

# IDENTIFY AND PROCESS TRIGGERS

## RESPONDING RATHER THAN REACTING TO TRIGGERS

Triggers (internal and external) cause a chain reaction in your mind and body, activating emotions, neurochemicals, hormones, and nerve impulses that may have more to do with the past than the present.

- When this happens, your higher cortex and rationale shut-down, making it difficult, if not impossible, to think clearly and respond rationally to your current experience.
- Triggers ignite reactivity, anxiety, anger, jealousy, shame, self-berating.
- Triggers may also result in numbness, stuck/helpless/trapped feeling.



## TRIGGERS ARE PERSONAL MESSENGERS TRYING TO HELP YOU!

- Triggers are personal. Different things trigger different people.
- Thus, triggers are windows into your subconscious programming.
- Your reactions, choices, sense of self, and many aspects of your life are feeding off this programming, taking direction from it.

# IDENTIFYING *Triggers*

NO  
IMPACT

SOME  
IMPACT

HIGH  
IMPACT

Feeling excluded or like a third wheel

Feeling powerless

Feeling unheard or not understood

Feeling scolded or criticized (even if it is constructive criticism)

Feeling blamed

Feeling disrespected

Feeling judged

Feeling ignored or like I'm not getting enough consideration or affection

Feeling dismissed or like I don't matter to someone I care about

Feeling lonely or empty inside

Feeling like the 'bad guy'

Feeling like I'm not needed

Feeling like I am being controlled or manipulated

Feeling unsafe

Feeling like a loved-one is unhappy with me, mad or disappointed in me

Feeling like things are unfair

Feeling frustrated

Feeling like I can't speak up for myself

Feeling like I am boring or uninteresting

Feeling unattractive

Feeling trapped

Feeling unappreciated or taken for granted

NO  
IMPACT

SOME  
IMPACT

HIGH  
IMPACT

Someone acting guarded/closed-off towards me (as if they don't trust me)

Painful emotions, anxiety, lonely, sad, disappointed, guilty or 'bad'

Someone leaving sooner than expected (or not parting in expected way)

Feeling trapped or out of control (in a situation or place, ie: an airplane)

Feeling distrust or jealous even though there are no real signs of betrayal

Helping others but not receiving a thank you or appreciation in return

Someone 'better' than me: better looking, smarter, more successful, etc.

Feeling disappointed or disrespected (ie. letting me down, being late, etc.)

Having to talk about a possible mistake I made or a disappointment

Being relied on too much, or feeling trapped in a situation or obligation

Feeling forced to small talk or interact with people I hardly know

Feeling overwhelmed with way too much work or others' expectations

Feeling pressured to say "yes" to plans or helping when I want to say "no"

Feeling left-out or like I don't belong (whether perceived or factual)

Messes, clutter, or feeling disorganized - or coming home to a cluttered house

Feeling cornered (as if I need to make a huge decision way too fast)

Feeling like I'm disappointing someone (due to complaints or my own fear)

Making a mistake, failing, or not living up to my expectations of myself

Seems specific people or personality types trigger me more than anything

Feeling lazy, lost, or like I am not getting enough done

Relying on others, asking for help, or communicating my needs and wants

Someone being unavailable to me (ie. not texting, calling back right way)

---

---



**"Emotional triggers are  
happening for us, not to us.  
Triggers are gifts."**

Ina Catrinescu

List any additional triggers that you are already aware of that are not listed above.

What are your overall thoughts? How do you see identifying triggers as helpful for your life?

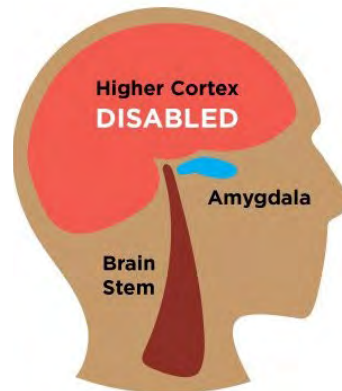
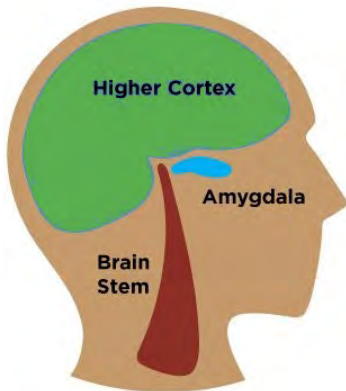
How do you plan on "catching" your triggered protective emotions in the moment (mindfulness)?

