

Medea's Tips for Controlling Flooding

From *Conflict Unraveled: Fixing Problems at Work and in Families*, by Andra Medea

Flooding is that "fight or flight" adrenaline overload that everyone gets now and then, but it may happen more often if you have post-deployment stress effects. In *Conflict Unraveled*, Andra Medea describes flooding and gives a number of concrete, practical strategies for dealing with it.

What to Remember

Flooding happens to everyone. It happens in different ways, with different styles, but no one is immune to it. We're hard wired for this. When it hits—when, not if—you have got to be prepared to bring yourself out. Only then do you have any chance of getting back to problem-solving and a sane, functioning life.

To Control Flooding in Yourself

- **Watch for physical symptoms first:** Pounding head, racing heart, short breath, sweaty palms, dry mouth. Make a list of your personal signs. Check the list when you're under stress. Checking the list is more important than yelling at someone.
- **Watch for mental symptoms:** Jumbled thoughts; rotary thinking; or an inability to see options, to sequence, or handle math. Also watch for sudden inarticulation, disjointed speech, or suggestibility.
- **Use large muscles:** Go for a walk. Close the door and do jumping-jacks or swing your arms in windmills. Use isometrics if you're stuck in a meeting.
- **Reverse symptoms:** If your breathing goes short, breathe deep and slow. If your fists are clenched, open your hands and stretch your fingers.
- **Focus on specifics:** List facts and read them back to keep your mind focused. Slow the pace.
- **If you can't break free of flooding at the time:** Recognize that you can't think and stop arguing. State clearly that you'd like to talk later, then leave and re-group. Try again after you have repeated the earlier steps.
- **Prepare in advance:** If a tough situation is approaching, practice taking yourself out of flooding. Your mind learned flooding; it can unlearn it. You can develop a resistance to flooding or train yourself to snap out of it.
- **Get it out of your system:** Go smash something, just not people or living things.

To Handle Flooding in Others

- **Watch for symptoms,** such as flushed face, pulsing veins, or disjointed sentences.
- **Don't talk at them since they can't hear you.** Instead, let them talk; give them time to vent. Ask sequence questions: what happened first? What happened next? Use a low, calm tone of voice.
- **Don't crowd them, don't touch them, and don't make fast movements.** If they want to leave, let them.
- **Be prepared for thinking problems.** Don't demand math from someone who is flooding, and don't give complicated directions. Keep it simple, or wait until they calm down.
- **Avoid jargon.** Use short, clear sentences.
- **With chronic cases talk pain control, not anger control.** High levels of adrenaline are toxic; this isn't a comfortable feeling. But the process will take time. They didn't learn flooding in a day, and they won't unlearn in a day.
- **Work on yourself first.** Flooding is contagious, but so is calm. You can't hope to stop someone else's flooding unless you can stop your own.

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