

A Survival Guide for Introverts

The Introvert Advantage, by Marti Olsen Laney

Reducing “Overwhelm”

When we are overstimulated and overwhelmed, we can't think, we can't be creative, and we aren't very productive. Learning ways to calm yourself down is vital.

1. Estimate your energy level each day, and adjust your day/week/life in order to maintain a balance of supply and demand.

- What is my mental energy level? Alert? Fussy? Brain dead?
- What is my body energy level? Pooped? Pert? Peppy?
- Do I feel overstimulated or understimulated?
- What do I have to do today? What is optional?
- Can I add anything if I have more energy?
- Can I put off anything if I'm running on low fuel or empty?
- Can I put extra breaks in my schedule?
- Do I need time alone?
- What kind of alone time do I need (reading, napping, staring out the window, sitting quietly inside, listening to music, watching television)?
- Could I benefit from some external stimulation (seeing friends, going to a museum)?
- What do I need today?

2. Figure out what's going on in your body.

Describe how you are feeling physically. The more you can describe to yourself or someone else what is happening in your body, the more you can learn how to help yourself.

3. Breathe and drink some water.

Most people hold their breath when they are in an overstimulated condition. Take a deep breath and blow it out. Drink a glass of ice water. Even mild dehydration affects concentration, thinking, metabolism, and the flow of neurotransmitters. Water stimulates increased energy production throughout your body and increases alertness in your brain and senses.

4. Notice what you're saying to yourself in your head.

Pay attention to the voice in your head, and listen to what it is saying. Learn to change it into a calming voice that can reduce your fears.

- I am just feeling anxious, but it will be okay.
- I am feeling tense. It doesn't mean something bad will happen. I will be okay.

5. Remember when....?

Remember other stressful situations you have handled. You have done it before, and you can do it again.

6. Give yourself a quick energy boost.

- Run cold water on your wrists, or alternate hot and cold water for 10 seconds each.
- Fill a small spray bottle with water, squeeze in a dash of lemon juice, and use it occasionally to mist your face.
- Stand up, and bend at the waist so your arms are dangling near the floor and you are looking at your knees. Relax and breathe for a few seconds, and then rise up slowly.
- Stand up, lift your chin slightly, bring your head forward, and nod slightly. Repeat several times during the day.
- Turn off the lights, and sit in the dark for a few minutes.
- Stare out a window, watch people, and let your mind wander.
- Sit down, close your eyes, put your head back, and think of a fun experience from your past.
- Buy a hot (or cold) neck wrap, put it in the microwave (or freezer), and apply it for 5 minutes on any area of your body where you feel tension.

7. Understand the “up” side of feeling overwhelmed.

Feeling overwhelmed is part of being Introverted. Don't criticize yourself, because it's one of your priceless qualities. Introverts take in lots of information, and their brains are very active.

Surviving at Work

How to Let Others Know You Are Participating at Meetings:

1. Relax before meetings by deep breathing for 5 minutes in a quiet, private place.
2. Try not to schedule too many meetings on the same day, and take breaks between meetings.
3. Say hello to and smile at others in the room as you enter, and say good-bye as you leave.
4. Find a strategic location to sit (near the door for a quick break) when you arrive.
5. Take notes to help you focus on your thoughts and reduce overload from the outside.
6. Use nonverbal signals like nods, eye contact, and smiles to let others know you are paying attention.
7. Say something. Ask a question, or restate what someone else said.
8. Get people's attention by giving an opening phrase in a firm voice: "I would like to add something...." or "My thought is...."
9. Give your thought a beginning, middle, and end.
10. If you know your thought is out of sync, say, "I want to add something to what you mentioned a few minutes ago."

11. Let people know you will continue to think about the topic: “I will give this some thought and let you know my reactions.”
12. Thank presenters, speakers, or department heads at the end of meetings.
13. Congratulate yourself if you speak, no matter what happens.
14. E-mail, jot a note, or send a memo with your comments the next day. Ask for feedback about your ideas: “What do you think?”

How to Blow Your Own Horn:

1. Remind yourself that if you share personal information with someone, you always have the right to end a chat or dodge a personal question.
2. Let your boss know what type of work, projects, and tasks are interesting to you.
3. Initiate a meeting yourself if you are working on a group project. Select the time, place, length, agenda, and participants.
4. Write a short article for the organization newsletter about an interest of yours.
5. Tell your boss about one of your successes: “I took care of the problem, and I will get the report to you tomorrow.”
6. Share personal information with others in an easy, relaxed way. For example, chat about your hobby while waiting to use the copier or fax machine.
7. Learn to accept a compliment to encourage others to acknowledge you and feel good about it: “Thank you,” or “I appreciate your telling me that.”
8. Give other people compliments and acknowledgment.
9. Volunteer to help at the organization picnic or to collect money for flowers for an ill co-worker so that others will see you as a team player.