With Self-Connected Attention (Wise Mind), you have **access to the space and time between the triggered emotion or belief and your reaction**. You will learn more about this in the following pages. For now, what skills and strengths do you feel you have already that will help you respond ideally to triggers (by taking time to process emotions) instead of reacting to them?

# SELF CONNECTED WITH WISE MIND *versus reactive*

**Why be aware of your triggers?**

**What is Wise Mind and how does it prevent reactivity and addictions?**

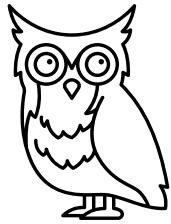


## **WISE MIND/CONNECTED** INNER AWARENESS POWER TO PROCESS ALL TRIGGERS/FEELINGS/BELIEFS

- Wise Mind is awareness (not judgment) and 100% ownership (empowered) over our own thoughts, perceptions and emotions
- Wise Mind keeps our Higher Cortex active, the rational part of our mind that can think clearly and make ideal, value-aligned, mindful responses.
- Can self-calm, destress, and process emotions with Emotional Processing Skills

## **UNWARENESS/DISCONNECTED** ATTEMPTS TO AVOID, IGNORE OR BLAME OTHERS FOR TRIGGERS/ FEELINGS/BELIEFS

- Amygdala hijacks Higher Cortex (rational thinking) and 'lizard brain' takes over
- Old trauma info, emotions, assumptions and all-or-nothing beliefs
- Inner Critic can take over too
- Ignites maladaptive coping
- Leaves us susceptible to mindless Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn reactions, such as over-spending, over-drinking, over-eating, over-thinking, over-expressing emotions, blaming, etc.

