

De-escalation Tips: For When the Mid-brain Takes Over

Rx for the Flipped Lid

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

We refer to this as “**having a flipped lid**” or “**flooding.**”

Tips for when YOU have flipped your lid:

- **Recognize what it feels like physically:** fast heartbeats, pounding head, a sense of urgency, etc. Learn your own body’s warning signs.
- **Recognize what it feels like mentally:** a sense of urgency, thoughts that keep repeating or going in circles, an inability to think calmly and clearly (or do mental math). Learn your own mind’s warning signs.
- **Take a time-out from the situation to calm down.** Recognize that continued engagement isn’t going to help.
- **Focus on your breathing.** Do belly breathing.
- **Use large muscles:** Walk, do isometrics, do windmills with your arms.
- **Try to engage your cortex.** Do mental math, spell things backwards, list facts...and slow the pace.
- **Notice why you are in “survival brain.”** “This situation makes me feel vulnerable because. . . “ (I’m not being heard, I may not be able to prevent injury, I’m not being respected) and work to not take it personally.

Tips for when the OTHER person has flipped his/her lid (child or adult):

- **Watch for signs in the other person:** Irrational action, flushed face, intense emotion, disjointed sentences.
- **Notice your own body.** Remember that mirror neurons work quickly. Don’t let the other person’s flipped lid “catch” you.
- **Remember safety.** People who are using their mid-brain and not their cortex do not act rationally and can be physically dangerous. Stay calm, move slowly, and be aware.
- **Use your mirror neurons.** The more you stay calm and connected, the easier it is for the other person to calm down.
- **Acknowledge feelings:** Use few words and a calm, empathetic tone.
- **Don’t talk at the person.** Don’t touch, and don’t make fast movements. If he/she wants to leave (and it is safe) allow it.
- **Don’t crowd.** Don’t make demands; don’t give complicated directions (a person with a flipped lid cannot process complex verbal statements).
- **Invite the person to take a time-out (non punitive) or “cool down time” (CDT)** This works best if it is an option, not a command.
- **Simple tasks may engage the cortex.** You might ask him/her to remind you how his/her name is spelled, to count to ten, ask if he/she remembers how to spell your name.
- **Ask for his/her help.** After the student has begun to de-escalate, change the subject by asking for his/her help. “I can tell you aren’t ready to engage in work yet, but are you calm enough to help me by...?” “I can tell you aren’t quite ready to play again, but would you be willing to help me by...?”