

Trigger and response inventory

A trigger is not the event happening again. It is the body recognising a cue and responding as if it were.

A sound, a smell, a place, a tone of voice can match something the system learned to read as danger. The response that follows is automatic: fight, flight, freeze, or shutdown. **Naming the pattern, from a settled distance, is how it becomes visible.**

i This is a pattern-finding tool, not exposure work. You are not being asked to relive anything or to face a trigger on purpose. The aim is to notice the pattern from a settled distance. The responses are the nervous system protecting you. You do not have to complete this, and you can stop at any point.

HOW A TRIGGER WORKS



the cue is in the present; the threat it points to is in the past

WHAT A TRIGGER IS

A cue the system links to past threat

- An **automatic** body response, not a decision
- Something happening in the present moment
- Information about what the body still carries
- The system doing what it learned to do to protect you

WHAT A TRIGGER IS NOT

The event happening again

- A choice, or an overreaction
- A sign of weakness or of getting worse
- Something to push through by willpower
- Proof that you are not coping

WHAT PAGE 2 CATALOGUES

For each trigger you choose to note, the inventory tracks four things. **The pattern is the point, not the list.** Shared cues and common responses are easier to see once they are written down.

1 THE CUE

What set it off

The sound, sight, smell, place, person, or situation.

2 THE RESPONSE

What happened in the body

The sensations, the urge, what the body did.

3 THE TYPE

Fight, flight, freeze, shutdown

The kind of protective response it was.

4 WHAT HELPED

What you tried

Anything that brought you back, or that you want to try.

WHAT ONE ROW MIGHT LOOK LIKE

THE CUE

A raised voice nearby

THE BODY'S RESPONSE

Chest tight, breath held, frozen

TYPE

Freeze

WHAT HELPED

Feet pressed to the floor, naming the date

REMEMBER

Noticing the pattern is not the same as facing the trigger. **You are looking at it from a settled distance, not stepping back into it.** Each response made sense to a system trying to keep you safe.

Note what you can, when you are settled. The patterns are easier to see on the page than in the moment.

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind*. Guilford Press. · Schauer, M., Neuner, F., & Elbert, T. (2011). *Narrative exposure therapy: A short-term treatment for traumatic stress disorders* (2nd ed.). Hogrefe. · Coventry, P. A., et al. (2020). *Psychological and pharmacological interventions for PTSD and comorbid mental health problems following complex traumatic events: Systematic review and component network meta-analysis*. *PLOS Medicine*, 17(8), e1003262.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT If you are in immediate danger, call **000**. For support at any time: Lifeline **13 11 14** · Beyond Blue **1300 22 4636** · 1800RESPECT **1800 737 732**.

Trigger and response inventory

List the triggers you notice, the body's response, the kind of response it was, and anything that helped. **Start with smaller ones.** There is no need to include your most difficult triggers here.

Fill this in when you feel settled, not in the middle of a response. **This is a catalogue, not a confrontation.** Leave rows blank, and stop, whenever you need to.

THE CUE (WHAT SET IT OFF)	THE BODY'S RESPONSE	TYPE	WHAT HELPED, OR WHAT I TRIED

PATTERNS I NOTICE

What these have in common

Shared cues, a common response type, times of day, or what tends to help.

A NOTE ON USING THIS

If cataloguing these brings up more than feels manageable, that is worth bringing to a GP or to someone like us. **You do not have to do this alone.**

WHEN YOU HAVE NOTED WHAT YOU CAN

Bring it into a session, or share it with someone you trust.

This inventory is useful information whether or not you are currently in therapy. If you would like to talk it through, the Meet and Greet is a short call to see if we are the right fit.

MEET & GREET

Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation

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