How to Help Others Understand Your Pacing:

1. Have a sense of humor about your pacing.
2. Do tough assignments early in the day. Don't let them hang over you and waste energy.
3. Don't get flustered if something unexpected comes up. Take a few deep breaths before you proceed, and remind yourself that you can go back to working at your own speed after the crisis is over.
4. Express your emotional reaction occasionally: “I was excited to see your ideas. They are great.”
5. Tell others that when you are silent, you are reflecting. “That's a good point. I'm giving it some thought.”
6. Don't let yourself be insulted if the group walks ahead of you. Ask them to save you a seat.
7. Prepare a few comments (write them down) when you know a specific topic will come up, so that you can make a few quick remarks.
8. Let people know you are concerned with their project: “I have been thinking about your assignment, and I had a couple of ideas. If you would like, I could e-mail them to you.”
9. Negotiate deadlines by explaining to others why you need the time.
10. Ask others for feedback about your contributions.

Strategies for Handling Deadlines:

1. Write your deadline down on your calendar. Then divide your task into small sections. Figure out what you need to do by when to complete the project on time.
2. Write on your calendar what you need to accomplish each day. Set aside specific times for the project in your peak energy hours when possible.
3. Leave room in your schedule for unexpected work and interruptions.
4. Don't criticize yourself if you don't accomplish everything you planned on any given day. Divide the work into larger sections over the next few days, and keep at it.
5. Give yourself a reward for what you do. Buy a new book, see a movie, eat a cookie, play a video game, etc.

Tips for Making Presentations:

1. Accept speaker's anxiety (it happens to everyone).
2. Analyze your audience, and direct your talk to them.
3. Know your topic.
4. Practice until you feel comfortable.
5. In the week before your presentation, visualize an attentive audience and yourself feeling confident.
6. Find a few friendly faces when presenting, and look at them.
7. Speak a little louder than you normally do.
8. Use your natural humor.
9. Remember that every presentation doesn't need to be perfect.
10. Congratulate yourself when it's over!

How to Avoid Taking the Extrovert's Style Personally:

1. Stay calm and breathe.
2. Think ahead about possible objections to your arguments. State them, as well as your response to them, in your presentation.
3. Include the possible objections before others raise them.
4. Listen carefully if someone raises an unanticipated objection. Restate the objection, and ask if you have given an accurate summation to give you time to think.
5. Compliment the person in a general way if the objection is valid: "You're right. We need to figure out a way to address that angle."
6. Ask "How do you think we can come to a workable solution?" if objections continue.
7. Remember that you have valuable ideas and the right to disagree.

Dealing With Interruptions:

1. Put a clock sign on your door giving the time when you will next be available.
2. Create your own “Do Not Disturb” sign using humor. For example, add a cartoon or an image, like the statue of The Thinker.
3. Cover the chairs in your office with papers, or remove the extra chairs from your office.
4. Say, “I can’t see you now, but I’ll be free at 10:00 a.m. Would that work for you?”
5. Cut a meeting short by standing up and gradually moving toward the door. Say, “I’m sorry, I have a deadline, and I need to get back to work.”
6. Set a time limit for every conversation: “Let’s talk Thursday for 15 minutes. Is that enough time?”
7. Head off unexpected visitors by walking to the door of your cubicle or office and say that you were just on your way to another meeting or to the rest room: “We can chat on the way.”
8. Keep nodding but stop talking and occasionally look away or at your watch if you need to make a getaway.
9. Find a hideout to think (a conference room, the bathroom, or a quiet corner in the break room) when all else fails.

Dealing With Friends

1. Explain Introversion to your Extroverted friends to save hurt feelings. Explain that you may need to call or e-mail them when you feel energized, and ask them to not take it personally if they don’t hear from you for several weeks.
2. Explain Introversion to your Introverted friends, because they may not know much about their temperament.
3. Schedule lunch with a friend at least once every two weeks.
4. Invite a friend over from time to time, clearly stating the starting and stopping times.
5. Let go of any so-called friends who are negative.