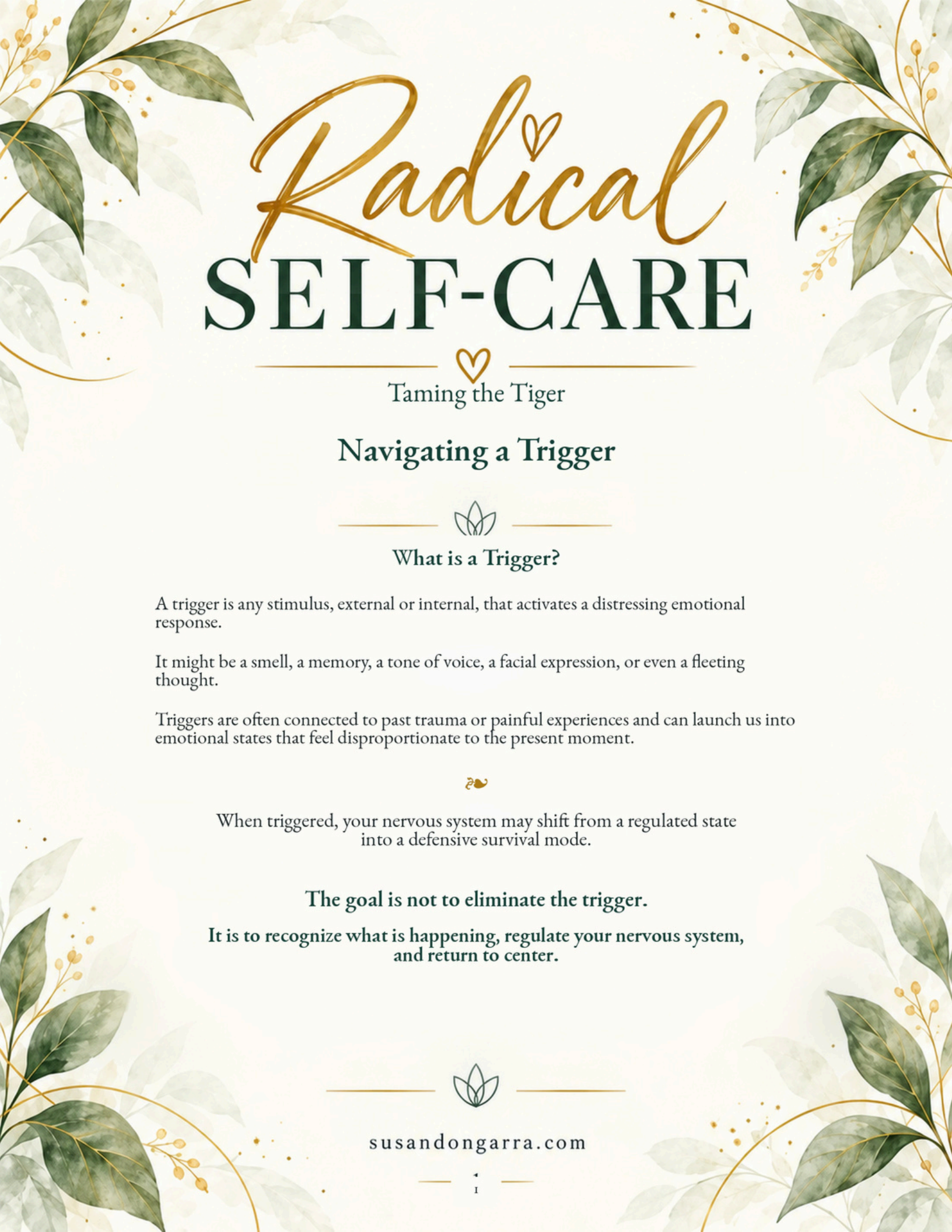




Radical SELF-CARE



Taming the Tiger

Navigating a Trigger



What is a Trigger?

A trigger is any stimulus, external or internal, that activates a distressing emotional response.

It might be a smell, a memory, a tone of voice, a facial expression, or even a fleeting thought.

Triggers are often connected to past trauma or painful experiences and can launch us into emotional states that feel disproportionate to the present moment.



When triggered, your nervous system may shift from a regulated state into a defensive survival mode.

The goal is not to eliminate the trigger.

It is to recognize what is happening, regulate your nervous system, and return to center.



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The Nervous System's Response



A trigger can move you from regulation into survival mode.

These are evolutionary survival responses governed by your autonomic nervous system.

Ventral Vagal: Safe / Social / Regulated

- Steady, calm heart rate and breath; warm hands and feet.
- Relaxed muscles, upright posture, functional digestion and balanced energy.
- Calm, grounded, joyful, curious; able to connect and communicate.

Sympathetic: Fight or Flight

- Rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, tense muscles, clenched jaw or fists.
- Digestive slowdown, tunnel vision, sweaty palms, restlessness.
- Racing thoughts, fear, anger, anxiety; reactive or defensive.

Dorsal Vagal: Shutdown / Collapse

- Slowed heart rate, shallow or held breath, heaviness, numbness or low energy.
- Cold extremities, slumped posture, digestive shutdown, disconnection or dissociation.
- Sadness, despair, emptiness; withdrawal from social interaction.



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Step 1: Recognize and Name the Trigger



- Pause and observe what just happened.
- Name the feeling: “I feel anxious,” “I feel dismissed,” or whatever is true for you.
- Identify what the trigger might be connected to.

What just happened?

What am I feeling right now?

What might this be connected to?

Step 2: Ground in the Present Moment

- Use your five senses: What do you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste?
- Try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique.
- Place your feet flat on the floor and feel your body supported.

What tells me that I am here, in this present moment?



