

# WHEN I'M TRIGGERED

Close relationships can activate different parts of us, for better and for worse. Use these tools to notice when you're activated, begin to recognize your patterns, and create enough space to choose what to do next.

*\*Not intended for relationships involving ongoing abuse.*

## 1) BEFORE YOU'RE TRIGGERED

### • BUILD AWARENESS DAILY:

Monitor when you rise from baseline on a 0–10 scale. Notice the specific things that activate you and stay curious. Practice regulating from less intense states.

### • CHECK IN REGULARLY:

Weekly or bi-monthly relationship check-ins can support smaller issues before they become larger resentments, and build connection.

• **GET SUPPORT:** Chronic stress, trauma, and relationship injuries can make activation more frequent or intense. Seek relational support.

## 2) NOTICE HOW ACTIVATED

1-3

*I can stay curious.*

- Listen
- Flexible
- Engaged

4-6

*I'm approaching my limit.*

- Thoughts narrow
- Actively regulate

7-10

*I'm becoming or am flooded.*

- Slow down
- Pause
- Hard stop

## 3) NOTICE YOUR PATTERNS

### • BODY

Heart racing  
Hot or cold  
Tense muscles  
Tight chest  
Stomach  
Shallow breath  
Clenched jaw

### • THOUGHTS

You always  
You never  
You don't care  
Nothing changes  
I'm inadequate  
I'm broken  
Narrow thinking

### • FEELINGS

Anger  
Fear  
Sadness  
Disgust  
Shame  
Guilt  
Grief

• **BEHAVIORS** - Fear is often at the heart of challenging relational triggers. It can ride along with anger, sadness, or disgust causing overwhelm.

### YOUR PREDOMINANT FEAR REACTION?

#### FIGHT ----->

- Criticize, Blame, Yell

- Protecting fear, hurt, powerlessness

#### FLIGHT / FREEZE ---->

- Avoid, Stonewall, Go blank

- Emotional overwhelm

#### FAWN ----->

- Quickly apologize, Agree, Placate

- Fear of conflict or rejection

#### FIX ----->

- Explain, Solve, Dismiss

- Escape emotional discomfort or helplessness

# LEAN IN OR PAUSE

Know your limits. Stay with yourself while staying curious about each other. You matter, and your partner matters too. Listen if either of you needs to hard stop to feel safe.

## SCALE 1-6 | TRY REGULATING TOGETHER

Keep going if you can slow down, regroup, speak from the “I,” and help each other. This builds capacity to stay connected through conflict and difference.

### • FIGHT

Lower intensity. See your partner as an equal. Exhale slowly. Feel your feet on the ground. Acknowledge fear, grief, or hurt.

### • FLIGHT / FREEZE

Ground in the present. Look around. Rub your legs and arms. Remind yourself you're safe. Offer one small response, such as validation or naming a feeling.

### • FAWN

Reconnect to your feelings and needs. Practice negotiating. Try "Yes, and..." or "No, and..."

### • FIX

Stop solving. Get curious. Actively listen for feelings and needs. Practice validating something, even when you disagree.

## SCALE 7-10 | PAUSE IF YOU CANNOT STAY CONNECTED

Pause if both of you are flooded or either is continuing to escalate. Regulate separately. Return when you can listen, validate, and respond with curiosity.

### AGREE BEFORE CONFLICT:

#### 1) HOW WILL WE SIGNAL PAUSES?

Choose a phrase or physical gesture.

#### 2) WHAT DOES A PAUSE MEAN?

We're not ending the convo or abandoning each other. We're creating space to regulate back into our wise selves.

#### 3) WHEN WILL WE RETURN?

Agree on a time to reconnect. Take at least 20 minutes to regulate. Try not to leave things unresolved for more than 24 hours.

#### 4) PAUSE ACTION PLAN?

Use your regulation tools. Don't rehearse the argument, send angry texts, recruit allies, or gather evidence. Reflect on what you're feeling, the stories you're telling yourself, what you need, where you can be accountable, and how you want to repair.