

Predicting and Reducing Overload

Catch Overload Early

Remember the last time the child became overloaded. What occurred 15, 10, and 5 minutes before overload? Were there any warning signs? List overload warning signs he or she makes (e.g., starts to talk louder or faster or in a higher voice, gets stuck on something, hums, increases repetitive behaviors, becomes more impulsive, becomes more anxious, starts refusing to do things, clenches body):

1. _____
2. _____

List triggers that lead to overload (e.g., hunger, crowds, fatigue, too much talking, writing):

1. _____
2. _____

Defuse the Situation: What to Do

Remember the last time you were able to help the child avoid overload. What did you do that calmed him or her (e.g., steer to a quiet place, touch him or her, make a sign that cued him or her to calm down, use other visual cues, leave him or her alone)?

1. _____
2. _____

What coping strategies did the child use effectively (e.g., take deep breaths, distract self with a favorite activity, think of a favorite thing or place, ask for a hug)?

1. _____
2. _____

What did you do that helped you stay calm (e.g., breathe deeply, think of how much you love your child, think of a calming melody, look at the child and put yourself in his or her shoes)?

1. _____
2. _____

Defuse the Situation: *What Not to Do*

Once a child is overloaded, it is usually *not* helpful to:

1. *Talk.* Reasoning at this stage makes things worse. The child is unlikely to be able to process what is said. Learning cannot happen when a child is overloaded.
2. *Act impulsively.* If you don't know how to help, don't do anything. An escalation of your emotions will probably escalate the child.
3. *Rush.* It can take a long time to recover from overload. Some children need hours of downtime.

An experienced emergency room doctor training new doctors once said, "Don't just do something, stand there!" When things are not going well, it is hard for most of us to hold back, but that is how we observe what is happening and avoid making things worse than they already are.