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Step 3: Regulate the Nervous System



- Deep belly breathing: inhale for 4, exhale for 6–8.
- Humming, singing, or toning to stimulate the vagus nerve.
- Gentle movement or stretching.
- Cold water on the face or holding an ice cube.

Step 4: Self-Validate and Reassure

“This feeling is valid. I am safe in this moment.”

□My nervous system is responding as it was designed to. I can return to calm.□

What does my body need from me right now?



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Step 5: Integrate the Experience



- Journal: What did this trigger teach me?
- Reflect on past patterns and what needs healing.
- Share the experience with a trusted friend, therapist, or coach.

Tools for Continued Resilience

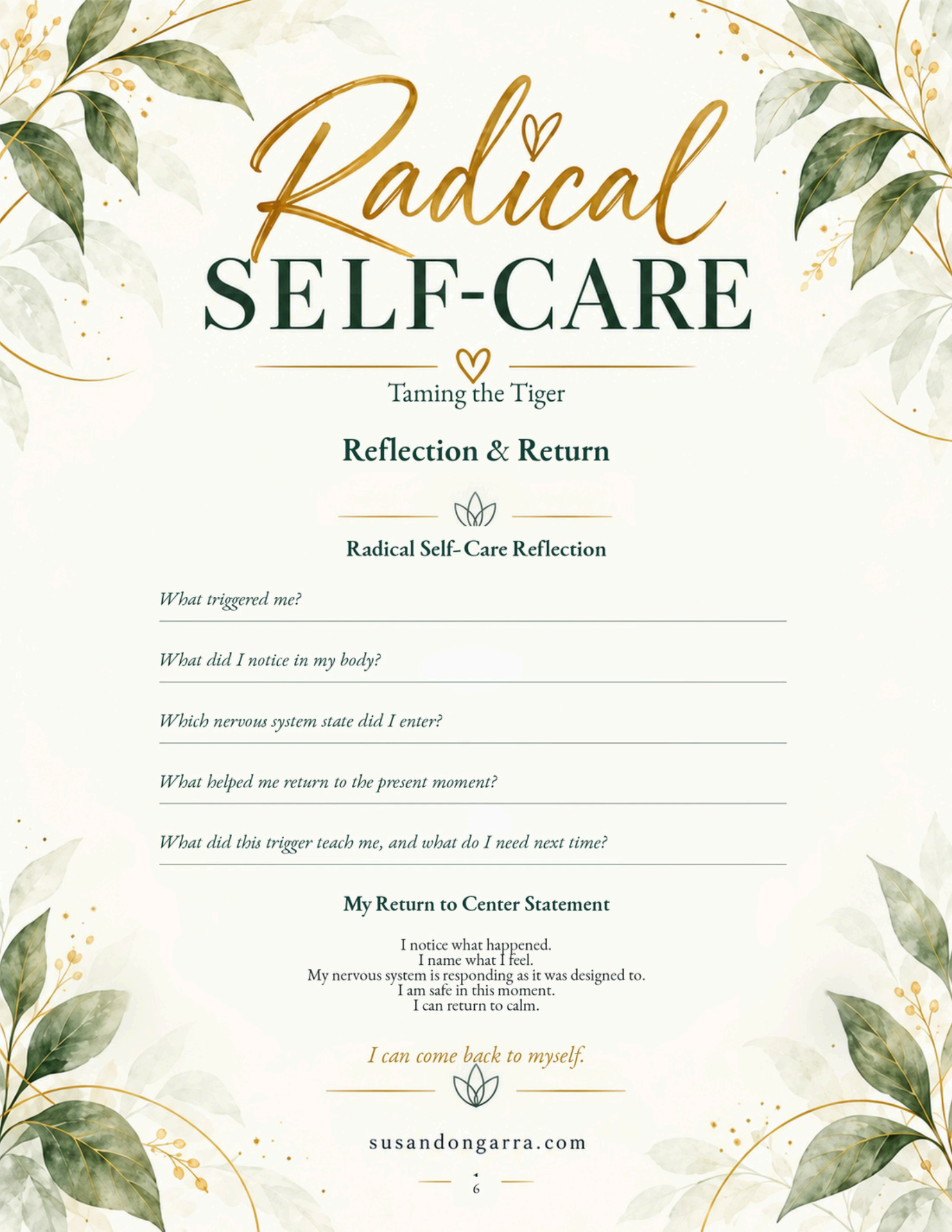
- Develop a daily self-care routine to keep your nervous system resilient.
- Practice nervous system mapping and learn your early signs of dysregulation.
- Use body-based practices such as yoga, breathwork, and somatic practices.
- Create a support system: trusted people, grounding objects, nature, and pets.

Navigating a trigger is not about eliminating them, but responding with curiosity and compassion.

With practice, each trigger becomes an opportunity to return to your center with greater wisdom and resilience.



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Reflection & Return



Radical Self-Care Reflection

What triggered me?

What did I notice in my body?

Which nervous system state did I enter?

What helped me return to the present moment?

What did this trigger teach me, and what do I need next time?

My Return to Center Statement

I notice what happened.
I name what I feel.
My nervous system is responding as it was designed to.
I am safe in this moment.
I can return to calm.

I can come back to myself.



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A Gentle Note



This resource is intended for education, personal reflection, and self-care. It is not a substitute for professional mental health care, medical care, or emergency support.

Nervous system responses can vary. Move through this practice at your own pace. If any part feels overwhelming or brings up intense emotions, pause and consider seeking support from a qualified trauma-informed professional.

If you are in immediate danger or experiencing abuse, contact emergency services or a domestic violence support organization in your area.

Take what supports your healing. Leave what does not.



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