



Pay close attention to your triggers – they reveal your REAL and PERCEIVED threats. It's the PERCEIVED threats we need to catch and see - the little gremlins that run havoc on our lives as we REACT to them irrationally. They SEEM so real and valid, until you mindfully bring them to light.

IDENTIFYING TRIGGERS

Triggers ignite emotional surges through your system, such as heightened emotions, anxiety, panic, anger, jealousy, self-berating, envy, resentment, etc. Triggers are personal. Different things trigger different people. Triggers are windows into your subconscious programming. Your reactions, choices, and many aspects of your life are feeding off of this programming, and taking direction from it. Identifying triggers is work. The work is worth it, as freeing yourself from the shackles of triggers, allows for clear, ideal RESPONSES rather than automatic, irrational REACTIONS.

WHERE DO TRIGGERS COME FROM?

Your subconscious programming is part nature (genetics) and part nurture (early childhood experiences, family dynamic, mini-traumas, big traumas, experiences in school, relationships, etc). Your collections of experiences, both good and bad are stored in your memory. Some of these memories are not very accessible, as they become stored deep in your subconscious. Yet they certainly impact your beliefs, thoughts, emotions, reactions, and more!

Most of this **programming is beneficial** and wonderful. For example, what is safe or not, social norms, language, a sense of belonging, etc. While **other programming is not so good**. For example, labels like "average," "perfect," "skinny," "fat," "ugly," "powerless," "too emotional," "weak," "weird," "reject," "not enough," "hyper," "slow," "defiant," "not normal," "misfit," etc., end up **deeply "repressed" under maladaptive protective strategies**.

Strong emotional experiences trigger the release of neurotransmitters and hormones, which strengthen memory. The stronger the emotions during life experiences, the stronger the memories are ingrained. When we are stressed or triggered, neurotransmitters kick into high gear, recalling previous stressful events. Your REACTION to the current situation is compounded as your mind and body can become flooded with emotions, hormones, and nerve impulses that may be over-charged for your current experience. When this occurs, your higher cortex and rationality shut-down, making it even more difficult, if not impossible, to think clearly and react rationally without calming first.

**EMOTIONAL
TRIGGERS ARE
HAPPENING FOR US,
NOT TO US.
TRIGGERS ARE GIFTS.**

As you go through life, your **programming continues** to develop and 'upload' more and more data from your experiences. **The less aware (mindful) you are, the more you unconsciously absorb fears, labels, beliefs, and form maladaptive protective strategies. All of which result in 'triggers,' due to emotional wounds.** Thus, triggers offer rich insight and opportunities to transform old programming.

IDENTIFY THE FIRST STEP IS AWARENESS & IDENTIFYING

Working with triggers requires awareness of how you are feeling in the moment.

THESE ARE COMMON TRIGGERS. IDENTIFY WHAT MAY BE TRUE FOR YOU AND ADD TO THIS LIST AS YOU IDENTIFY MORE.

Someone acting guarded, quiet, or closed-off towards me (as if they don't trust me)

Painful emotions: anxious, disheartened, deep sadness, disappointment, _____, _____

Someone leaving sooner than expected (or not parting in expected way)

Feeling trapped or not in control (in a situation, such as a work meeting, or place, such as in an airplane)

Being alone

Feeling discounted or ignored (whether real or perceived)

Someone not understanding me, or not listening to me enough to understand my point or how I feel

Someone being unavailable to me (such as not texting or calling me back right way)

Someone giving me a disapproving look

Seeing someone 'better' than me: better looking, smarter, more successful, _____, _____

Someone disappointing me or detecting disrespect (being late, forgetting something important to me, etc.)

Someone not appearing to be happy to see me

Being relied on too much, or feeling trapped in a situation or obligation

Someone (or a group of people) judging me (whether perceived or factual)

Feeling overwhelmed with way too much work, or expectations going on

Feeling pressured to say "yes" to an event, plans, helping someone, etc. when I really want to say "no"

Feeling left-out or like I don't belong (whether perceived or factual)

Messes, clutter, or feeling disorganized

Feeling cornered (as if I need to make a huge decision way too fast)

Someone trying to control me, change me or "smother" me with their needs

Making a mistake, failing, or not living up to my expectations of myself

Seems specific people or personality types trigger me more than anything

Feeling like my significant other is looking at or talking to someone else

Helping others but not receiving a thank you or appreciation in return

Feeling forced to small talk or interact with people I hardly know

IDENTIFY YOUR COMMON REACTIONS TO TRIGGERS

IDENTIFY WHAT REACTION PATTERNS MAY BE TRUE FOR YOU AND ADD TO THIS LIST AS YOU IDENTIFY MORE. BE HONEST.

