

VAGUE INSTRUCTIONS & LOOSE ENDS

HOW UNCERTAINTY TURNS INTO
OVERTHINKING, STRESS & BURNOUT

CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS HELP.



UNCERTAINTY BEFORE WORK BEGINS

Vague instructions, open-ended questions, and un-finalized schedules, so called “loose ends,” cause immense stress due to feelings of uncertainty and overthinking. A good example would be this very paper. Yes, I know I have to work on it today, but for how long? What time do I start? Should I take breaks?

WHY CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS MATTER

Thankfully my coworker devised a well-thought-out breakdown of the instructions on how I should format this paper. (thank you so much!) That thankfully minimized how much overthinking there would be regarding questions such as “how should I begin?” and “How should I even format this?” This is a clear example of how clear instructions help. The questions I start asking myself when instructions are unclear lead to overthinking, which in turn leads to stress and potential for burnout before any actual work has begun.

THE LEGO SET WITHOUT A MANUAL

The best way I could describe this, is like if you got a Lego set, and you opened the box, to find all of the bags of pieces, but no instruction manual. You see the final product on the box, but you have no idea which bag to open first, or where to even begin to start assembling it.

**YOU SEE THE FINAL PRODUCT,
BUT YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHICH
BAG TO OPEN FIRST**

WHEN CONFUSION BECOMES OVERLOAD

Imagine the confusion this would cause to a child that cannot yet articulate how they are feeling. It would easily result in lashing out or a tantrum, or even just plain old burnout.

SCHEDULES “UP IN THE AIR”

Schedules are similar, an open or “up in the air” schedule is horrible for us, because we need to know when, where, and how things need to be done, and it’s the not knowing that leads to overthinking and then burnout. Questions like “When do I need to do certain things and in what order” and “How much time to myself will I have after this task?”

WHEN WORDS AREN’T AVAILABLE

It’s easy to see how this kind of self-questioning can drive one insane and into burnout, and as children, we have an especially hard time... conveying these emotions through words, and thus many Autistic children convey these feelings via raw energy output, often in the form of a tantrum or meltdown.

REMOTE WORK & SELF-IMPOSED STRUCTURE

To be honest, sometimes I find remote work is quite challenging due to this, and having to self-impose a schedule and maintain said schedule without the external reinforcement that a commute or office would provide is extremely difficult at best, and at worst, a complete dumpster fire.