

FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE & FAWN

Your stress response is protective, automatic and human.

These are nervous system responses, not personality flaws.

People
Heal
in
Connection

1 What are trauma responses?

When the brain senses danger, the nervous system may move into **survival mode automatically**. These responses are designed to **protect** us and can happen during trauma, chronic stress, overwhelm, or reminders of past experiences.



Your nervous system is always working to keep you safe. These responses are human, adaptive and make sense.

You are not overreacting. You are having a very normal response to feeling unsafe or unsafe.

2 Fight *More activated. Ready to push back.*



"Protecting myself by pushing back."

The **fight** response can look like becoming more activated, irritable, angry, controlling, defensive, or ready to push back.

Common signs in the body

- Increased heart rate
- Muscle tension
- Feeling hot or restless
- Clenched jaw or fists
- Low tolerance for frustration

Examples

- Arguing
- Feeling easily irritated
- Being controlling or defensive
- Difficulty calming down
- Reacting quickly

What may help:



Pause



Movement



Cold water



Time away



Grounding

4 Freeze *Shut down. Go blank. Feel stuck.*



"Protecting myself by pausing."

The **freeze** response can look like shutting down, going blank, feeling stuck, numb, disconnected, foggy, or unable to act.

Common signs in the body

- Feeling numb or heavy
- Low energy
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Feeling stuck or immobile
- Disconnection from body or surroundings

Examples

- Going blank
- Trouble making decisions
- Not being able to speak or move
- Feeling foggy or unreal
- Zoning out or dissociating

What may help:



Gentle movement



Warmth



Sensory grounding



One small step



Reduce demands

3 Flight *The urge to escape. Keep moving.*



"Protecting myself by getting away."

The **flight** response can look like the urge to escape, stay busy, overwork, panic, avoid, or leave.

Common signs in the body

- Racing thoughts
- Feeling restless or wired
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- Tense muscles
- Difficulty relaxing

Examples

- Avoiding people, places or situations
- Overworking or staying busy
- Panic, anxiety or worry
- Procrastinating
- Needing to be on the go

What may help:



Slow breathing



Orient to the room



Break tasks down



Reassurance



Safe connection

5 Fawn *Keep others happy. Stay safe through connection.*



"Protecting myself by keeping the peace."

The **fawn** response can look like people-pleasing, over-apologizing, conflict-avoiding, saying yes when you mean no, or focusing on others to stay safe.

Common signs in the body

- Tension or unease
- Difficulty noticing own needs
- Feeling anxious around conflict
- People-pleasing can feel exhausting

Examples

- Over-apologizing
- Saying yes when you mean no
- Putting others' needs first
- Avoiding conflict
- Seeking approval
- Feeling responsible for others' emotions

What may help:



Pause before answering



Notice your needs



Practice boundaries



Supportive relationships



Self-compassion

You might use more than one response.

All of these responses can show up at different times, or even at the same time.

You did not choose these patterns to be difficult. Your nervous system learned them to help you survive.

What once helped you get through can still show up today, even when the danger is no longer present.

6 A kinder takeaway

You are doing the best you can. And healing is possible.



Your body is trying to protect you.

These responses are survival skills, not signs of weakness.



Awareness is the first step.

Noticing your patterns can help you understand yourself with more compassion.



Regulation skills can help.

Simple tools can help you feel safer, more grounded, and more in control over time.



Healing is possible.

With support, safety, and self-compassion, new patterns can develop. A brighter tomorrow is possible.



Kind
Brave
Capable
You Got This