



## Reaching Your Boiling Point

We all have a boiling point. Some of us reach it faster than others and some may take a very long time to reach it. Part of the battle is recognizing when you are getting to your boiling point and knowing what to do to stop it and recover.

### Emotional Flooding

The term for this reaction is called emotional flooding—when you are so overwhelmed with emotion that you feel as if you are spinning out of control. In this state, our bodies revert to a “fight or flight response.” This is our bodies’ safety system for reacting to danger and emotional flooding.

When we are in a “fight or flight response,” our bodies begin to release large amounts of adrenaline and cortisol (stress hormone). Our heart rate increases while our blood flow starts to move to the major muscle groups of the body.

This is also the time in which brain function leaves the frontal lobe (where logic is stored) and moves to the brain centers (where instinct and survival skills are held). So, when we are experiencing emotional flooding it is virtually impossible to think clearly or hear the other person. We are only reacting and trying to survive.

Here are some signs to help you recognize when you (and others) are flooded:

- You feel overwhelmed by your emotions.
- You feel like you are going to “lose it” and start yelling.
- You are crying and feel out of control.
- You would “rather be anywhere on the planet” other than in the same room with the other person.
- You desperately want the talking to stop.
- You really want to leave the situation.
- You are so upset that you “can’t stand to listen to one more word.”



### Taking a Break

When you recognize that you are emotionally flooded, take a break from others. Give yourself time to

relax and calm down. Again, you will not be able to resolve anything in this state and will most likely fall back on negative behaviors that can escalate the situation. It is perfectly okay to take a break and then come back to discuss the issue at another time.

Long before an emotionally flooded event occurs, you will need to make a plan to signal that a break is needed. Some families use a cue word such as “space” or “phone call.” Other families use non-verbal cues that they need a break such

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as a peace sign. Try not to use inappropriate hand gestures or banging—this will likely only create more flooding. Also, make a plan *before* the conflict occurs about how much time you will need for a break and how you will come back to the discussion.

### How Do You Calm Down?

When you are feeling tense and find yourself getting flooded, take a break, and calm down. Here are some suggestions:

- **Get control of your breathing.** When you are getting flooded, you will find yourself either holding your breath a lot or breathing shallowly. Change your breathing so it is even and take deep regular breaths. Take your time inhaling and exhaling.
- **Find areas of muscle tension in your body.**
  - First tense and then relax these muscle groups.
  - Examine your face, particularly your forehead and jaw.
  - Then examine your neck, shoulders, arms and back.
- **Let the tension flow out of each muscle group** and get them to feel heavy.
- **Let the tension flow out of each** (now heavy) muscle group and get that muscle group to feel warm.
- **Try focusing your attention on one calming vision or idea.** It can be a very specific place you go to that was once a very comforting place, like a room

or a beach. Imagine this place as vividly as you can as you calm yourself down.

Your break needs to last at least 30 minutes. This is the minimum amount of time it takes for your body to process all of the stress hormones that were released when you were emotionally flooded. Many parents say that they do not have time or the ability to take a break. But you can't afford not to. Taking a break is different for every person. Staying upset and continuing your daily tasks will be difficult and unhealthy for you and your family.

### Create and Plan for Relaxing Rituals

Have a few things that you do daily and weekly that help you relax. Take some time to think about creating daily and weekly relaxing rituals including possibly the following:

- Take a bath or shower
- Exercise: take a walk, do yoga, lift weights
- Go to the park
- Read
- Listen to music, meditate, or sit quietly
- Go out with a friend
- Work on a craft or building project
- Go for a drive
- Watch a movie

Make a plan by answering these questions:

- When will these rituals happen?
- What support do you need to make it happen?

Creating this plan will allow you to start in a relaxed state which will hopefully lessen your moments of emotional flooding. While it often doesn't seem like it, *everyone* has times of emotional flooding. Parents, especially, have a lot to deal with and sometimes we just need to take a step back.



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## Resources

- *The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated Chronically Inflexible Children*, by Ross W. Greene
- *99 Ways to Drive Your Child Sane*, by Brita St. Clair
- [Child Maltreatment](#), Department of Health and Human Services
- [Prevent Child Abuse America](#)
- [Before You Tie the Knot: Conflict Management and Resolution: Can We Agree?](#) (2005) University of Florida
- [Mindful Parenting](#)



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