**You are not alone. You never were.**

Involuntary age regression isn't weakness.  
It isn't immaturity.  
It isn't failure.

It's a part of your story. And that story is still being written—with tenderness, courage, and grace.

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### 💛 Living Lightly with Your Inner Child

This journey isn't about being perfect. It's about being present. There will still be days when you regress unexpectedly. When the tears come too fast. When the blanket is your best friend. When you need help and can't explain why.

That's okay.

Your job is not to erase your little self.

Your job is to **hold her close**, whisper to her, “*You’re safe now*,” and mean it.

And the more you do, the more your inner world becomes a place of integration, not fragmentation. Trust, not terror. Belonging, not abandonment.

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## For Every Small, Sacred Self

To every reader who knows what it’s like to feel too little for this world:

Your bigness is not the measure of your worth.

Your capacity is not the measure of your goodness.

Your softness is not the measure of your success.

You are loved—when you feel grown.

You are loved—when you feel five.

You are loved—when you can’t say anything at all.

Let no one tell you otherwise. Not society. Not religion. Not shame.

And certainly not the voice in your head that still echoes an old pain.

You are loved. You are whole. You are enough.

**Even when you feel small. Especially then.**

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With all tenderness,

**Sister Abigail Hester, OFC**

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## About the Author

**Sister Abigail Hester, OFC** is a queer, transgender Christian nun, spiritual caregiver, and the founder of the *Order of Franciscan Clareans*, a new monastic movement rooted in radical love, sacred simplicity, and justice for all people—especially those at the margins. A survivor of trauma and a lifelong mystic, Sister Abigail blends her lived experience with the deep wisdom of queer theology, liberation spirituality, contemplative practice, and psychological insight.

She writes with honesty, tenderness, and a prophetic voice—inviting readers to embrace their whole selves, including the wounded and regressed parts we are so often taught to hide. Her

ministry centers the sacredness of the inner child, the power of spiritual embodiment, and the call to belong in a world that too often shames our softness.

Sister Abigail is also the author of *Little Girl, Arise: A Transgender Christian Manifesto*, *The Table of Success: A Franciscan Clarean Guide to Health and Wellness*, and numerous sermons, devotionals, and commentaries. She teaches, writes, and ministers online at:

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