

The Overwhelm Reset Guide

A simple, practical guide to identifying what is causing overwhelm, reducing the immediate pressure, and taking one manageable step forward.

When everything feels like too much, you do not have to solve everything at once.

Practical coaching systems designed for the way your brain works.

How to Use This Guide

Overwhelm can make ordinary tasks feel impossible. When your brain is trying to track too many demands at once, you may freeze, avoid, jump between tasks, or feel like you need to fix everything immediately.

This guide is a **reset process**: identify what is creating pressure, reduce what you can, and choose one manageable next step.

The goal is not to get everything done. **The goal is to regain enough control to move forward.**

Important note

This guide is educational and is not a diagnosis or medical treatment. If overwhelm is severe, persistent, or significantly interferes with your life, consider seeking help from an appropriately qualified professional.

1. What Is Overwhelm?

Overwhelm happens when the demands placed on your attention, time, energy, or emotions feel greater than your current capacity to manage them.

It can show up as:

- A long mental list that never seems to stop.
- Difficulty deciding what to do first.
- Starting several things but finishing none.
- Avoiding tasks because you do not know where to begin.
- Feeling physically or mentally tense.
- Losing track of time.
- Irritability or emotional shutdown.
- Thinking, "I have to do all of this right now."

Overwhelm is often made worse by treating everything as equally urgent. A useful reset is to separate what is truly urgent from what merely feels urgent.

Try this reframe

"I do not need to solve my whole life today. I need to identify what matters right now."

2. Step One: Identify What Is Causing the Overwhelm

Before trying to fix anything, identify the source of the pressure. Overwhelm often feels like one giant problem when it is actually several smaller problems stacked together.

Ask yourself:

- What am I worried about right now?
- What am I trying to remember?
- What decisions am I avoiding?
- What deadlines are approaching?
- What unfinished tasks are taking up mental space?
- Is there something emotional I am trying not to think about?
- Am I tired, hungry, overstimulated, or running low on capacity?

Quick brain dump

Write down everything competing for your attention. Do not organize it or judge it. Just get it out of your head.

What is on my mind?
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3. Step Two: Reduce the Immediate Pressure

Once everything is visible, resist the urge to tackle it all. First, reduce the load.

NOW

Needs attention today or within the next few hours.

SOON

Important, but does not need to happen right now.

LATER

Can be scheduled for another day.

NOT NOW

Optional, unnecessary, or something you can consciously set aside.

Then ask:

- What can I postpone?
- What can I delegate, simplify, or do less perfectly?
- What can I remove entirely?

Reducing your workload is a legitimate strategy. You do not always need a better system. Sometimes you need fewer demands.

4. Step Three: Choose One Manageable Step

The next step should be small enough that you can begin without needing a burst of motivation.

Instead of:

- “Clean the house.”
- “Deal with my finances.”
- “Get organized.”
- “Finish the project.”

Try:

- “Put the dishes in the sink.”
- “Open the bank statement.”
- “Clear one corner of the desk.”
- “Open the project file and write the next sentence.”

A good next step is **specific, physical, and observable**. If you cannot picture yourself doing it, it may still be too vague.

The 5-minute reset

Set a timer for five minutes. Work only on your chosen next step. When the timer ends, you may stop. Continuing is optional.

5. The Overwhelm Reset: A Five-Step Process

1. STOP

Pause. Do not immediately react to every demand.

2. EMPTY YOUR HEAD

Write down what is competing for your attention.

3. REDUCE

Postpone, simplify, delegate, or remove what does not need attention now.

4. CHOOSE

Pick one manageable next action.

5. START

Set a short timer and begin.

This process can take five minutes or less. It is deliberately simple so it is available when your brain is overloaded.

MY RESET	
What is causing pressure?	_____
What can wait?	_____
My one next step:	_____
I will start at:	_____ For: _____ minutes

6. What to Do When You Freeze

Sometimes overwhelm produces **freeze**. You may stare at a task, scroll, pace, avoid opening the email, or tell yourself you will deal with it later.

When that happens, make the goal smaller—not bigger.

- Stand up.
- Take one slow breath.
- Put the item you need in front of you.
- Open the document, email, or application.
- Read only the first line.
- Write one sentence.
- Set a two-minute timer.
- Ask someone to sit with you or check in with you.

Ask: **“What is the smallest action that counts as starting?”**

Starting is not the same as finishing. You are allowed to separate those two jobs.

7. Preventing the Next Overwhelm Spiral

Once you have reset, use the calmer moment to make the next episode less likely.

- Capture tasks in one trusted place.
- Use your calendar for commitments, not just a to-do list.
- Limit your daily priorities.
- Break recurring tasks into routines.
- Prepare for predictable difficult times of day.
- Leave buffer time between commitments.
- Review unfinished tasks instead of carrying them mentally.
- Build recovery time into demanding days.

Watch for these warning signs:

- You are saying yes to everything.
- Your list keeps growing but nothing gets scheduled.
- You are constantly switching tasks.
- You are staying up late because the day felt unproductive.
- You are avoiding a task because it has become emotionally loaded.
- Small problems are beginning to feel enormous.

The earlier you notice the pattern, the easier it is to reset.

8. Your Personal Overwhelm Reset Card

Keep this page somewhere easy to find. Use it before overwhelm turns into a full shutdown.

WHEN I FEEL OVERWHELMED:
■ STOP — Pause before reacting.
■ DUMP — Write down everything competing for attention.
■ SORT — What is NOW, SOON, LATER, or NOT NOW?
■ REDUCE — What can I postpone, simplify, delegate, or remove?
■ CHOOSE — What is one manageable next action?
■ START — Set a 5-minute timer and begin.
■ RESET — Decide what the next step is after the timer.

My reminder to myself:

9. When Coaching May Help

Sometimes overwhelm is not caused by one unusually busy day. It is a recurring pattern: difficulty prioritizing, starting tasks, maintaining routines, managing competing demands, or recovering after plans change.

Coaching can provide a structured space to identify patterns creating friction, develop practical systems, practice them in real life, and adjust them when they do not work.

A coaching relationship may focus on:

- Clarifying what matters most.
- Creating realistic routines.
- Breaking goals into manageable actions.
- Building accountability.
- Reducing unnecessary friction.
- Finding strategies that fit your actual life.
- Reviewing setbacks without turning them into self-criticism.

The objective is not to eliminate every difficult day. It is to make difficult days **more manageable** and recovery **more predictable**.

You Don't Have to Do Everything at Once

When life feels overwhelming, the answer is rarely to push harder on every task simultaneously. Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is pause, reduce the pressure, and take one manageable step.

Steve Rubin Coaching helps neurodivergent adults build confidence, daily-life organization, and greater independence through practical coaching systems designed for the way their brain works.

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Practical coaching. Real-life systems. Greater independence.