ADULTS & TEENS | PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

Understanding Emotional Triggers



WHAT THIS IS

A trigger is a reminder, often outside of awareness, that sets off a strong reaction tied to past experiences. Tracing the chain gives you more choice.

HOW TO USE IT

1. Notice a strong reaction.
2. Trace the chain step by step.
3. Choose a grounding tool and a kind response.

EXAMPLE

"The smell of smoke (trigger) made my heart race and I felt unsafe. I used the 5-4-3-2-1 skill."

1	→	2	→	3	→	4
A reminder (sight, sound, smell, words)		My body reacts (heart, tension, stomach)		My mind tells a story ("I'm in danger")		I react (shut down, snap, escape)

What reminded me	What my body did	What my mind said	What I did	What could help

Common triggers (check any)

- ☐ Certain places
- ☐ Smells or sounds
- ☐ Anniversaries
- ☐ Raised voices
- ☐ Feeling trapped
- ☐ Being touched unexpectedly

Patterns I notice

Go at your own pace. Skip anything that feels like too much, and stop any time. Trauma education and self-help materials are not a substitute for individualized trauma-informed care.

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