

The 4F Trauma Responses

Fight • Flight • Freeze • Fawn

Automatic survival strategies—not character flaws.



Fight

Flight

Freeze

Fawn

Two Healthy Continuums

Relating to Others

FIGHT ← Assertiveness + Receptivity → **FAWN**

Balance means flexible give-and-take: talking and listening, helping and being helped, leading and following.

Relating to Self

FLIGHT ← Doing + Persistence | Being + Letting Go → **FREEZE**

Flex between focused action and restorative rest; sympathetic and parasympathetic states.



Healthy Expression ↔ Trauma Extreme



FIGHT

Assertiveness ↔ Bullying



FLIGHT

Efficiency ↔ Driven-ness



FREEZE

Peacefulness ↔ Shutdown



FAWN

Helpfulness ↔ Servitude



Where do you land on each line? About what % of your time is spent in each response?

Fawn Blends

FAWN-FREEZE • "The Scapegoat"



Self-assertion may feel unsafe; boundaries can disappear.

FAWN-FLIGHT • "The Super Nurse"



Constant caretaking and busyness can eclipse personal needs.

FAWN-FIGHT • "The Smother Mother"



Help can become intense, intrusive, or controlling.



Offer advice once, as take-it-or-leave-it—and first ask whether feedback is wanted.

Recovery: From Survival to Choice



1 Understand the origin

Family-of-origin work can reveal why self-expression once felt dangerous.



2 Grieve + reclaim healthy anger

Grief can restore self-protection, assertiveness, and reciprocity.



3 Practice safely

Careful role-play can build capacity to protest unfairness and advocate for yourself.

Grounding Your Nervous System



Mobilized • Fight / Flight



Immobilized • Freeze



Appease / Connect • Fawn

Pause
→
Notice
→
Choose

Reflection



Which response appears first?



What does it protect you from?



What would a 5% shift toward balance look like?



