

HOW TO STOP FEELING OVERWHELMED

Take control of your emotions

you are
stronger
than you
think

BY ELLY PRIOR

How to take control of your emotions

Coping with the immediate aftermath

If you'd come to see me for help and support with getting over of what's happened, the first thing I would do would be to tell you to be gentle with yourself. You need to soothe and calm yourself, and not to expect too much from yourself at first - and be your very own best friend.

You'll need to take things one step at a time. If all that's happened has come as a surprise, or even when you suspected something was about to happen, you've had a *shock* and you need to be very kind to yourself. Allow yourself time and understanding, and don't try to force yourself - or let anyone else tell you - to just '*get over it*', or think that you '*should* be over it by now'.

During a crisis, you need to give yourself at least three days to a couple of weeks to just settle down again, without pushing yourself. Coping with 'not coping' is the only realistic expectation for the immediate aftermath. That feeling of being out of control will slowly diminish.

In times of shock or trauma, your emotional brain takes control and 'thinking straight' takes the greatest amount of energy - it's like you're feeling knee-deep in the mud. Therefore it's best to avoid making life-changing decisions right now - if at all possible!

Can you just blank out what's happened?

The simple answer? I'm afraid not. Doing your best to just stop thinking about it all isn't going to work.

Have you ever noticed that the harder you try *not* to think about something, the more you inevitably think about it?

Therefore don't waste your precious energy on trying *not* to think about it.

But...

Don't go too far the other way either. You may well be tempted to spend all your time thinking about the lost love, nurturing every thought about him or her. Perhaps you're even devising imaginary (or real) plans to rekindle the love that never was, or that's now considered plain dead by him or her. I'm sure it won't come as a surprise that those ruminations won't help you much either.

Fortunately, this programme will lead you gently 'out of the woods' again.

Banish the old and build your strength

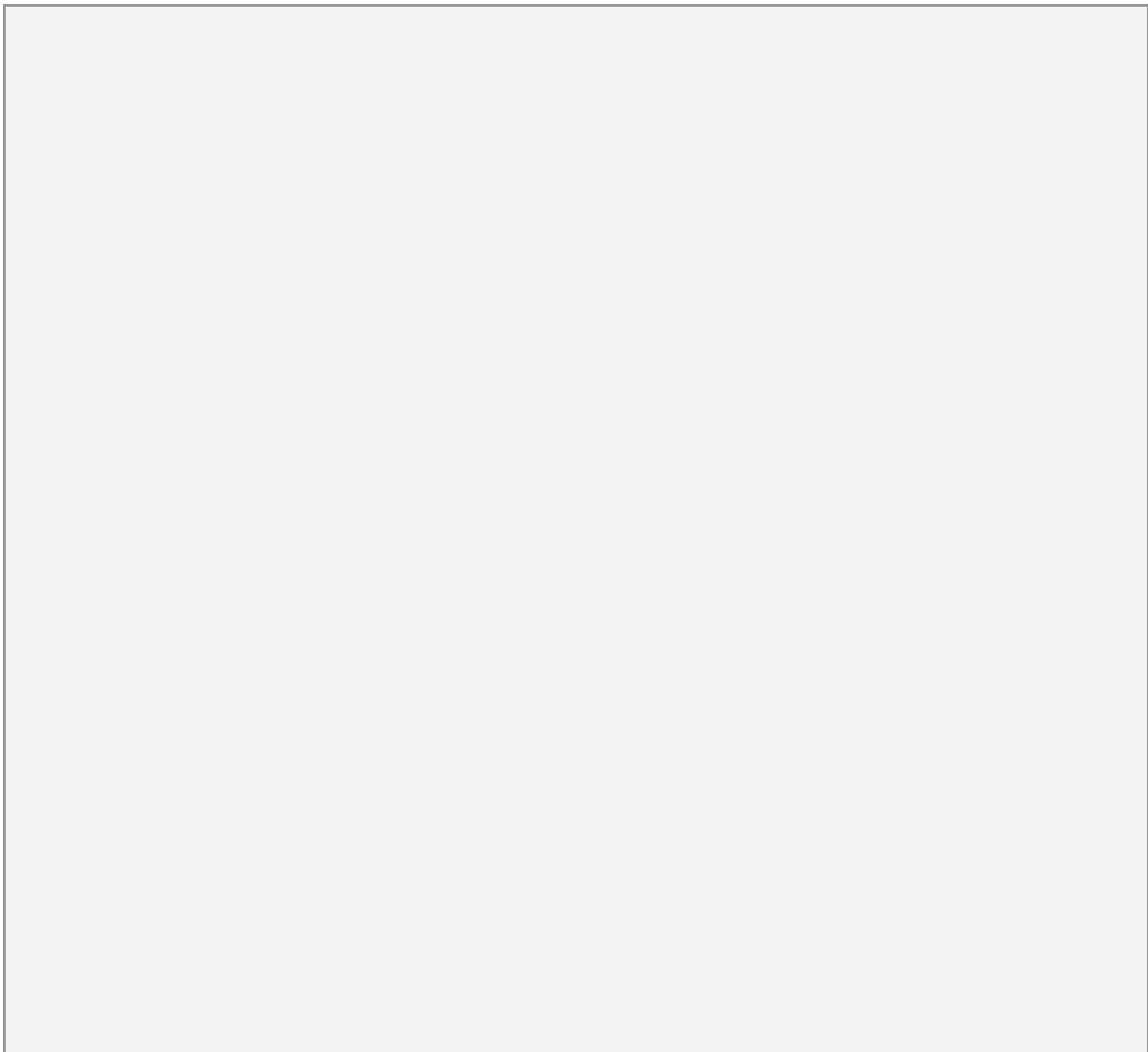
Focus only (if at all possible) on essential and familiar activities and responsibilities - such as doing your job or seeing to the children. This is not the time to start dealing with any long-standing problems, for example.

