



10 Tips for Dealing with “Systems Overload”

Try these ideas when you or your child is bombarded with lots of stimulus, information, demands, or requests all at the same time. (This tends to shut down the “executive function” thinking in your brain, making it hard to make good decisions or even to move forward with what you need to do.) These ideas can help you “refresh” or “reboot” your thinking—or help another family member do the same.

1. Don't give (or ask for) a whole bunch of instructions for the whole task at hand. Break the steps down. Give instructions just one step at a time.
2. Find a place without distractions that only add to the “incoming traffic.” It may mean going to a quiet place where it's easier to focus.
3. Avoid setting off “emotional triggers” that add to the stress and flood the system. These include blaming the person for the situation, challenging them just to work harder to avoid punishment, or reminding them of all the other times things went wrong or they weren't successful.
4. Pause, take deep breaths, take a break, slow down, and get away from the action for a bit. Find ways to calm yourself, rather than just building up frustration or stress.
5. Turn off television, video games, music, or smartphones. The additional noise, beeps, and images distract you, adding to information and stimulation overload.
6. Pause, step back, and look at the big picture. If, for example, your child has a big project to plan for, talk through the steps: When is the project due? What materials do you need? How many hours will it take to complete? Organize the different pieces so you can see them more clearly. Then identify the one or two you need to focus on first, and set the others aside.
7. Brainstorm with someone you trust about options you have for sorting out the “incoming data” or information. How might you think about it differently?
8. Talk about what's going on inside your head—what you're thinking and feeling. This helps you make conscious decisions, rather than just running on autopilot.
9. Move around. Getting heart rates up increases blood flow to the brain, and being active also reduces stress. Running, swimming, basketball, dance, martial arts, yoga, or other physical activity can all help reboot your brainpower.
10. Suggest a bike ride, game, playing music, cooking, or some other activity that you enjoy doing together. Just relaxing can give your brain a chance to reboot and be ready to tackle the challenging tasks.

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