

Recognizing and Attending to IN-THE-MOMENT TRAUMA RESPONSES

“Fight or Flight” or “Freeze”

Our brains and bodies often respond with a “Fight or Flight” or “Freeze” response when we feel threatened. This can include feeling stuck or trapped, being harmed (physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually), being ignored or not taken seriously, being treated unfairly, or reminded of previous harm.



If we are experiencing a fight/flight response, we might:

- Feel anxious or overwhelmed
- Feel angry, and want to yell or fight
- Have obsessive thoughts that we can’t “turn off”
- Have a hard time concentrating
- Have trouble finding the right words
- Be over-reactive to what is happening around us

If we are experiencing a freeze response, we might:

- Feel zoned-out or numb
- Feel unmotivated
- Have a hard time remembering things
- Seem emotionless
- Feel disconnected from ourselves
- Dissociate

What helps us return to our Window of Tolerance?

Fight/Flight

To feel calmer again, we can:

- Move our body to let out excess energy
 - Go for a walk/run,
 - Do push ups against a wall
 - Dance/”shake it out”
 - Squeeze stress ball
- Take deep breaths, focusing one long exhale
- Name our fears, concerns, and frustrations
- Remove ourselves from the situation

Freeze

To feel calmer again, we can:

- Press our hands on to our arms, legs, hands
- Count to 20 and then back down again
- Describe the things around you: What colours can you see? What shapes? What do you see that looks soft? Hard?
- Drink a cool glass of water
- Take deep breaths, focusing on long exhale
- Colour/paint a picture
- Smell pleasing smells (essential oils or spices like cinnamon)