Shrinking the Inner Critic

From threat + shame toward safety + self-compassion

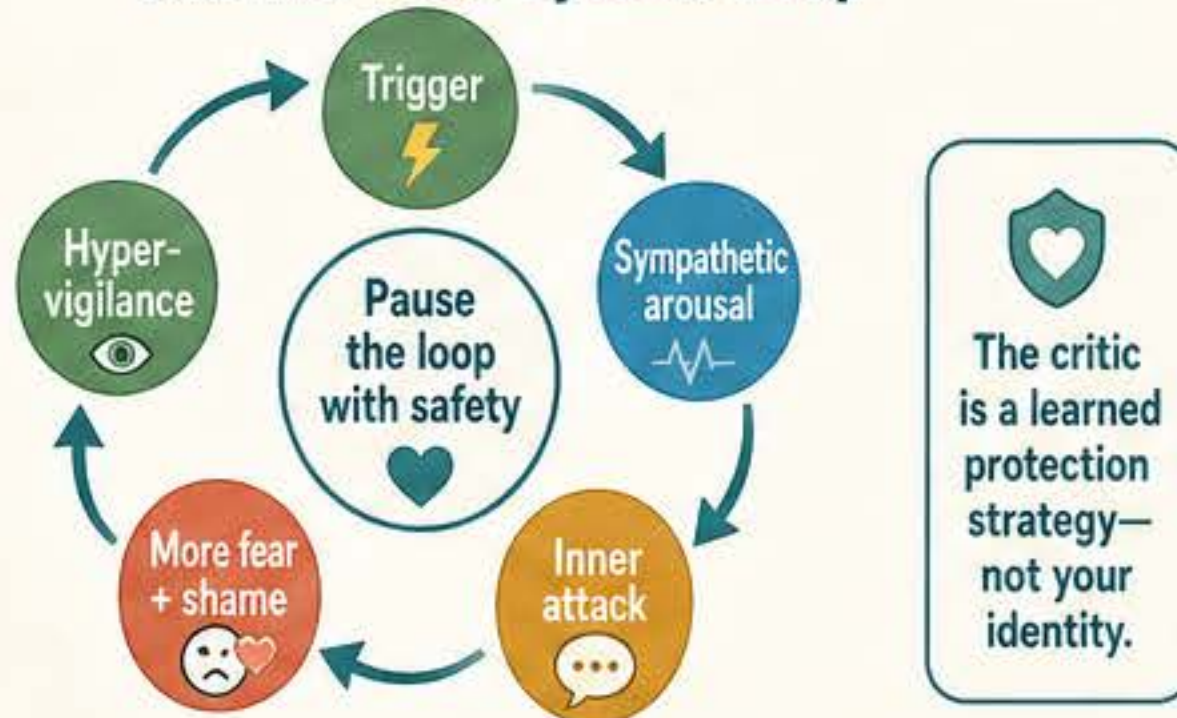


How It Develops



When safe bonding and supportive feedback are missing, a child may learn to scan for danger and blame themselves to preserve connection.

The Nervous-System Loop



Notice It • Name It • Reframe It

Each critic pattern can be answered with a more balanced thought.

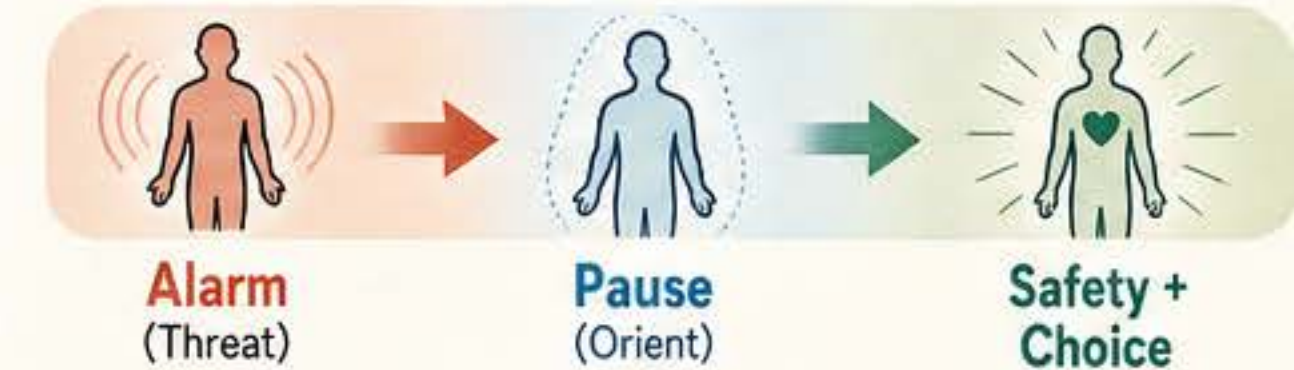


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| | 1 Perfectionism | Safe enough beats perfect. |
| | 2 All-or-none thinking | Most things exist on a spectrum. |
| | 3 Self-hate + toxic shame | I am worthy, even when imperfect. |
| | 4 Worrying + looping | I can act on what is controllable. |
| | 5 Unfair comparisons | My full life cannot be compared to someone's outside. |
| | 6 Guilt | A feeling is not a verdict; I can repair and release. |
| | 7 "Shoulding" | Replace "should" with "want" or "choose." |
| | 8 Over-productivity | I am a human being, not a human doing. |
| | 9 Harsh judgments | I can set boundaries without attacking myself or others. |

Meet Fear with Present-Day Truth

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| | 10 Catastrophizing | I feel afraid, but I am not in danger now. |
| | 11 Negative focus | Notice strengths, support, beauty, and what is working. |
| | 12 Time urgency | I can slow down unless it is a true emergency. |
| | 13 Performance anxiety | Unfair criticism does not define me. |
| | 14 Fear of being attacked | Most people are peaceful; I can seek help and protection. |

A Recovery Path



Reflection

- ? Which critic pattern visits most?
- 🛡️ What does it fear would happen?
- ★ What compassionate truth can answer it?



Psychoeducation adapted from Pete Walker, *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*.



Use gently. Pause and seek support if reflection becomes overwhelming.