

Trigger Tracking Worksheet

I get triggered when:

Sights:
Sounds:
Smells:
Positions:
Places:

For example:

- * When I hear a door close when I am sleeping.
- * When someone is too close to me and I can smell alcohol on their breath.
- * What happens in my body (sensations) is:
- * My breathing gets really shallow.
- * The muscles in my legs get really tense / tight.
- * What to do when triggered?

NOTICE

Notice what are some of your current triggers? What happens when you are triggered? How can you (or those close to you) notice that you are triggered? Be specific about behaviors. List at least three signals or signs that let you know you are triggered.

1.	2.	3.
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STOP

Pause and take a deep breath. Stop the activity you are currently doing. Triggers can happen in any situation and sometimes this makes it hard to stop. If you are in a group setting, in a work meeting, or even engaged in sexual activity, a very useful excuse is to go to the bathroom. Breathe again. Name three things you can do to stop a triggering activity or remove yourself from a situation.

1.	2.	3.
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CHOOSE

Choose how you would like to proceed. Keep breathing. Relax your body. It is easiest to do this step if you have already generated a list of options you feel will work for you. Choose from this list what will meet your needs and what is most accessible to you in the situation.

ENGAGE

Engage in whatever strategy you have decided on. Continue to build your capacity to stay present and tolerate the sensations and feelings that are a part of this healing work. You can always change your mind and choose again. If you find that you consistently choose the same choice, try choosing something different. Bring yourself to your own edge of discomfort so that you can expand your possibilities and process the abuse.

RETURN

Go back to the beginning whenever you need to.

PLAN

Sometimes you know beforehand that you are going to be in a situation that may have triggers that remind you of your traumatic experience(s). The PLAN Tool is a strategy to manage situations that you anticipate will be difficult.

Prepare for the situation. Your sense of control may have been weakened by experiencing a trauma. A great way to begin regaining your sense of control is by preparing for the trigger or stressful situation. Think about the upcoming situation and how to handle it. Talk about it with someone whose judgment you respect.

- * How can you relax yourself before the situation?
- * Would it help to take a friend along who knows what you might experience?
- * Can you discuss it with a family member and decide on a plan if things don't go well?
- * Can you change the situation in some way that will make it easier to deal with?
- * What is it about the situation that causes you distress?
- * Is this a situation you would be better off avoiding?

LET GO

Let go of your worry. It can be helpful to know ahead of time when you are going to confront a trigger. Unfortunately, it can also lead to a lot of worry about how you will manage the trigger and the painful reactions you might have. Getting stuck in a struggle with the “what ifs” or drowning in dread can be worse than going through the actual thing you are worried about. Accept that you will experience distress and it is possible to manage your reaction.

After a trauma, the stresses of life can seem even more difficult to manage. Accepting that you will experience upsetting emotions and stress if you are triggered can actually make the stress feel less overwhelming.

- * Accepting distress means having realistic expectations about your reactions. It does not mean that you like the situation or feel good about being upset.
- * Accepting distress means that even though you may have upsetting emotions, you will not allow those emotions to control or limit your life.
- * Accepting distress means that your feelings don't have to dictate your behavior.
- * You can choose how you respond, even when you feel bad.

Adapted from: Haines, Staci. “The Survivor’s Guide to Sex” (1999).