

# Overwhelmed Mom's Rescue Kit

## Go From Frantic Activity to Focused Action in 7 Steps

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Let's cut to the chase. If you're reading this, something like this might be going on for you:

*There's way too much to do and I don't have nearly enough time.*

*I have so much to do I don't even know where to begin.*

*I'm running around like a maniac, but I'm not getting anything done.*

These are the voices of overwhelm.

And it's not just 'all in your head.' Overwhelm happens in your body as well. It's the shallow breathing, the frantic activity, or the inability to move at all.

When we're in overwhelm, it's like our whole system is in a state of emergency. It *really is* hard to think because our nervous systems react as if there is a tiger about to eat us. The range of options gets narrowed down to the basics: fight, flight or freeze. Executive functions like rational decision-making and long range planning go right out the window.

So it's no wonder we can't think, can't move and can't get anything done.

At this point, it doesn't really matter how you got into this soup, the point is you're there and **you need help**. Like yesterday.

The good news is, **you got it**. This workbook is designed to work *with* your neurobiology so that you can calm the state of emergency, move out of overwhelm and start taking focused action. If you can talk yourself into sitting down for half an hour or so with this workbook, by the time you're done, you'll be breathing a little easier, you'll know exactly what you need to do and when you're going to do it. Best of all, you can use all that energy that's been generated by the state of emergency to get stuff done.

**Ready? Print these pages, grab a pen and let's get started! Download the audio and I'll walk you through the process.**

## Step 1: Slow it down

Tuning into your actual physical, emotional and mental experience is the first step in releasing yourself from overwhelm. The idea here is slow down long enough to *just notice* what you are actually experiencing. Just *notice* without judgment, without trying to make it different. If it changes, fine. Simply notice this as well.

When I check in with my breathing I notice:

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As I scan my body for areas of tightness or tension, I find:

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If I watched a video of myself right now I would see:

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Accompanying these physical sensations you'll find some emotions (i.e. fear, anxiety, anger, numbness, etc.). Allow yourself to notice without judgment and without trying to MAKE them go away or change. When I allow myself to feel my emotions, I feel:

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What thoughts accompany these emotions? For instance, if you notice fear, what exactly are you afraid of? If you notice anger, who are you angry at? What are you angry about? Spend some time here really noticing and articulating the thoughts spinning around in your head.

When I listen to the voices in my head, I hear:

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Once you have these free-floating thoughts down in black and white, ask each one, "Is this true? What would be more true?" (For instance, one thought might be, "If I don't get this article finished, my editor is going to kill me." Obviously not true. A truer thought is "If I miss my deadline, the editor will be crunched, the layout person might be crunched and worst case, the article won't run." )

Thought 1:

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Thought 2:

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Thought 3:

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If you need more room- please turn this page over and continue on the back.

*Overwhelm says, "OMG, OMG, OMG! I can't do it, there's just no way, terrible things are going to happen... Gaaaaahhhh!!!!*

*Slowing down says, "Even if there's no possible way I can do it all, I can still breathe. Even if there are real consequences to not getting something (or everything) done, the real consequences are very different from my worst-case scenarios."*

## Step 2: Write it down (the brain dump)

Using the back of this page, a fresh sheet of notebook paper, or whatever decent sized piece of paper you have handy make a list. A long list.

A post-it is not going to cut it, because I want you to write down *everything* that's spinning around in your head. All the things to do, people to call, errands to run, emails to send, household tasks, whatever is on your plate right now, write it down. Leave yourself some room because some of these items are going to expand, but for now just get it all out of your brain and onto the page.

Go. Write. Now!

(I'll wait right here for you- no matter how long it takes.)

At this juncture, I often notice that some of the things I think I "HAVE" to do come from unexamined expectations that I have of myself, or that I imagine others have of me. Is there anything like this on your list? Would you be willing to consider letting these go for now? Is there anything else on the list that you would be willing to let go for now?

If so, just cross it off your list. I bet that feels good!

*Overwhelm says, "There's way too much, I can't even think of all the things I have to do, I'll never get it all done."*

*Writing it down says, "No matter how many pieces of paper it takes to write it all down, my list is not really infinite."*

## Step 3: Break it down

Once you've identified the essential items on your list, let's break it down. Chances are, many of the things you listed above are multi-step projects.

For instance I have "PTA agenda" on my list. But this is not a single action.

Here's how I'd break this one down:

- Call/email admin re PTO agenda items
- Call/email teacher rep re PTO agenda items
- Call/email parent reps re PTO agenda items
- Write agenda
- Photocopy agenda
- Bring agenda to meeting Fri.

It may seem kind of ridiculous to write down "bring agenda to meeting" but when I'm in overwhelm, my brain simply isn't functioning at normal capacity. This is precisely when I space out on what seems like a no-brainer when I'm not overwhelmed.

Now it's your turn. Take your list from Step 2 and when you find an item that has more than one piece, break it down into its smallest action steps. Your list will get longer- but it's OK!

Go. Now. Break it Down!

*Overwhelm says, "There's just too much to do. These projects are too big."*

*Breaking it down says, "Even if I can't do a whole big project, I can do one little thing."*

## Step 4: Make a Plan

With your fine-grained list in front of you, you can identify your deadlines for each task. You can see which steps must come first, and which come later. You can see which items have time constraints (i.e. business hours, or after the kids are in bed) and which are more flexible. You can see what you need to be at home to do, and where you need to go for the rest.

Now- go grab your calendar. If you don't have a calendar, no worries- just grab some paper and write the next few days across the top with plenty of room to write underneath. Make sure your regular commitments and any appointments, etc. are already penciled in so you know when you have time available for the tasks on your list.

With your master list in hand, figure out (at least roughly) when you're going to do each of the things on your list. For instance, if you know you're doing carpool on Tuesday morning, you can plan to drop off the picture order form, sign the card for the teacher and check on the PTA fundraiser. After you drop the kid off at orchestra rehearsal, you can run to pick up the drycleaning and get a birthday card for your niece. You get the idea.

Do it. Grab your master list and make a plan.

*Overwhelm says, "I can't do it all and I don't even know where to start."*

*Making a plan says, "Even if I can't do it all, at least I have a plan."*

## Step 5: Make Requests

Sometimes when we're in overwhelm mode, people actually offer to help. Your husband, a colleague, a friend notices that you're struggling to keep your head above water and asks if there's anything they can do.

But there's a problem. Actually, there are two problems- one internal and one external.

The internal problem is that whether we like to admit it or not, we are often not willing to accept help. It might be because some of us tend to be a little control freaky. Or because we think if we can't do it all, it means we're a failure. And, achievers that we are, we will NOT fail! This makes us unwilling to get help.

The external problem is that when everything is swimming inside your head, there's no way you could delegate anything (even if you wanted to!)

When you break down each larger project into its micro actions, you might find at least a few that could be outsourced IF you are willing. You might not want to have someone else pick out the card for your niece, but maybe your husband could drop the card in the office mail. Could your teen pick up the dry-cleaning on her way home from school? Can you arrange a play-date or kid swap to buy you an extra hour or two?

Which tasks on your master list might you be willing to delegate/ask for help with?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Who could you ask?

When will you make these requests?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Hint- put making these requests on your master list!

*Overwhelm says, "There's no way I can do this all by myself."*

*Making requests says, "Even though there's a lot to do, I don't have to do it all by myself. There's a small chance I'm not in this alone."*

Sometimes you see that even with help, it just ain't gonna happen. Unless you give up sleeping for three days (which I don't recommend!) there are simply not enough hours in the day to get it all done. So what now?

## Step 6: Make adjustments

Here you have to make some hard choices. Identify which of your tasks have 'hard' deadlines and which are softer. What can you change, rearrange, reschedule? What can't you?

Given the realistic consequences (not the worst case scenarios we imagine when in the grip of overwhelm), what are you going to let go of? What can you give yourself permission to NOT do?

I lovingly give myself permission to drop the following (for now):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What do you need to do for this to go as gracefully as possible? Which appointments do you need to reschedule? What conversations do you need to have? What commitments do you need to re-negotiate? Who do you need to call, email, etc? When will you make the necessary arrangements?

Who do I need to connect with?

When/how will you do this?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Sometimes the hardest person to face is ourselves. Others are much more willing to negotiate, make accommodations, forgive our 'failures' than we are. And it's important to recognize that we sometimes need to take time to make peace with ourselves.

What do you need to make peace with yourself about these tasks?

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*Overwhelm says, "Terrible things are going to happen if I don't do every last thing on my list."  
Making adjustments says, "It looks like I really can't do everything. And even if I can't do everything I wanted to do, it's going to be OK."*

## Step 7: Make it Happen!

Pick one thing- one little tiny thing and just do it.

Cross it off your list.

Rinse and repeat.

Taking action, no matter how small gets you out of the 'freeze' response that overwhelm can induce.

Taking action is empowering, and with your list in hand, you're not just spinning your wheels, you're making progress. One small action leads to another, and another, and another. Before you know it, you're cranking through your list.

*Overwhelm says, "I can't do it all."*

*Taking action says, "Even if I can't do it all, at least I can do this one little thing... and this one little thing... and this one little thing..."*

## Congratulations!

If you've made it this far, I hope you're breathing a little easier, stopped the doomsday scenarios running through your head, made a plan, and maybe even ticked one or two things off your list.

Living in overwhelm is like living in a 'state of emergency.' And this takes an incredible amount of energy. When you redirect that energy from the fight or flight response into focused action, you just might be amazed at what you can accomplish.

I didn't want to mention it earlier, because there's nothing more annoying when you're in the grip of overwhelm than someone telling you all the things you could/should have done so as not to find yourself in this situation. BUT....Regular practice of each of these steps will help stop overwhelm before it gets out of control. Before you get into total freak out mode try one or more of the following:

Slow it down

Write it down

Break it down

Make a plan

Make requests

Make adjustments

Make it happen

*If you find yourself living in overwhelm most of the time, I can help. Shoot at email to Liz@dreamgardencoaching.com and we'll set up a complimentary "Out from Under Overwhelm" session. Life is more fun when you're "Out from Under!"*