

WHAT ARE MY TRIGGERS?

Understanding What Sets Me Off & What Helps Me Stay Cool

WHAT IS A TRIGGER?

A trigger is something that causes a strong emotional reaction - like anger, fear, sadness, or the urge to use substances or engage in unhelpful behaviors.

Triggers can be:

- **People** (certain individuals who stress you out)
- **Places** (locations that bring back difficult memories)
- **Things** (objects that remind you of tough experiences)
- **Situations** (specific activities or scenarios)
- **Sensations** (sounds, smells, physical feelings)
- **Thoughts** (negative beliefs about yourself or others)
- **Emotions** (one feeling that leads to other, stronger feelings)

Understanding your triggers is like having a superpower - it gives you a chance to prepare and respond differently!

MY TRIGGER DETECTIVE WORK

Instructions: Think about times when you've gotten really upset, angry, anxious, or had strong urges to use substances or act out. Try to remember what happened right before those feelings started. Fill in as many sections below as you can.

PEOPLE TRIGGERS

Who sometimes triggers strong reactions in me? (This doesn't mean they're bad people - just that interactions can be challenging)

1. _____ How they trigger me:

2. _____ How they trigger me:

3. _____ How they trigger me:

PLACE TRIGGERS

What locations or environments sometimes trigger me?

1. _____ Why this place affects me:

2. _____ Why this place affects me:

3. _____ Why this place affects me:

SITUATION TRIGGERS

What situations, activities, or events sometimes trigger me?

1. _____ Why this situation affects me:

2. _____ Why this situation affects me:

3. _____ Why this situation affects me:

PHYSICAL TRIGGERS

What physical feelings sometimes trigger me? (Hunger, tiredness, pain, etc.)

1. _____ How my body feels when triggered:

2. _____ How my body feels when triggered:

3. _____ How my body feels when triggered:

THOUGHT TRIGGERS

What thoughts sometimes run through my mind and trigger strong emotions?

1. " _____ " How this thought affects me:

2. " _____ " How this thought affects me:

3. " _____ " How this thought affects me:

HOW DO I KNOW I'M TRIGGERED?

Instructions: How can you tell when you're getting triggered? Check all the ways your body and mind let you know, and add your own unique signals.

BODY SIGNALS

- Heart beats faster
- Breathing gets faster/shallower
- Muscles tighten up
- Face feels hot
- Hands get sweaty
- Stomach feels upset
- Jaw clenches
- Want to run away
- Fists clench
- Feel frozen/can't move
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

MIND SIGNALS

- Thoughts race
- Can't focus
- Think in black and white (all or nothing)
- Assume the worst will happen
- Mind goes blank
- Can only think negative thoughts
- Start thinking "They always..." or "I never..."
- Replay bad memories
- Feel like I'm in danger
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

BEHAVIOR SIGNALS

- Talk louder/faster
- Go quiet/shut down
- Pace or can't sit still
- Want to hit something
- Want to use substances
- Want to isolate myself
- Start arguing
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

My earliest warning sign - the very FIRST hint that I'm getting triggered - is usually:

MY TRIGGER RESPONSE PLAN

Instructions: For each major type of trigger you identified, create a plan for what to do when it happens. Remember the 3 Ds: **Detect** (notice it's happening), **Delay** (pause before reacting), and **Decide** (choose a better response).

TRIGGER TYPE #1: _____

When this happens, I can:

IMMEDIATE RESPONSES (things I can do in the moment):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP:

1. _____ How they can help:

2. _____ How they can help:

WHAT I CAN TELL MYSELF:

TRIGGER TYPE #2: _____

When this happens, I can:

IMMEDIATE RESPONSES (things I can do in the moment):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP:

1. _____ How they can help:

2. _____ How they can help:

WHAT I CAN TELL MYSELF:

TRIGGER TYPE #3: _____

When this happens, I can:

IMMEDIATE RESPONSES (things I can do in the moment):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP:

1. _____ How they can help:

2. _____ How they can help:

WHAT I CAN TELL MYSELF:

GROUNDING TECHNIQUES THAT HELP ME

Instructions: Check the grounding techniques that work best for you. Try new ones to expand your toolkit!

5-4-3-2-1 TECHNIQUE

- Find 5 things I can see
- Find 4 things I can touch
- Find 3 things I can hear
- Find 2 things I can smell
- Find 1 thing I can taste

BODY-BASED TECHNIQUES

- Take 5 deep belly breaths
- Push my feet firmly into the ground
- Stretch my arms over my head
- Splash cold water on my face
- Squeeze a stress ball or putty
- Do 10 jumping jacks or push-ups
- Progressive muscle relaxation (tense and release)
- Other: _____

MIND-BASED TECHNIQUES

- Count backward from 100 by 7s
- Name all the states/countries I can think of
- Recite song lyrics I know by heart
- Describe what's around me in detail
- Repeat a helpful phrase: _____
- Picture a place where I feel safe

- Other: _____

MY TOP 3 GROUNDING TECHNIQUES:

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-

TRIGGER PREVENTION PLAN

Instructions: While we can't avoid all triggers, we can reduce their frequency and impact with good self-care. Check the strategies you'll commit to practicing:

PHYSICAL SELF-CARE

- Getting enough sleep (hours I need: _____)
- Eating regular meals
- Drinking enough water
- Physical activity/exercise
- Taking prescribed medications
- Limiting caffeine
- Other: _____

EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE

- Talking to someone I trust
- Journal writing
- Creative activities (art, music, etc.)
- Taking breaks when needed
- Setting boundaries with others
- Identifying my feelings regularly
- Other: _____

ENVIRONMENTAL SELF-CARE

- Avoiding high-risk places when possible
- Creating a calm space I can go to
- Reducing chaos in my surroundings
- Planning ahead for challenging situations
- Limiting time with people who trigger me
- Having exit strategies for tough situations
- Other: _____

The ONE self-care strategy I want to focus on this week is:

MY TRIGGER STORY

Instructions: Think about a time when you got triggered but handled it well. Writing about our successes helps train our brain to repeat them!

The situation was:

I noticed I was triggered because:

What I did that helped:

What I learned from this experience:

SHARING MY PLAN (OPTIONAL)

Instructions: Sometimes it helps to share your trigger plan with people you trust. They can help support you and remind you of your strategies when needed.

People I might share this plan with:

1.

2.

3.

What I want them to know about my triggers and how they can help:

REMEMBER:

- Having triggers is completely normal - everyone has them!
- Triggers are not your fault - they often come from past experiences
- You CAN learn to manage your responses to triggers
- Each time you handle a trigger in a healthy way, you're rewiring your brain
- Getting support from others when dealing with triggers is a sign of strength

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response." - Viktor Frankl

MY COMMITMENT

I, _____, am committed to paying attention to my triggers and practicing my response strategies. I understand that this takes practice and I won't be perfect. I will give myself credit for trying and learning.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Notes from my counselor/group leader:
