



## 15 SIMPLE STEPS TO CONQUER TRIGGERS

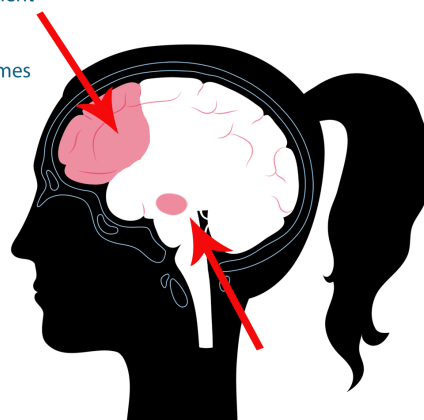
**Triggers:** When a trigger happens, we can feel like we have no control over our current situation, feelings, and body. It can be frightening!

This is because the part of the brain where the trauma is stored (**amygdala**) is over-stimulated and is hijacking access to our logical mind (**prefrontal cortex**). While experiencing the trigger, we don't feel safe and our ability to communicate effectively and learn new information is diminished.

### *Two brains: Thinking Brain vs. Trauma Brain*

#### **Prefrontal Cortex**

- Executive functions (Math, Sequencing, Planning)
- Inhibition
- Morality - Judgement
- Body sensations
- Concentration
- Predicting Outcomes



#### **Amygdala**

- Fear Auto Response: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn
- Trauma memory fragments
- Cannot interpret time - past or present

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**We can hack our brain and body**, to put the logical, safety-oriented brain back into the driver's seat by forcing the logical brain to take over command from the trauma brain. Learning the skills below will give you mastery over the experience and lessen the severity of the triggers over time.

**Read and practice these steps now when you're not experiencing a trigger** and your logical brain is more capable of learning. As you practice, you will become more able to respond rather than react to triggers when they do come.



While experiencing the trigger:

1. **Stop** –pause — whatever you're doing, slow down. This allows you to put the focus on you and your self-care right now.
2. **Breathe slowly, and deeply, feeling your belly move in and out as you do.** Whatever you do, do not hold your breath. Your amygdala is over-stimulated and sending "red alert" signals to the rest of your body as if it must quickly react to a dangerous situation. But reminding yourself that you're safe and breathing slowly will calm the amygdala and send signals back the rest of your nervous system, that there is no danger, and it can move back into a relaxed state.
3. **Say to yourself, "I'm having a trigger".** Acknowledge the trigger is happening at the current moment.
4. **Tell yourself it's ok to feel what you feel.** You're not to blame for how you feel during your triggers; **what happened to you** is the cause of these feelings, NOT YOU.

5. **Get into the current moment.** Triggers take us into a timeless part of the brain (amygdala) that isn't capable of functions like sequencing or understanding time. Remind yourself by saying things out loud that place you in the current moment, not the past.

**Example:** *"The things that hurt me in the past, aren't happening in this moment. "*

6. **Remind yourself out loud, that you're safe.** Your brain needs to hear you say this to yourself. *It's more powerful when you hear yourself say it, than it is to hear someone else say it to you!*

**Example:** *"I feel afraid, but right now at this moment, I'm safe, I am safe now, here in the present."*

7. **Get into your senses:** Sight, Touch, Hearing, Smell, Taste  
You can't be in the part of the brain that processes the body senses and also be in full-on anxiety at the same time. This forces the prefrontal cortex to do more work, taking away resources from the amygdala.

**Tip:** Make a "trigger toolkit" with fragrant items to smell; strong mints or gum for taste; and Playdough or clay to roll in your hands for touch. Keep calming music on a special playlist that is easy to listen to; pictures of art you find beautiful or interesting to look at.



8. **If you can move to a quiet and calm place, do so as safely as you can.** If you're driving, pull over and park in safe place. If you're in a public place, excuse yourself to the lady's room. If you're home, find a safe place to unwind and soothe yourself: wrap yourself in a soft blanket; hold your pet on your lap or hug a stuffed animal.

**Tip:** *Get a calming essential oil like lavender, rose or ylang-ylang, and spray it on a large pillow to hug and engage your sense of smell.*

9. **Continue to focus on your body:** Gently ask your body to Relax: feel each of your major muscle groups and softly encourage them to relax. (Tightened muscles sends unnecessary danger signals to the brain.)
10. **Allow yourself to feel all the emotions.** Triggers are opportunities to release old, unexpressed feelings of fear, hurt, and abandonment, and to validate - and then soothe - the old experiences of helplessness and hopelessness. Holding space for those emotions can turn our tears into self-compassion and our anger into self-protection.
11. **Call a safe friend who understands trauma.** Cultivate safe relationships in your recovery groups and seek support. Take time alone when you need it, but don't let shame isolate you. Feeling shame doesn't mean you are shameful. Educate your partner and close trusted circle about triggers and ask them to help you talk and feel your way through them.
12. **Identify the types of things that lead to triggers.** When you're able to, you can plan to avoid unsafe people, places, activities and triggering mental processes. Practice preventive maintenance with these steps when triggering situations are unavoidable. Set and enforce boundaries around these things that help you feel safe and prepared to respond.

13. **Use your Trigger Log to help identify why you're experiencing the trigger.** The more you pay attention to these details, the more you can eliminate them, avoid them, or plan alternative choices for them.
14. **Even If these tools don't seem to "work" at first – keep working them.** The effects may seem small at first, but the over-all outcome is cumulative. Just doing something different is creating new healthy neural pathways in your brain. Over time, you'll feel more confident and capable, and eventually the strength of the triggers will become weaker and weaker. You'll still feel the emotions – but they won't have the same power over your mind and body.
15. **When the trigger has passed, acknowledge that you have used your tools to move through it, and allow yourself a sense of accomplishment for working these tools.** As you use these tools, you'll feel less anxiety about potential future triggers, and you'll feel more empowered to master your recovery.

**To Recap:** Slow down, breathe, find or affirm your physical safety in the current moment and get grounded and practice mindfulness.

***For more resources on betrayal trauma recovery, visit me at:***



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