

Wisdom Projects

Peace, Healing, and Justice For All



About Triggers

Mitigating Traumas through De-escalation for Peace and Justice

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A trigger is something that initiates a protective and traumatic response within our body-mind, pitching us into at least seven states that we call “F’s” in Dr. Amos N. Wilson’s vision for culturally-competent trauma-informed care.

The 7 F’s (according to Dr. Amos N. Wilson)

Flee: Excessive avoidance.	Fight: Overly aggressive response.	Freeze: Pernicious inaction.
Flop: Chronically dropping out.		Fawn: Pernicious over-pleasing that denies self-care.
Finagle: Deceiving, manipulating, or thieving.		Flashback: When painful memories overwhelm us.

A trigger can be a memory, an incident, an event, a memory, a place, or a thing. The National Institutes of Health reports that almost 70 percent of people experience traumatic events, making triggers very commonplace. Yet, in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces, we often do not have deeply rooted, regularly performed practices to mitigate, manage, and even resolve triggers. Moreover, across the world, our lives are so often disadvantaged by avoidable systemic oppressions brought on by our governments, businesses, and larger institutions, that it is hard to get through a week without being triggered by injustices like war, expensive products, corruption, or inadequate healthcare. The ubiquity of triggers often plunges us into stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, or perpetual-traumatic stress. Here are some non-pharmacological mitigations I recommend.

Find love, peace, and support: Work hard to surround yourself with people, places, and things that love, protect, relax, and support you as much as possible. Make this a priority in your life and do not be afraid to fight for your peace. Work to live a life of true connection and connective emotional response every day. Yes, this may be difficult in a world racked with such severe inequalities and injustices, but even a little regular love, peace, and support goes a long way.

Know your triggers: When they arise, seek to understand when, how, and why they impact you. The more you know and understand, the more you can mitigate, manage, and even resolve the triggers. If it is a larger injustice, begin speaking out or resisting the oppression in your own way within your limits because action can elevate mental health more than inaction.

Avoid the triggers: Often it is a matter of avoiding the triggers that malign us if we can (and I realize that sometimes we cannot avoid key people, places, and situations).

Confront the triggers: If a person is triggering you, whether unintentionally or intentionally, then chances are that a discussion with them may begin a healing journey. Begin with words like, “I know you may not intend to do _____, but you may not realize that those actions make me feel _____ because of _____ and I would be grateful to talk with you about stopping the actions when around me.” Safety is paramount and it may be wise to talk to the person with a witness. Try to seek a reasonable agreement to resolve the triggering behavior. If the trigger is not one person, then it may be best to seek clinical or managerial support to help stop the triggers—like talking to a counselor, a trusted friend, or someone in the workplace that can genuinely advise you without threatening your employment.

De-escalate the triggers: Regularly introduce and practice mindfulness techniques involving deep, regular breathing and activities that relax the nervous systems to find calm, focus, and awareness.

Stress: Immediate, direct adverse reactions to triggering incidents, people, places, or things.
Anxiety: Ongoing, chronic adverse reactions that either no longer or never did issue from a single trigger.
Post-traumatic stress: Treatable severe anxiety along with debilitating mental and physical health in the wake of traumas.
Perpetual-traumatic stress: Treatable severe anxiety and ill health issuing from ongoing oppression and/or mistreatment.
Protective feelings: e.g.: anger, fear, panic, sadness, overwhelmed, depressed, enraged, reactive, etc.
Connective feelings: e.g.: relaxed, kind, calm, friendly, caring, helpful, soothing, listening, responsive, supportive, etc.