

# Managing Overwhelm with the Triage Exercise

[www.olivemecounseling.com/blogs/triage](http://www.olivemecounseling.com/blogs/triage)

“Triage” comes from the French word “*trier*” meaning **to sort**. It is a term often used in the ER, where the Head Nurse surveys all the patients, identify who has the most critical or urgent condition, and then go through a sorting process that determines **who will be seen in what order**. The Nurse’s main objective is to keep as many people alive and healthy as possible. **Triage** is the way to do that.

**Step 1:** Brain dump a list of all the things that you feel like you have to do until there is nothing left to write down. Do this without analyzing (you’ll do that later) or judging yourself (this isn’t helpful).

	TASK	IMPORTANT?	URGENT?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			

**Step 2:** Rate each item on a scale of 1-5 (1 = low, 5 = high) in terms of **Importance** or **Urgency**.

**Step 3:** Write each item down into the corresponding box below.



**Step 4:** Follow the instructions for each box:

- **Box A (Important AND Urgent):** 3-5 items MAX, put excess items into Box B to do later. Focus on doing **ONLY** these tasks, and consider everything else irrelevant until these are done.
- **Box B (Important, but NOT Urgent):** Do these tasks only after Box A becomes empty. Pick 2-3 items from this list to put into Box A.
- **Box C (NOT Important, but Urgent):** Eliminate tasks rated as 1s, and ask “Urgent for whom?” Draw boundaries with those people and focus on what matters to YOU first until you have the margin, time, and energy to attend to the needs of others. Not doing so can lead to resentment.
- **Box D (NOT Important and NOT Urgent):** Cover this box with a sticky note that you peel off only after the rest of the boxes are empty. Keep this sticky note on until the other boxes are empty.

NOT IMPORTANT (1-3)

IMPORTANT (4-5)

URGENT (4-5)

C

Urgent For Whom?

3-5 Items Max

A

Do These Now

NOT URGENT (1-3)

D

These Are Distractions

B

Do These Later