

Lauren Dana  
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Service article

### **Triggered: a word that is losing meaning in the world of mental health**

*Being triggered is a lot more than just an uncomfortable feeling; here's how to know if you are really triggered, or overusing a word that holds a lot of weight.*

A trigger is a reminder of past trauma and it can cause intense distress. Throughout social media and in every day life, the word "trigger" is often used to describe any amount of discomfort, whether it is an actual trauma response or not. Being triggered is most common amongst those with post-traumatic stress disorder, and over-using the word "triggered" when it comes to mild situation, can have the potential to undermine those who struggle with this disorder.

According to licensed clinical social worker, Leslie Rouder, "people don't often understand the gravity the words they say can have on people, especially those struggling with mental illness."

After discussing with Rouder the ways in which normalizing being triggered can either harm or benefit the treatment for PTSD, these are the top three ways to tell if you are actually triggered or if you are being offensive:

#### **1. Did you feel a sense of panic and anxiety overcome you when you heard a specific word or phrase?**

Often people with PTSD who get triggered will go into a state of panic, some to a point of a panic attack. This can last for a few minutes or it can ruin someone's entire day.

#### **2. Did this word or phrase take you out of your current situation and give you flashbacks of a traumatic event?**

People with PTSD can have vivid and often terrifying flashbacks when a certain situation, word, image, scent, etc. triggers them. Sometimes there is a momentary dissociation where it is hard to tell the difference between their current reality and a traumatic flashback.

#### **3. Did you feel severe emotional distress or have an unwarranted physical response to the trigger?**

Whether it's nausea, a headache, or even passing out in more severe situations, people who get triggered can experience overwhelming physical reactions to the stress and trauma they are facing.

With time and a strong development of coping mechanism, post-traumatic stress disorder can be very treatable. It is important for those who don't struggle with this disorder to acknowledge the severity of it and have a level of sensitivity in order to limit your harm to others.

Pitch:

Subject line: Should we be normalizing being triggered? No, it can be detrimental to mental health awareness.

Sending to: Amanda Woerner, editor at *Women's Health magazine*,  
woerner@womenhealthmag.com

Good afternoon,

Throughout social media and in my everyday life, I have been noticing a lot of people throwing around the word “triggered.” Young people tend to throw around the word like it is apart of their every day vernacular without actually understanding what it implies or the severity of it. I am noticing a trend of this word being thrown around particularly on TikTok and amongst young people in general, and I think it could potentially have negative effects on those who truly struggle with post-traumatic stress.

Post-traumatic stress is a very real mental illness, one that I especially have a lot of history with. Since PTSD was researched as a mental illness, the word “triggered” has been used to pinpoint a certain situation or factor that reminds someone of a specific traumatizing experience, which can result in a panic attack. When I hear people constantly saying that something is triggering them, it makes me question whether we should be normalizing this word or not. When someone with PTSD is actually triggered, they can be sent into a state of panic and overwhelming anxiety that can distort their mind momentarily. When people say they are triggered in passing, as if it is a synonym for unease or being uncomfortable, it can be dangerous for those who truly suffer with post-traumatic stress in regards to being taken seriously.

I think it would be beneficial to publish a story that goes into what exactly PTSD is and what being triggered truly means at its core, and list three factors that will determine whether or not you should be using the word “triggered.” These are a few question you can ask yourself to determine the gravity of the situation you are in and whether or not you are experiencing the same emotional distress as someone who has post-traumatic stress. A source I included is a licensed social worker that has a lot of experience working with people under this kind of emotional distress and have been through different situations where they were triggered by a traumatic event.

This topic is relevant now because there is a lot of conversation about mental health, especially due to the rise in social media. Raising awareness over normalizing certain words and behaviors could be beneficial for treatment and the discussion of mental health overall.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Lauren Dana