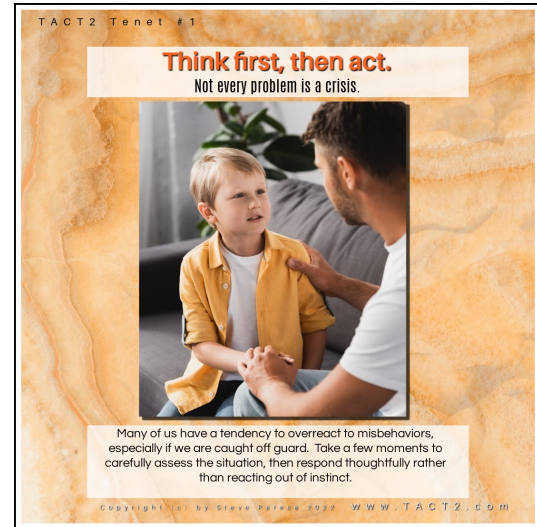


Tenet #1: THINK FIRST, THEN ACT

The Deeper Cut:

In moments of genuine danger, our survival instincts are activated. Our amygdala reacts to a threat in fractions of a second, triggering the release of adrenaline and cortisol. Our eyes widen and skin tightens, allowing us to better sense possible danger. Our hearts and lungs go into overdrive, providing a rush of oxygen and energy to our muscles. Our capillaries constrict and our pain sensors dull, helping us ignore injuries and function even if damaged. This finely-tuned autonomic survival response is like a turbocharged engine kicking in, offering a gust of power to fight, run, or hide, then fading away in the minutes that follow.



The problem is that our survival brain has difficulty distinguishing between a genuine threat to our physical well-being and a perceived threat to our emotional well-being. Our body initially reacts to a thrown insult in the same way it might to a thrown chair: in survival mode. This is especially true when we are (1) Already having a stressful day; (2) Struggling with self-esteem or health issues; or (3) Still dealing with our own past traumas. *Do any of these conditions apply to you?*

During intense moments with disobedient children and youth, it can be easy to overreact, responding as if their distracting or disruptive behavior is actually dangerous!

The counter-measure is to reengage the “Thinking Brain” so that we can make a rational decision about how best to handle the problem before us. It requires a deliberate effort, but can be done in about 6 seconds:

1. **Back off and breathe:** Take a small step backward, or turn to the side. Glance away, or briefly close your eyes. Then take a slow deep breath in through your nose. Hold it for a 2-count.... then release, emptying your lungs fully.
2. **Notice it and name it:** Notice your physical tension: your clenched hands, tight shoulders. Breathe deeply again. Then tell yourself: “Okay, I’m feeling triggered by _____ right now.”
3. **Assess the threat:** Ask “Am I actually in any danger?” Breathe again (very important!) If there is danger, ask “What’s my plan?” If not, say: “Okay, I have time to figure this out.” Then use your clearer head and calmer body to act with deliberation rather than on impulse.

Summary: It is easy to overreact in survival mode when we become overwhelmed. However, not every problem is a crisis. If possible, take 5-6 seconds to calm your body and activate your thinking brain before responding to a challenging situation. For even more information, see: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-happens-during-an-amygdala-hijack-4165944>