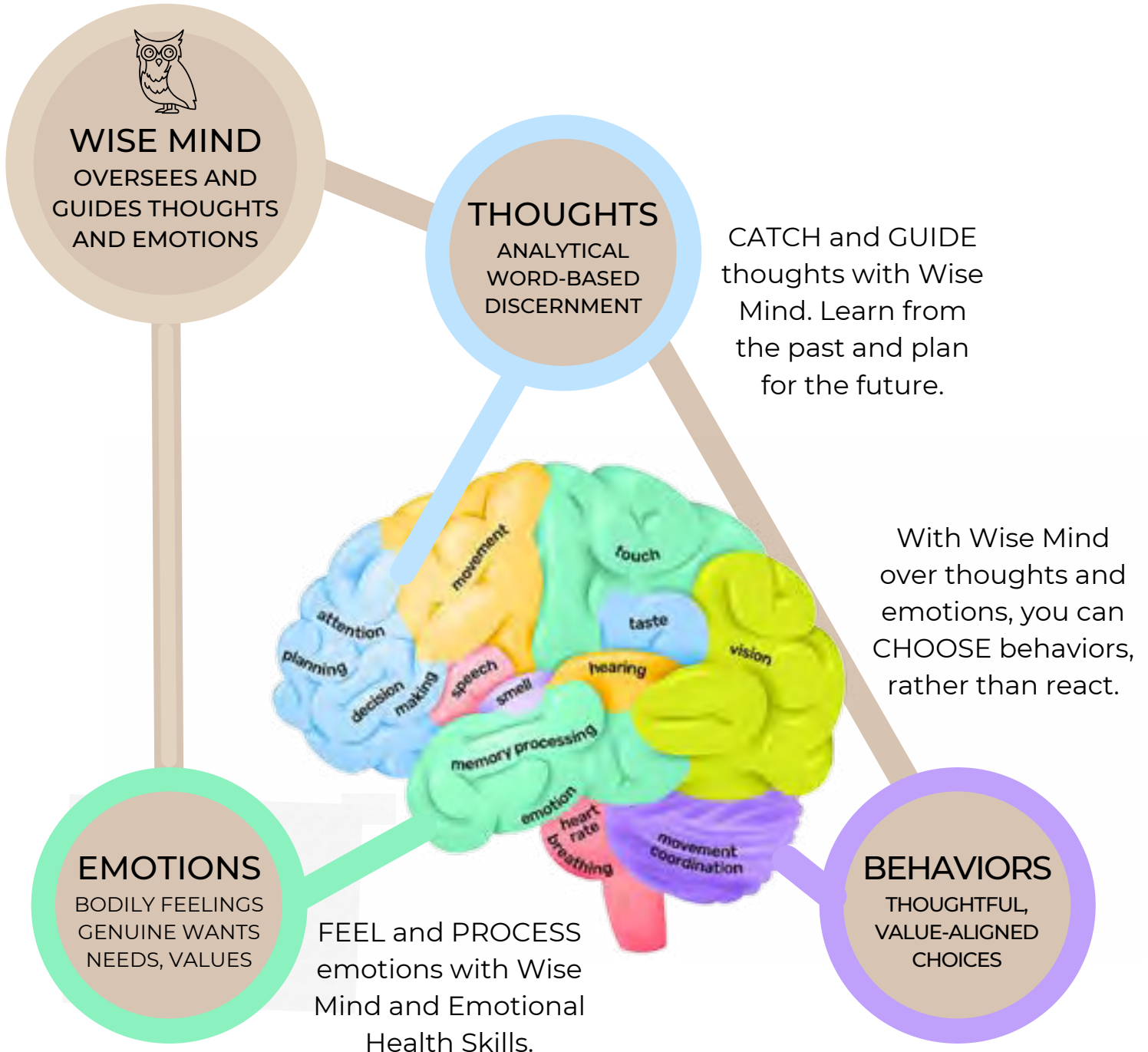


# WISE MIND

# self-leadership



We need to be in Wise Mind (inner awareness) to connect with our thoughts and emotions, understand them with curiosity and calm them, in order to make thoughtful choices and responses, rather than reactive behaviors.





WITHOUT  
WISE  
MIND

NO  
*self-leadership*

Without Wise Mind, thoughts and emotions get into conflict or gridlock. Also leaves you susceptible to reactive behaviors. Emotional-mind (Inner Child) needs us to 'parent' it to process emotions. Neglected emotions hijack rational thinking and can act out.



WITHOUT  
WISE MIND



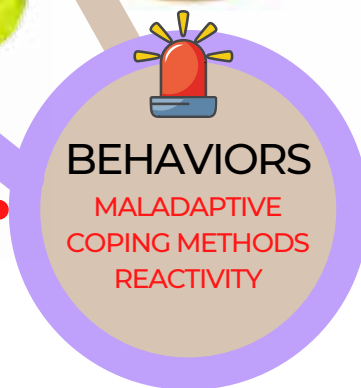
OVERPOWERING  
THOUGHTS  
JUDGEMENTAL  
WORD-BASED  
CRITICAL

CLOUDY  
THINKING



NEGLECTED  
EMOTIONS  
BODILY FEELINGS  
GENUINE WANTS  
NEEDS, VALUES

100 MILLISECONDS  
MINDLESS REACTIONS  
IMPULSIVE, AVOIDANCE  
FIGHT/FLIGHT/FREEZE/FAWN  
MALADAPTIVE REACTIONS



BEHAVIORS  
MALADAPTIVE  
COPING METHODS  
REACTIVITY

A hand is shown holding a thick metal chain. The hand is positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers gripping a link of the chain. The chain is made of large, interlocking metal links and is wrapped around the hand and wrist. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The overall image conveys a sense of being trapped or restricted.

”

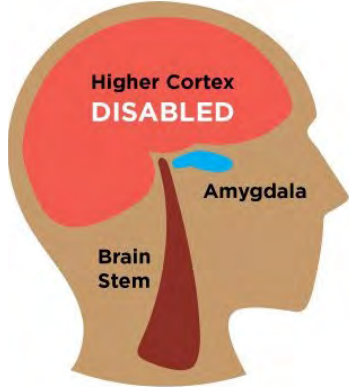
**Be grateful  
for triggers,  
they point  
you to  
where you  
are not free.**

-  
Tristan Sophia, PhD



# WITHOUT WISE MIND OVER TRIGGERS

reaction types

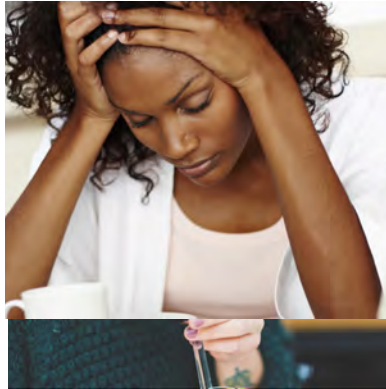


**WHEN WE ATTEMPT TO AVOID, DEPRESS OR BLAME OUR TRIGGERS/BELIEFS/FEELINGS ON OTHERS, WE TEND TO MINDLESSLY REACT WITH MALADAPTIVE COPING METHODS/BEHAVIORS**

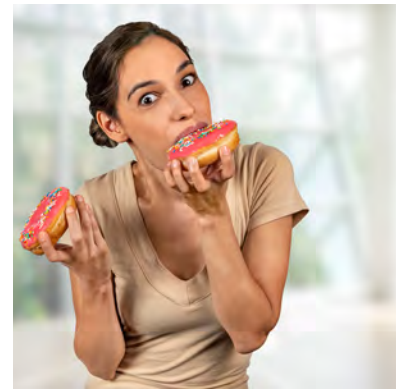
## Examples of Triggered Reactions and Maladaptive Coping Methods Both Long Term Patterns and Short Term Reactions



**FIGHT REACTION**  
Outbursts / Blaming



**FREEZE REACTION**  
Procrastinating



**FLIGHT REACTION**  
Binge Eating



**FLIGHT REACTION**  
Over Spending



**FAWN REACTION**  
Self Deprecating



**FAWN REACTION**  
People Pleasing

# MALADAPTIVE COPING

# THE FOUR

# DISTRESS



Gain awareness of your distress-reactions and ways you react to stress, emotions and triggers. **Instead of trying to just stop these, learn to replace them with ADAPTIVE responses, examples on next page.**

## FIGHT



- Reactive, Angry Outbursts
- Verbal or Physical Attacks
- Controlling Behaviors
- Believe Control Secures Safety
- Silent Treatment with Contempt
- Gaslighting, Stonewalling
- Highly Critical, Outer Critic

**Can Become Diagnosable When Extreme**  
Labeled as **Conduct Disorder, Narcissist and other Cluster B Disorders, 'Bully,' Controlling**

## FLIGHT



- Always 'On the Go', Impulsive
- Over-thinking, Obsessing
- Worry, Anxiety and Panic
- Perfectionism
- Achievement-Addict
- Substance Use to 'Flee' Feelings
- Addictions to 'Run From' Reality

**Can Become Diagnosable When Extreme**  
Labeled as **ADHD, Anxiety Disorder, 'Addict' Anxious Attachment Style, OCD, 'Workaholic'**

## FREEZE



- Spacing-Out, Shut-Down
- Overwhelmed by Expectations
- Disassociating, Fogginess
- Feels 'Stuck,' Hopeless, Apathy
- Achievement-Phobic
- Procrastination
- Difficulty Deciding Wants, Goals

**Can Become Diagnosable When Extreme**  
Labeled as **Depression, ADD, DID, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Inflammatory Conditions**

## FAWN



- Please and Appease
- Over-Giving, Prioritizes Others
- Lack Balanced Boundaries
- Unsolicited Advice and Help
- Passive Aggressive, Resentful
- Compliant, Can't say 'No'
- Highly Self-Critical, Inner Critic

**Can Become Diagnosable When Extreme**  
Labeled as **Codependency, Chameleon, People Pleaser, Enabling, Selfless**

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS

# THE FOUR DISTRESS



Instead of mindlessly reacting with default distress-reactions, learn to mindfully choose adaptive ways, from each of the Four Types, to navigate stress, emotions and circumstances.

## FIGHT



- Attack Your Goals
- Protect Yourself & Loved-Ones
- Creative Powerful Solutions
- Conquer Difficult Tasks
- High-Impact Exercise or Sports
- Build Balanced Boundaries
- Assertive Communication
- Live Aligned with Your Values

## FLIGHT



- Disengage & Flee Danger
- Evacuate Fights with Loved-Ones
- Vacations and Road Trips
- Spontaneous Adventures
- Jog to 'Flight' Painful Feelings
- Strategic Planning for What-if's
- Plan to Leave Abusive People, Jobs and Toxic Situations

## FREEZE



- 'Emotional Cast' to Heal
- Slow Down, Relax, Nap, Meditate
- Simple Comforts, Movies, Books
- Daydream, Simply Imagine
- 'Turtle Shell' Mode
- Take Time to Plan before Action
- Choose No Response when Interaction is Counterproductive
- Feel Instead of Avoiding Feelings

