

Fight or Flight Response



The fight-or-flight response is a physiological reaction that takes place when a person senses a threat, equipping them to either face the danger or flee from it. It serves as a natural survival mechanism that is embedded in our evolutionary history. However, prolonged activation may lead to adverse effects. More recently, the freeze and fawn responses have been added as different reactions to perceived threat.

Fight

- The body prepares to confront the threat directly.
- Common reactions: anger, irritability, aggression, verbal arguments, or physically defending oneself.
- Often accompanied by a surge of adrenaline, increased heart rate, and tense muscles.

Flight

- The instinct to escape or avoid the threat.
- Common behaviours: running away, withdrawing from people or situations, procrastination, or avoidance.
- The body is primed to move quickly, often accompanied by rapid breathing and heightened alertness.

Freeze

- The body becomes immobilised or “stuck” in response to overwhelming fear or threat.
- Common reactions: dissociation, feeling numb, indecision, staring blankly, or feeling “paralysed” emotionally or physically.

Fawn

- The people-pleasing or appeasing response, often seen in interpersonal threat situations.
- Common behaviours: agreeing to everything, over-accommodating others, prioritising others’ needs over one’s own, or seeking approval to avoid conflict.