

Triggers

What Are Some Common Triggers?

- Unexpected change
- Feelings of vulnerability or fear
- Feeling threatened or attacked
- Too much stimulation from the environment

What Does a Triggered Child Look Like?

- Behaviors resulting from a stress response typically fall into one of three **flight, fight or freeze**.
 - **What does flight look like?**
 - Behaviors in which children move away from a person/situation they feel is a threat
 - **What does fight look like?**
 - Behaviors in which children move toward a person/situation they feel is a threat
 - **What does freeze look like?**
 - Behaviors in which children use their minds to move away from a person/situation they feel is a threat (holding still while “checking out”)
- Children who have experienced trauma may:
 - Appear nervous or jumpy.
 - Avoid physical contact.
 - Have difficulty sleeping/have nightmares.
 - Be confused about what is dangerous and who to go to for protection, especially if the trauma was caused by a caregiver.
 - Have mood swings, for example, shifting quickly between being quiet and withdrawn to being aggressive.
 - Demand lots of attention.
 - Have trouble paying attention to teachers at school and to parents at home.
 - Lose their appetite.
 - Go back to “younger” behaviors such as baby talk or wanting adults to feed or dress them.
 - Re-enact the scary things they have experienced during play.
 - Withdraw from friends or activities they have enjoyed previously.
 - Get into fights at school or fight with siblings at home.
 - Older children may engage in self-destructive behaviors such as drug or alcohol abuse, cutting themselves or having unprotected sex.



What Can Be Done?

- Stay calm, no matter what behaviors are displayed. Becoming upset when dealing with a triggered child can worsen the behavior.
- Remember the iceberg...try to identify the need below the surface that is driving the child's behavior. Focus on meeting the child's need rather than on "fixing" troubling behavior.
- Wait until the child is no longer triggered to talk about what happened. While triggered, a child is not able to use the rational part of the brain, making reasoning ineffective.
- When the child is calm, talk about how to recognize triggers and what can be done to increase awareness of emotions to prevent being triggered, or what can be done to calm down and manage (or regulate) emotions.
- As difficult as it can be, try to remember that these behaviors are not a personal attack, and likely have little to do with you.



MORE INFORMATION



The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Reading this in print? Go to:
<http://www.nctsn.org/>



Hand Model of the Brain by Dan Siegel

Reading this in print? Go to:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>



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