Most people dealing with a crisis find that their memory leaves much to be desired. I suspect it's the same for you.

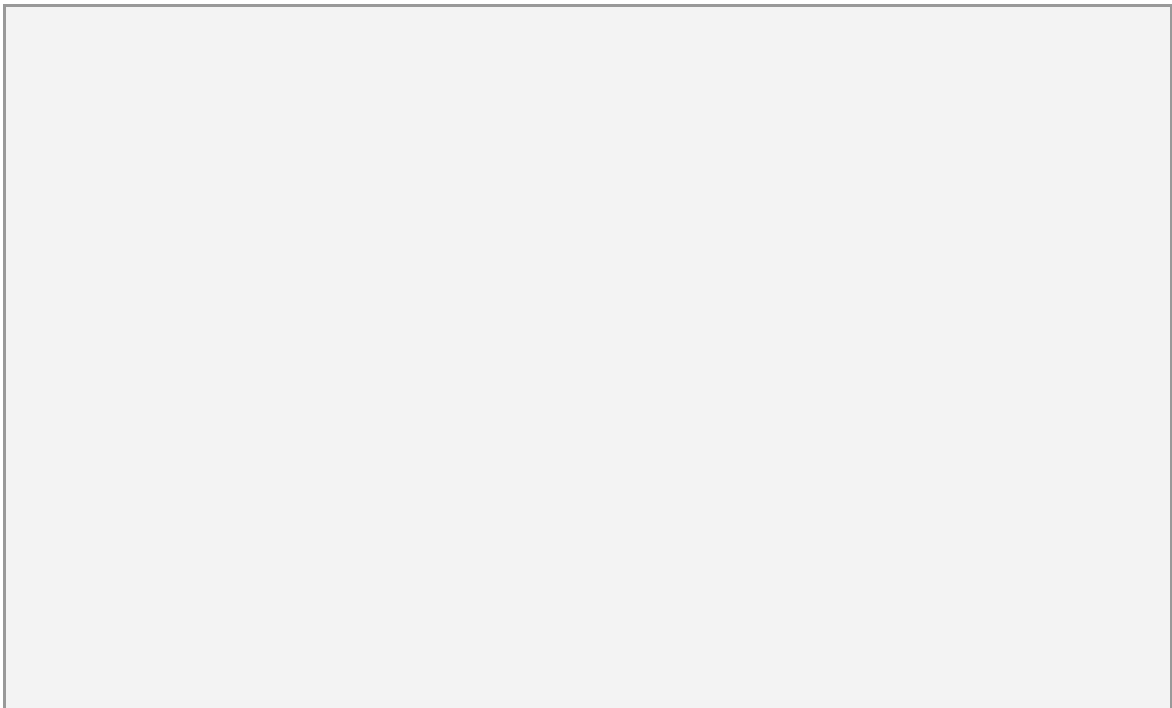
The following activity is going to help you separate your worries and thereby create a little bit of calm in the chaos.