## FAWN



- Choose to Help Others in a Balanced Way, (Not Guilt-Driven)
- Leverage Empathy to Connect with Openhearted Listening
- Problem-Solve for Win-Win
- Prioritize Values and Self-Care
- Go with the Flow when Ideal
- Cultivate Connection with Balanced Boundaries

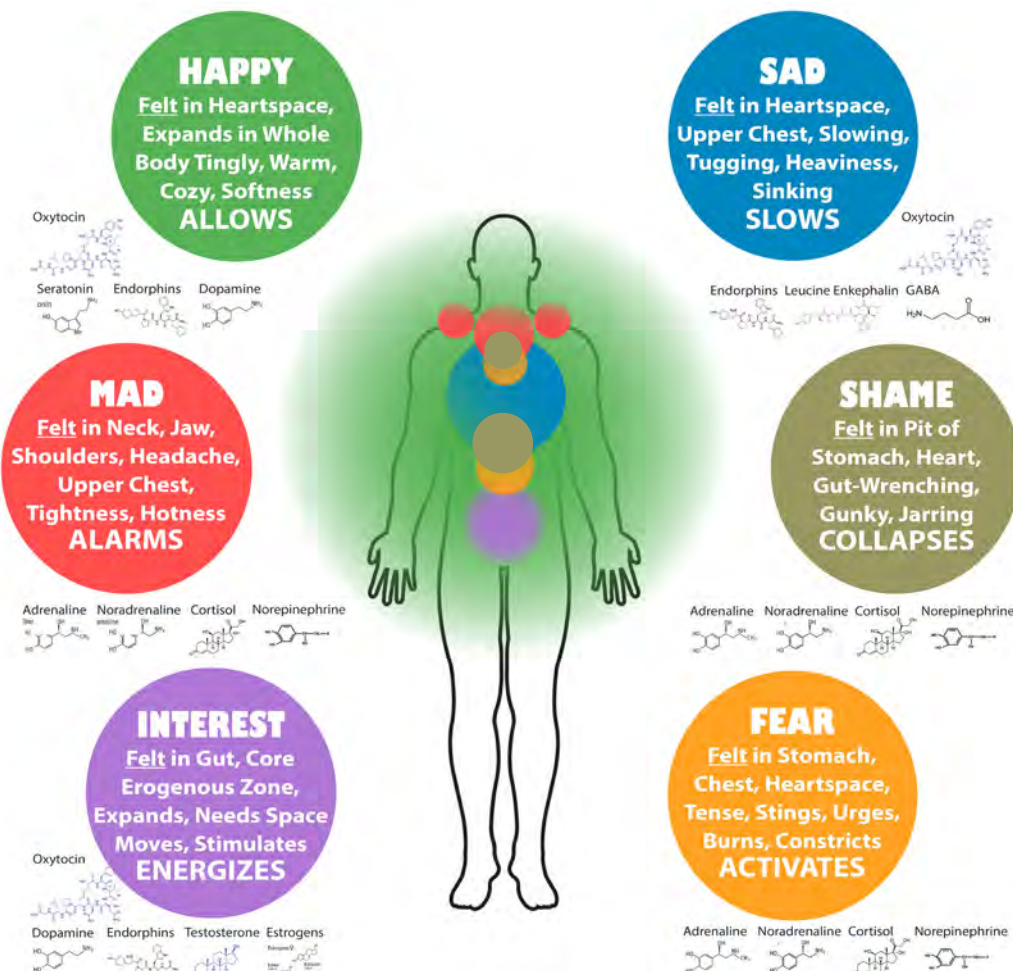
# SELF CONNECTED WITH WISE MIND *versus reactive*

## What do triggers feel like?

### TRIGGERS ACTIVATE 4 TYPES OF PROTECTIVE EMOTIONS

The first step to processing through Protective Emotions is awareness and taking 100% responsibility for them. This engages your Wise Mind.