- I comply and become a people-pleaser (say or do anything to make things feel ok) ⁴
 - I tend to 'freeze-up' or shut-down (and later I may try to ignore what happened) ³
 - I tend to get mad at myself... and criticize myself in my mind ^{1/4}
 - I have lashed out with anger at least once in the last year (yelled, name-called, fought, etc.) ²
 - I tend to flee or leave right away (even though I'm not being yelled at or in any real danger) ¹
 - I have had extreme anxiety and/or panic attacks ¹
 - I withdraw from the person that triggered me... I can be cold and silent towards them for days ³
 - I prefer to gain a sense of peace back by checking my partner's phone, investigating, interrogating, or demanding ²
 - I turn to food, alcohol or another substance to try to feel better ¹
 - I need reassurance right away that everything is ok (multiple texts, calls, or visits to get relief) ⁴
 - I turn to shopping, gaming, or another behavior or process to distract me ¹
 - Sometimes I ruminate, analyze, and can't stop thinking and/or talking about what happened ¹
 - I say 'yes' to avoid conflict or guilt, but sometimes I end up resenting myself or others ⁴
 - I prefer to retreat from everyone for awhile so I can recall all the times I have been letdown ³
 - Now that I think about, I have no idea how I react when I'm triggered ³
 - I've been known to 'act-out' by lying, cheating, or leaving my partner, only to come back later to make amends ²
 - I tend to make assumptions or 'mind-read' and react based on this, instead of asking questions and getting clarity ⁴
 - I tend to feel like I hit a wall and shut-down; I can end up procrastinating or failing to get things done ³
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IDENTIFY YOUR ABILITIES TO RESPOND (RATHER THAN REACT) TO TRIGGERS

Responding rather than reacting requires a PAUSE – a layer of observation, space, mindfulness, whatever you want to call it – to notice your thoughts, feel your emotions, reflect and allow for calm rationale. This can make all the difference in strengthening or breaking a relationship, and feeling good about yourself or having major regrets.

- I pause to feel and accept my emotions, and allow for calm Wise Mind before taking action (even if it takes days)
- I thoughtfully explore possible outcomes in my mind before saying a word (even if it takes days to do this)
- I weigh the pros and cons and consider what would be best for myself and others in the situation
- I do not force myself to do something I am terrified of, not ready for, or truly do not want to do. I say 'No.'
- I observe my inner dialogue and thoughts, so I may identify real threats versus perceived threats
- I distance myself from the experience to watch how my MIND/BODY is reacting WITHOUT outwardly reacting
- If someone is yelling at me, being rude, or mistreating me in any way, I allow myself to LEAVE right away
- I give myself permission to feel my feelings and understand how I can guide myself to feel better with self-care
- If lonely, I realize it's a clear and natural sign that I need to explore ways to fulfill my purpose or connect with others
- I utilize specific practices to guide myself through triggers, such as 'Containment' practices and **P. L. A. C. E.**

P. L. A. C. E. YOUR TRIGGER IN AWARENESS: STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICE FOR WORKING WITH TRIGGERS

P: PAUSE

As soon as you notice you're triggered, take a breath. For example, let's say you get cut off on the highway. Before you spin into road rage and get bent out of shape, as soon as you notice your energy shift, take a deep breath.

L: LABEL & LOCATE YOUR EMOTIONS

What are you feeling? Is it frustration, helpless, or something else? In the example of getting cut off on the highway, are you angry? Anxious? Label your emotions and identify the locations of them in your body. Your chest, heart, neck, gut?

This Emotion is: _____ I feel it mostly in my: _____

A: APPRECIATE & ASK YOUR EMOTIONS WHY

Appreciate and honor your anger, fear, anxiety, pain, etc., as it is just trying to protect you. What actually triggered you? The event itself, or is it related to a previous judgment or a common trigger? Allow for AWARENESS. The emotion is likely tied to something below the surface of the actual event. Something from the past, fears, or your feelings of self-worth.

What has been or may be violated? _____ (values, safety, boundaries, sense of self, etc.)

What do I value most in this experience? _____ (safety, respect, fitting in, my values, my worth, etc.)

Accept, honor and allow your emotion to process naturally. Anger, for example, will burn through if you truly honor it and allow it to be. There is no need to react with anger unless you are in REAL danger. Compassionately guide your emotions and reactions, instead of letting your emotions control you. Learn more with Empowering Emotions practices.