Take action

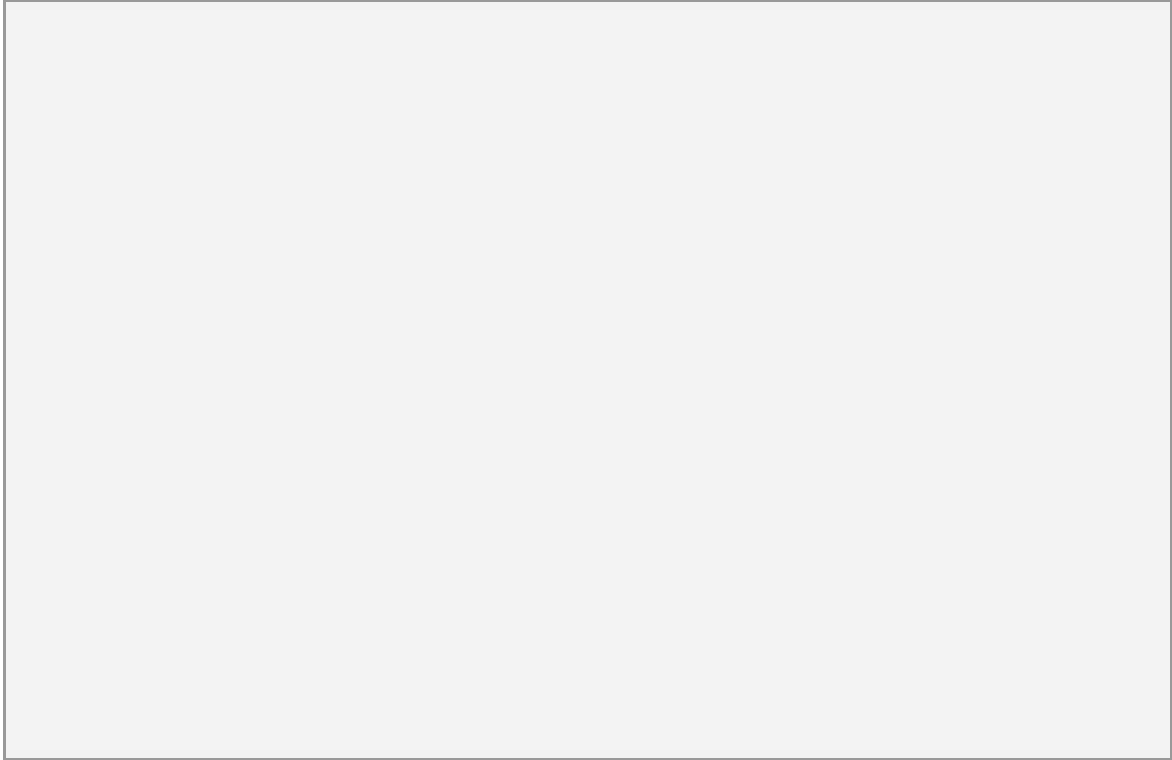
1. Make a list of things that are on your mind. Don't think - just write.



