

THE MENTAL UNLOAD

CLEARING THE MENTAL CLUTTER OF PARENTHOOD

A PROGRAM BY SIMPLE FAMILIES
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THE WORKBOOK | STEP 1: UNPACK IT

STEP 1



NO BUSY TALK

The impact of daily stress is largely determined by how we perceive it. If you perceive life as busy and overwhelming, it will be busy and overwhelming. The first step in the mindset switch is changing our language. *What are three "busy/crazy" free responses you can use when someone asks "How have you been?"*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



YOUR WHY

Why are YOU completing this program? Even if your why is exactly the same as the one discussed in the program, write it here. Putting our goals and motivation *in writing* makes us more likely to learn and keep moving forward.



YOUR SEESAW

It's not a matter of "if" you have anxiety or depression. It's more of a question of which one do you tip towards in times of stress/overwhelm. **What is your tendency?** If you tip towards anxiety--you may have feelings of panic, hurriedness, or preoccupation about the future and "what-ifs". If you tip towards depression--you tend to withdraw, feel like hiding, or perhaps feel hopeless and pessimistic. (Hint: Some people alternate between the two). *Draw your seesaw to indicate the tendency you are tipping towards today + how balanced/out of balance you feel.*

(HERE'S A SAMPLE)

YOUR SEESAW





CHANGES IN YOUR SEESAW

Your seesaw will tip back and forth into and out of balance constantly throughout life. There's something about parenthood that makes the seesaw particularly vulnerable to change. Small, everyday life events will bring us slightly out of balance and tip us somewhat towards our tendency--resulting in changes in our mood, attitude and behavior. Big life events (and hormone/physiological changes) can bring us crashing down on our tendency, throwing us deep into the throws of our anxiety and/or depression.

What are three small life events in the past week that have tipped you towards your tendency?

(e.g. The long line at the post office while wrangling three kids, running out of bread when you need to pack lunches, etc)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three big life events in the past decade that have led you to crash down on your tendency?

(e.g. death of a parent, birth of a child, planning a wedding, etc.)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



THE POWER OF AWARENESS

1. Your physical reaction. Your body is deeply intertwined with your brain and mental load.

How does your body respond to stress and overwhelm? Insomnia, jaw-clenching, tense shoulders, brain fog...these are a few common signs from your body. What are yours?

2. Your communication-style. When you are overwhelmed, your communication-style will change.

How does that look for you? Do you have anxious energy and talk more? Or do you withdrawal and talk less? Reflect on your communication-style changes.

TIME TO GET STARTED ON STEP ONE. WE WOULD LOVE TO SEE PHOTOS/SELFIES OF YOU DOING YOUR BRAIN DUMP. MAYBE IN A COFFEE SHOP OR CAFE? POST THEM IN THE COMMUNITY GROUP. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING PHOTOS OF YOU ALL TAKING A TIME-OUT FOR YOUR MENTAL HEALTH.



STEP 1: UNPACK IT

I am going to introduce Step 1. Much of the mental load exists in our minds. When it exists there, it is invisible and confusing to both us and our support system. This includes planning, executing, researching, worrying—all these things collectively begin to weigh us down. We rarely stop to examine these thoughts and understand them. As a result, it usually ends up as a jumble of stress. I love analogies, so here's one for you.

Right now your mental load is this: You have just given a two-year-old a dozen different colors of play-doh. It all gets mashed together. It's nearly impossible to tell the colors apart. You can't tell where one color starts and the other stops. The eventual result is just a mushy, ugly color of brown. You finally give up because it's impossible to deal with at this point. You just live with the brown.

You probably have a rather generalized feeling of overwhelm and don't know where to start. In this program, we are going to start fresh with all new play-doh. Everything is separate and you can see the colors clearly. You can figure out which colors you want to keep, and which ones you don't. And perhaps which ones you can give away—because no one needs SO many colors.

STEP 1: Visualize.

To better understand and alleviate the mental load, we need to make it visible. Therefore, step 1 is to execute a massive brain dump. You are going to take the mental load out of your head and put it on paper.

1. Block out an hour of (precious) quiet time. I strongly suggest you get out of the house for this.
2. Get a pile of notecards or small pieces of paper
3. Start writing every single piece of your mental load (one thought on each paper/card). That includes all the plans, all the worries, all the duties, all the things you are currently researching...This is not the same as writing down your to-do list. Instead, it's quite like free association. If you tell me that you can't think of anything when you try to do this—then you may be in a serene meditative state with a perfectly clear mind. If that's true, then bravo. Teach me! If that's not true, then this is a symptom of Brown Play-Doh Brain. The best solution for this is to sit quietly with your thoughts (sans phone and children). Take a few deep breaths and then wait for them show up.

After this major brainstorming session, you can continue to add things to your cards as you see fit. If thoughts come up in the next few days, jot those down somewhere and transfer them to your notecards. [Or stop after the initial hour—completely up to you!]

Of course these notecards won't include EVERYTHING. Instead, it will be an unscientific sample of your actual mental load. We will be using this sample in the steps to come.