- **ANGER**, blame, frustration, irritability, resentment, etc.  
Alarms for unmet need or violation to boundary, safety, respect or values
- **FEAR**, worry, anxiety, envy, jealousy, panic attack, etc.  
Activates for possible threat or "what if" (tends to be future-based)
- **SAD**, hurt, disappointment, powerless, lonely, etc.  
Slows for needed healing, crying, acceptance, letting go, relief and reset
- **SHAME**, insecurities, regrets, feeling worthless, inner critic, self-blame, etc.  
Collapses to enforce "should's," morals, gain acceptance and connection



# PROTECTIVE EMOTIONS CAN BE PROCESSED WITH WISE MIND



Protective emotions tend to need your attention until you understand what the emotion is pointing to, in terms of your genuine wants and needs. They do not need others' attention and expressing them tends to be counterproductive. Communicating our wants and needs is ideal however, especially with connection needs and boundaries.

## Without Wise Mind, Protective Emotions tend to:

- ✓ Get more intense or shut you down, until they get your attention!
- ✓ Disrupt your attention and focus (brain fog, ADD, numbness, etc.)
- ✓ Disrupt your ability to digest, rest, heal and sleep
- ✓ Disrupt your ability to calm, listen, love and connect with others
- ✓ ADHD, OCD, BPD, Anxiety, Depression, Substance Use Disorders
- ✓ Decrease your metabolism, increase weight gain
- ✓ Chronic stress results in chronic inflammation throughout your entire body (linked to serious medical conditions)
- ✓ Ramp up more maladaptive Fight-Flight-Freeze-Fawn reactions (binging, outbursts, overworking, people-pleasing, resenting, etc.)



# EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN

**ADAPTIVE WAYS TO CALM TRIGGERS  
AND PREVENT REACTIVITY**

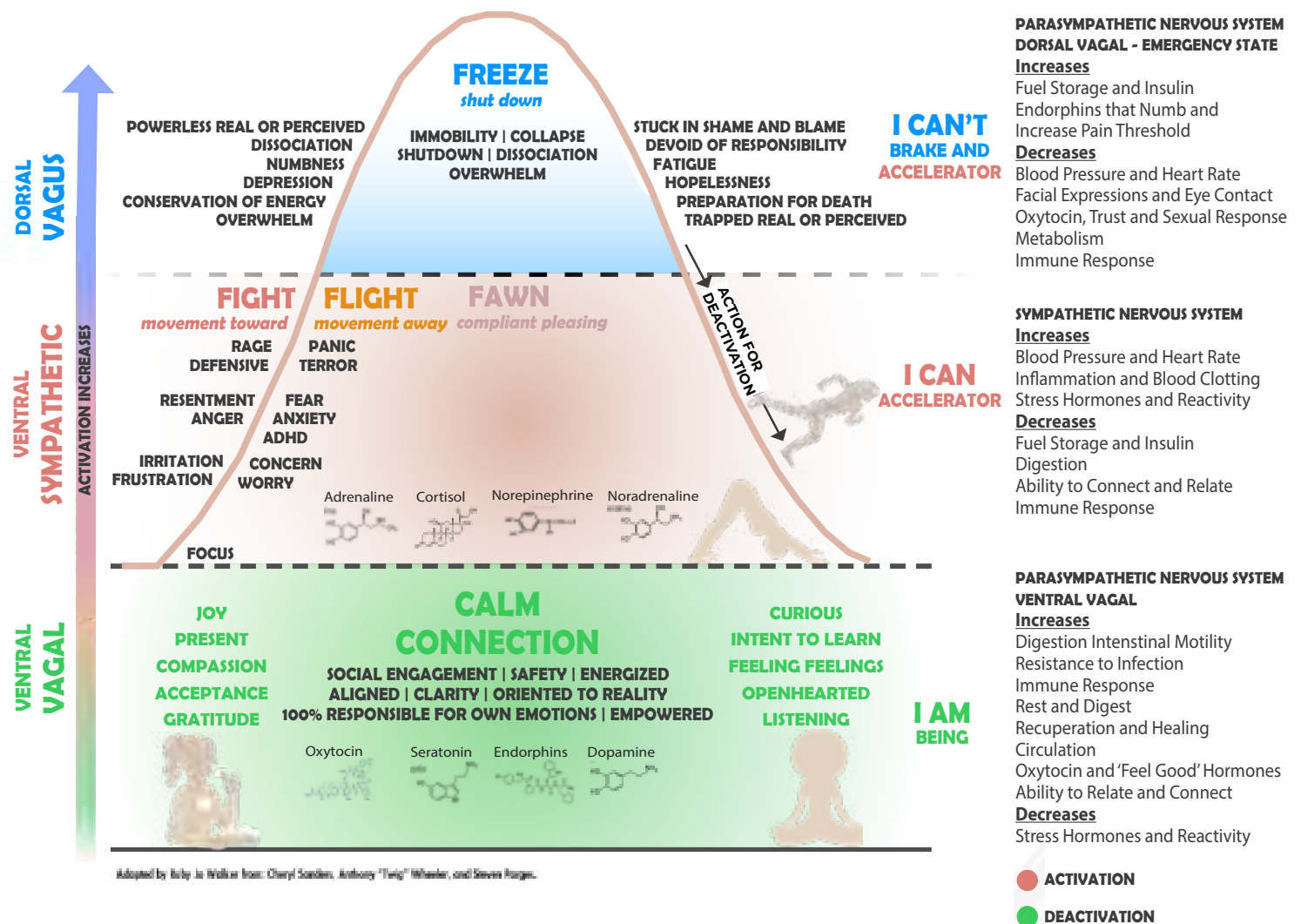
*for Triggers*

- Your Emergency Evacuation Plan gives you pre-planned adaptive CHOICES to respond to triggers with FLIGHT or FREEZE instead of FIGHTING or FAWNING
- When we are angry, defensive or triggered, we have an activated nervous system (Fight-or-Flight) and in a "self-protective" state
- During this state we lose access to our rational thinking. A dangerous state to be in for yourself and others.
- Stress-reactions result in, reactive behaviors, such as yelling, blaming, demanding, gaslighting, name-calling, throwing things, and hurting our loved-ones - these behaviors are the opposite of connection.
- Your Emergency Evacuation Plan can also be something you can communicate to loved-ones. When you need to evacuate, say:  
**"I'm feeling triggered currently so I am evacuating for \_\_\_\_\_ (time needed)."**
- Also use Emotional Health Skills for processing triggers and emotions and to communicate your needs, wants and limits (boundaries) SEE PAGE 18



# WHY ACTION WORKS TO *resolve Triggers*

Taking ACTION, like physical activity works because of physics and physiology. See image below. Trying to meditate, 'chill' or be 'happy' during highly activated fight-or-flight states can be counterproductive and frustrating! The nervous system tends to activate more! Process the stress hormones and neurochemicals with ACTION first so you can quite literally 'flight' to CALM.



You can also see why action-oriented, self-care like simple comforts, yoga, acceptance practices and gratitude work to allow for more CALM and less susceptibility for fight-or-flight states (chronic stress). Having Wise Mind and awareness to feel your feelings and nervous system activation in each moment is imperative to be proactive and prevent high stress states.





# EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND PROCESSING SKILLS *for Triggers*

## LEARN AND PRACTICE EMOTIONAL HEALTH SKILLS

Learn to work with your emotions, instead of trying to numb them, mindlessly react, or get overwhelmed by them.

- **Deactivate** even the most painful emotions, beliefs and triggers
- **Respond** in ways you feel proud of (instead of regret or feel ashamed of)
- **Process** rather than depress or over-express emotions
- **Feel empowered**, confident, self-trusting and self-connected with clarity
- **Connect** with your genuine values, wants, needs and limits (boundaries)
- **Feel energized** by emotions, like gratitude, excitement, desire and more
- **Communicate** clearly to get more of what you want in life, including connection, feeling seen, heard, valued respected and cared for
- **Align** with your unique sense of purpose and self-worth



# RESPONDING TO *Triggers*

**SUN**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**MON**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**TUE**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**WED**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**THU**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**FRI**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)

**SAT**

EVENT OR THOUGHT CAUSING THE TRIGGER
I REACTED OR I TOOK TIME TO IDEALLY RESPOND BY (INCLUDING SIMPLY CALMING)
MY TRIGGERED EMOTIONS WERE TRYING TO TELL ME (WANT, NEED, LIMIT)



#### MEDICAL DISCLAIMER

Content provided and presented in this document or otherwise is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Content is intended for educational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for medical or psychiatric advice, cannot diagnosis or treat any medical or psychiatric condition and does not replace care from your physician. Always consult a healthcare professional if you suspect you require medical or psychiatric treatment.

If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, in danger of hurting yourself or others, feeling suicidal, overwhelmed, or in crisis, you can access the following resources to find help.

If you are experiencing an emergency dial 911

Crisis Text Line [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)

Suicide Prevention [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org)

National Domestic Hotline [www.thehotline.org](http://www.thehotline.org)