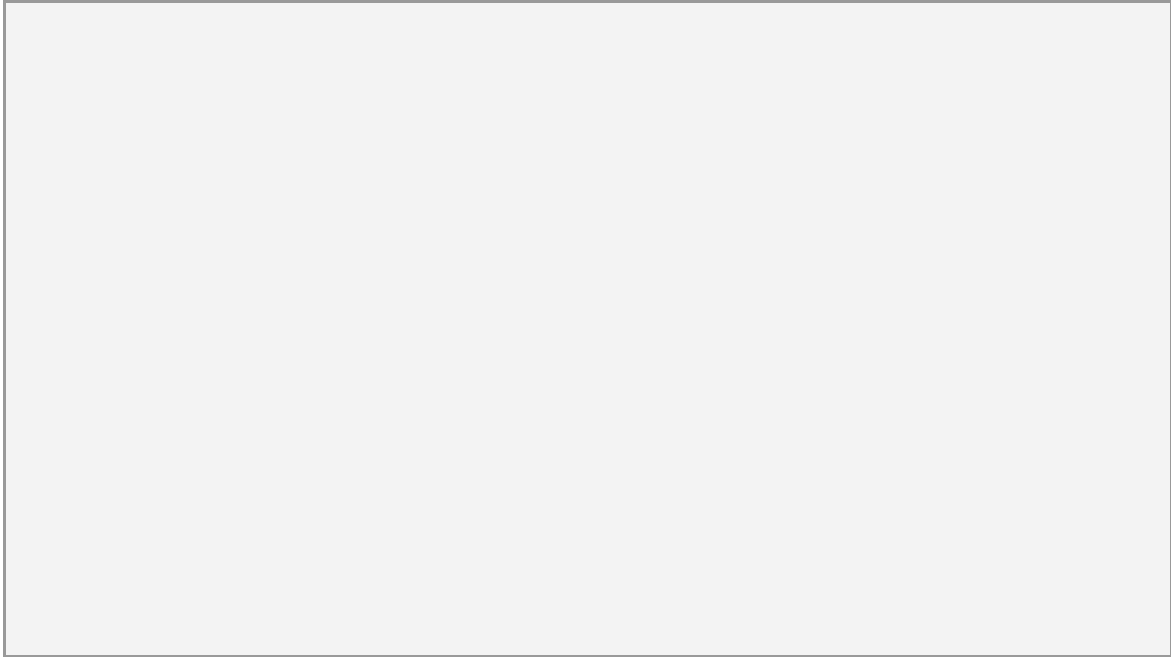
2. Take three separate sheets of paper (or use the boxes below) and write:
 - a. one list for long-standing stuff that can really wait a couple of weeks (or at least for the duration of this programme)



b. one list of worries relating to whatever is causing your distress right now.



c. one list of the chores you need to stay on top of regardless of how you're feeling



Clearing your path

Take a look at the three lists you've just made:

- A. Put this first list away for the time being. You don't need to remind yourself of these points at the moment - you know they can wait.
- B. This is the lists of things you want to sort during the course of this programme
- C. This list is going to help you manage the things you have to deal with regardless of how you're feeling. Rewrite it each night before you go to bed, so that at least these things won't churn around in your brain and prevent you from falling asleep. Neither are they likely to wake you with a startle in the middle of the night.

Emergency coping skill for feeling overwhelmed

I used to have my clients calmed down in minutes with the following method...

Step 1

Score your stress level: 10 for all-out think you're going mad, 0 for pure calm.

Step 2

Pay very close attention to your breathing for just five minutes, noticing your in-breaths, and in particular your out-breaths.

Step 3

Now take two deep breaths in and out. I know it may sound silly, but try to make a sound with the out-breath - like when you sit down after some hard physical work. It really helps.

Step 4

Apply the magic...

- As you breathe in, focus on and follow the cool air through your nose or mouth, feel it at the back of your throat and notice how your chest expands.
- Slowly breathe out, following the warm air through your nose and trying to notice it touch your top lip (or feel the flow of warm air on your tongue).
- Really concentrate on this for a few minutes.
- When your focus drifts - as it will - just bring it back to your breath.

Score again. How did you feel before, and how do you feel now?

Life is tough at times. We're all likely to go through some difficult times. Learning how to deal with our emotions helps us to feel strong in the face of any challenge.