

STOP OVERREACTING

Effective Strategies for Calming Your Emotions

JUDITH P. SIEGEL PH.D., LCSW



PHOTO BY PHYLLIS FERRIS

“Finally, a practical book that gets at what the REAL triggers are to our over-reacting to everyday situations. A terrific integration of varied ideas about how to understand present day over-reactions in light of past experiences, especially past relationship experiences. Goes way beyond most guides to thinking rationally and mindfully.

— Alan S. Gurman, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public health and author, *Full Catastrophe Living*

Important skills for coping with intense and overwhelming emotions without **overreacting**, withdrawing, lashing out or raging.

Everyone knows what it's like to overreact. It is one of the most common factors that lead to unnecessary and destructive conflict escalation within our relationships with partners, family members, friends and colleagues, and yet it can be one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome. In addition to enhancing the stress of an already emotional situation, it can leave us feeling ashamed, guilty and out of control.

In her new book, *Stop Overreacting*, Dr. Judith Siegel applies cutting edge research and more than thirty years of clinical practice experience to present the key concepts to understanding and overcoming intense emotional reactions to life's less than ideal situations, specifically in the realms of relationships, family and the workplace. Based on new research that is changing the way therapists view emotional regulation, Dr. Siegel identifies the common factors that contribute to overreaction and then provides the reader with approachable, applicable skills for understanding and gaining control over them in order to reduce overreaction and improve relationships with both the self and others.

Do you often:

- Regret things you say or do in the heat of emotion?
- Lash out at loved ones?
- Have to apologize to others for your actions or words?
- Feel surprised at your seemingly uncontrollable reactions?
- Assume the worst about situations or people?
- Withdraw when things get emotionally overwhelming?

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FOR AN INTERVIEW REQUEST *or*
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Tips

In *Stop Overreacting*, Dr. Judith Siegel presents some of the most effective methods to curb overreactions within the everyday realms of family, relationships and the workplace.



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About the Author

JUDITH SIEGEL, PH.D., LCSW has taught for the past twenty years at the New York University Silver School of Social Work. In addition to *Stop Overreacting*, she has written *What Children Learn from Their Parents' Marriage*.

She has appeared on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, NPR's *Fresh Air*, and has been quoted widely in magazines including *Parenting*, *Parents Magazine*, and *Good Housekeeping*.

Be confident.

Confidence propels us to seek control while self-doubt leads us to defer control to others. On the other hand, when we believe no one is in control we may feel a sense of panic, which can often trigger overreactions.

Give your emotions a name.

The process of naming emotions can stimulate the circuits connecting the left and right-brain, which allow us to see situations in terms of both what we know and what we feel.

Don't Detach.

While self-confidence helps us establish control, taking a passive stance and relying on the capabilities of others can instill a feeling of powerlessness. This perceived lack of influence over a situation's outcome sets the stage for overreaction triggered by rage and/or defeat.

Develop mind-body awareness.

Be aware of subtle physical responses that occur during emotional experiences. Focusing on physical sensations can alert you to an impending storm if you know how to read your radar map.

Consider the consequences.

Searching stored memory for lessons we may have learned activates the higher areas of the brain which we use to be calculative in our actions.

Take a stroll down memory lane.

The personal values we acquire during childhood play a key role in what can trigger our emotions as adults. By taking time to think about the qualities that you observed and reacted to growing up, you'll be aware when these values are challenged and why it bothers you.

Practice what you preach: Share.

When we never let others take over we make life more stressful than it needs to be. As a part of a family unit or partnership, difficulty sharing can inspire us to use force or questionable tactics to maintain full control, leading to mistrust and jealousy; both known to trigger overreaction.

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What is Overreaction?

Not all emotional reactions are overreactions. *Stop Overreacting* offers some questions to ask yourself to determine if they are:

- Do you regret things you say or do in the heat of emotion?
- Do you lash out at loved ones?
- Do you have to apologize to others for your actions or words?
- Do you feel surprised at your seemingly uncontrollable reactions?
- Do you assume the worst about situations or people?
- Do you find yourself in conflict without knowing how you got there?

3 Factors of Overreaction

SCHEMAS, OR STORIES WE ATTACH TO OUR RELATIONSHIPS, OURSELVES AND EVENTS WHICH HELP US TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD, BUT CAN ALSO LEAD TO BIASES, DISTORTED UNDERSTANDING, AND KNEE-JERK REACTIONS TO SITUATIONS

SPLITTING, OR THE OVERSIMPLIFICATION OF SITUATIONS AS EITHER 'ALL GOOD' OR 'ALL BAD'

FLOODING, OR A RE-EXPERIENCING OF RAW EMOTION (STORED IN OUR MEMORY FROM INITIAL EXPERIENCES THAT ENCODED THE SCHEMA) TRIGGERED BY PARTICULARLY RESONANT SCHEMAS AND RESULTANT SPLITTING

"One of the most important differences between people who cope reasonably well and those who overreact is the ability to connect thoughts and feelings. The stronger the circuits that connect left and right, the better able you are to tolerate and diffuse intense emotions. Every time you are able to talk about your emotional experience with someone who cares, and consider an emotionally charged situation from multiple perspectives, you are developing new circuits between the left and right parts of your brain."

—Judith Siegel
from *Stop Overreacting*

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