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## **Triggers**

It is pretty common for survivors to find they have triggers with some aspects of their lives. Triggers may be found with people, places or things that remind them of the trauma that was experienced. They may know what their triggers are or the triggers may catch them off guard. Sometimes they haven't experienced a particular trigger in the past, so there was no warning that whatever it was, was a trigger.

If they know the triggers they have, they can prepare themselves to deal with them. It's the unexpected ones that are more difficult to deal with. Triggers can create very intense emotional and physical responses. For some survivors, triggers can kick up a full range of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms including flashbacks where they forget it is today and it is like they are in the middle of their trauma again.

There are however, tools to manage triggers with the practice of coping skills when they are doing well. Here are some common coping skills that can be helpful. Let's start with grounding skills.

### **5-4-3-2-1**

This grounding exercise is using all senses. As you identify them, talk out loud so you can hear your voice. That helps to bring you into today.

1. Identify 5 things you can see – notice the colors and designs and describe them.
2. Identify 4 things you can touch – notice the feel, temperature and anything else you notice as you are touching these things.
3. Identify 3 things you can hear – these can be sounds inside or outside of where you are. What kind of sound is it? Can you identify what it is coming from?
4. Identify 2 scents you can smell – notice what type of scents they are. Describe them.
5. Identify 1 thing you can taste – it could be a food, gum/mint, or drink you have with you.

### **Breathing**

When you are triggered it's important to remember to breathe. Survivors tend to breathe shallow or to hold their breath. Use slow breaths. Slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Focus on the feel of your chest and abdomen as they rise and fall with each breath. Focus on making your breathing intentional. Slow in over 4 seconds and out slowly over 4 seconds.

### **Relaxation**

Be intentional to relax your muscles. Tighten your muscles then relax them. You can use progressive relaxation which starts at your feet and slowly moves the way up your body to your face. A shorter type of relaxation is to target the muscle groups that are tense. Tighten them for 3-4 seconds then release them. If your shoulders are tense, it can help to shift them such as

lifting them up toward your ears, then relax them. Also, if you can physically do so without hurting yourself, you can do shoulder rolls, starting forward then moving backwards. All the time, breathe slowly.

### **Orientation to the Here and Now**

Remind yourself of the current year and that you are now safe. Remind yourself where you are physically. If you have on a piece of jewelry or an outfit that you have now but didn't have at the time of the trauma, remind yourself that they are from today, not from the time of your trauma. Touching something you have on such as your necklace, ring or shirt can help you with orientating to today.

These are just a few coping skills to help you after being triggered. It's okay to ask for help, such as calling a friend that you've shared your trauma with. Call your local crisis line or therapist.

Remember that not all skills work for everyone, but to keep working on finding those that work for you. There are other things that can be used, such as playing music, taking a cold shower, putting something cold up to your face, and more. You are not alone with having triggers. Try practicing these exercises when you are doing well and not so that it is easier to recall them when you are triggered. Also, keeping a list of things with you or in common places you might be can help as well.