C: CHOOSE A WISE AND WELL-TIMED RESPONSE

This is where the magic happens in the process. Take the imperative pause and consider...

Is this too big to work through in the moment? Do I need to place into a "Container" and revisit it later on? _____

What matters most in this situation? _____

How can I RESPOND in alignment with my values and who I truly am (we are not our triggers)? _____

How can I respond in a productive way – a way that will move me closer to my goals in life? _____

When is the best time communicate and resolve this issue (if an issue needs to be resolved)? _____

This may take, **seconds, hours, or even days** depending on the situation at hand. In our example, the most important thing is drive safe, and the best way to respond is likely to remain collected and attentive for the drive.

E: EMPOWER YOURSELF

Empower yourself by providing yourself with a *simple comfort* or *reward* for handling your trigger in balanced way. Feel the accomplishment. Continue to empower yourself to explore and guide your triggers in a healthier, more rewarding outcome for everyone involved. You are building a self-reflective capacity – strengthening a muscle (neuroplasticity) within yourself to respond with purpose, rationality, compassion and in alignment with your values.

This is not easy and it takes practice. It's impossible to be unreactive 100% of the time! The goal is to decrease reactivity (unless you are literally in real danger), and recover your balanced, centeredness more quickly. The faster you can acknowledge when you're triggered, the faster you'll be able to calm your nervous system, and get back on track.

"Neurons that fire together, wire together." - Rick Hanson

In other words, the more you can practice being calm and respond mindfully, the better at it you become. Learning to respond versus react is a continual process that gets easier over time.

REFLECTING ON TRIGGERS AND REACTIONS

Remember, the goal isn't to be calm 24/7 or to get rid of your triggers. That is impossible. Nor would that even be ideal because there are REAL threats in life that we need to react to ASAP. Triggers also show you who and what is important to you and worth protecting, including your safety and values.

The goal is about being aware and accepting of your triggers, emotions, thoughts, patterns, and impulsive reactions — and learning to be so incredibly in tune with your SELF that you can quite literally walk yourself through any given scenario with grace and chose ideal responses that you will feel proud of.

How may identifying your triggers be useful for you?

How do you see being mindful of your programming, false beliefs, thoughts, and maladaptive protective strategies that trigger reactions benefit you?

How do you plan on “catching” your triggers in the moment (mindfulness and awareness) so you learn to feel into your emotions and perhaps find a sense of CALM before RESPONDING RATIONALLY, rather than REACT with old patterns?

For the final step, **E: EMPOWER YOURSELF**, create a list of the simple comforts or rewards you will provide yourself with every time you respond ideally to a trigger. If you want to see positive change in your life, rewarding new behavior is your power. This is an imperative step in the process of learning to respond, rather than react to triggers.

Do you trust yourself to keep your triggers list updated, daily, for at least ONE WEEK to build self-awareness? What might get in your way of this goal? How can you make sure you do this for at least a week?

When we are stressed out and not present, we are caught up in reactivity. It becomes more difficult to choose our response. We get stuck in what's happening externally and lose the boundary of our inner landscape. When you are mindfully present, you have access to *the space and time between the trigger and the response*. You will learn more about emotions, mindfulness, and practices that will allow you to work with your triggers and allow for rational responses, rather than triggered reactivity. What skills and strengths do you feel you have already that will help you as you build upon your emotional health skills?

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. And in that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." - Viktor Frankl

DAILY TRIGGERS AND BUILDING MINDFULNESS

List triggers and how you REACTED or, if you were able to calm and RESPOND (may involve choosing ideal action or not taking any action) based on your highest good. Practice experiencing, honoring emotions, mindful acceptance, and practice respond ideally, instead of reacting. This takes practice.

LIST ONE TRIGGER PER DAY OR IDENTIFY MANY TRIGGERS IN ONE DAY. IT IS UP TO YOU.

I felt triggered when this occurred: _____

These people were involved: _____

I felt the following emotions: _____

I REACTED by _____ I RESPONDED ideally by _____

I felt triggered when this occurred: _____

These people were involved: _____

I felt the following emotions: _____

I REACTED by _____ I RESPONDED ideally by _____

I felt triggered when this occurred: _____

These people were involved: _____

I felt the following emotions: _____

I REACTED by _____ I RESPONDED ideally by _____

I felt triggered when this occurred: _____

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I felt triggered when this occurred: _____

These people were involved: _____

I felt the following emotions: _____

I REACTED by _____ I RESPONDED ideally by _____