



7 Ways to diminish Overwhelm

By Inner Life Coach Judy Keating

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Overwhelm has become a consistent state of being for many people. Just listen to conversations all around you. How often do you hear a co-worker, friend, or loved one say “I’m overwhelmed”?

According to **Dictionary.com**, “overwhelm is a verb (used with object)”, yet we have adopted it as a way to describe how we feel when we take on too much, don’t know where to turn or what to do next, and/or when we believe our world is crumbling and we are powerless to do anything about it. At least that is what I’ve experienced and seen with other people who sometimes are “overwhelmed”.

As someone who is consistently trying to improve my self-talk, using a word that is usually applied to an object to describe any part of me is something I want to avoid. So I came up with a list of seven ways to diminish overwhelm that have proven helpful time and time again.

BREATHE - Full in and out breaths. We live in a world of hurry, rush and have to. There really are very few absolute have tos- Believe it or not breathing is one of them and when we short change our bodies of much needed oxygen by hustling all the time (which results in shallow breathing) we literally are adding untold stress on our endocrine, cardiac and lymphatic systems, not to mention our brain. If you’re overwhelmed, stop, focus. Take five deep in and out breathes. Check in with how you feel. Do this practice every half hour until the overwhelm recedes.

UNPLUG - Do not go near your computer/ laptop, television, blackberry, cell-phone, email, voice mail, I-pad, facebook or any other device that gives you more input about anything. I know that seems unthinkable. Just do it, even if it’s only for 15 minutes at a time. While more time away is recommended, such as having hours every day where you are not receiving information, I believe

that small steps are always better. Then, if you want to become truly unfamiliar with overwhelm have days, weekends or times during a vacation where you do not go near those devices except in true emergencies.

QUIET - Silence...the absence of any noise. How often do you not have background noise in your life? I am not asking you to muffle your children, your pet or the sound of your own breathing. Just become aware how often you are without quiet. That alone can make anyone feel overwhelmed. Invite quiet in like you would an honored friend, often and with lovely anticipation. When you are alone in the car, don't turn on your radio or listen to that book on tape. Let silence ride with you. When you wake up in the morning, don't turn on the news right a way. At night when the kids have gone to bed, allow the stillness, do nothing, just be with it. Quiet is a daily soul nutrient in my book and it diminishes overwhelm every time.

PUT YOUR FEET ON THE EARTH - Yes, that does mean you have to go outside. Time in nature, even if you live in an urban area, grounds us. As nice as our homes and offices can be, actually spending time outdoors results in a calming sensation that permeates our being.

MOVE YOUR BODY - Take a walk, exercise, dance, swim, run. Just move. Moving the body helps to integrate information, clears the mind, and clarifies what is the next step out of overwhelm and into moving forward. What you do in the physical translates to the emotional and mental within you. Physically moving is nature's way of dispelling the flight or fight response that feels like overwhelm out of our bodies. If it has been a while since you moved a lot start slow, do what you can. Any body movement is good.

PRACTICE SAYING NO - A lot. I say a lot because if you are feeling overwhelmed much of the time, saying NO is a skill you need. Declining to take on something that is more than you can do right now is good self-care. Not to be confused with "letting someone down." Or "not being a good person" which are not good self-care and lying chi suckers to boot. "No" is a complete sentence. It requires no justification or explanation. Saying no diminishes overwhelm in it's tracks.

ASK YOURSELF “WHAT’S BENEATH THE OVERWHELM I’M FEELING?” - When you feel overwhelmed, what is going on inside you? It has been proven time and time again that what we sense outside of us, is a reflection of what is happening inside of us, sometimes that we are trying to avoid. Being willing to explore the emotions that may have triggered the overwhelm is a powerful antidote. Sometimes it may not be immediately clear. Stay with it. Use some of the other techniques mentioned above, take a walk, move your body, see what gets revealed, what you feel, or notice. Another helpful question is “what is this overwhelm trying to tell me?” At times when doing this exploration, it is helpful to have support from a loving family member or friend, as emotions may surface. This is an additional tool for diminishing overwhelm. Being willing to ask for help, and spending time with those we care about, helps us gain a new perspective and safety in our lives.



I am a life coach, author and group facilitator dedicated to assisting you get clear about what you want, who you are and who you want to become. I know coaching works because I have used it and had some great coaches, mentors and teachers along the way. Most importantly, I have learned to coach myself and I want to pass those skills on to you. – Judy Keating

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