

Safe Haven Connect CIC

Understanding Emotional Triggers

A Practical Workbook

Version: 1.0

Welcome

Everyone experiences emotional triggers. A smell, a conversation, a memory, or even a particular situation can suddenly bring up strong emotions such as anxiety, anger, sadness, fear or shame.

Being triggered does not mean you are weak or failing. It simply means your mind and body are responding to something that feels important or threatening based on your past experiences.

This workbook will help you understand your triggers, recognise early warning signs, and develop practical strategies to respond in healthier ways.

What You'll Learn

By completing this workbook, you will:

Understand what emotional triggers are.

Learn why triggers happen.

Identify your own personal triggers.

Recognise physical and emotional warning signs.

Develop healthier coping strategies.

Create your own trigger management plan.

Before You Begin

There are no right or wrong answers.

Take your time.

Be honest with yourself.

If any activity feels overwhelming, take a break and return when you feel ready.

Progress is more important than perfection.

Inspirational Quote

> "Awareness is the first step towards change. Every trigger you understand becomes an opportunity to grow."

Module 1 – What Are Emotional Triggers?

An emotional trigger is anything that causes a strong emotional reaction.

Triggers can remind us of difficult experiences, fears, worries or painful memories.

Common emotions include:

Anxiety

Anger

Fear

Sadness

Guilt

Shame

Embarrassment

Loneliness

Sometimes triggers happen immediately.

Other times they build up over time.

Activity 1

Think about the last time you felt a very strong emotion.

What happened?

How did you feel?

How did your body react?

How did you respond?

(Continued in Module 2: Identifying Your Personal Triggers.)

Module 2 – Identifying Your Personal Triggers

Now that you understand what emotional triggers are, it's time to identify your own.

Everyone's triggers are different. What affects one person may not affect another.

Understanding your triggers is one of the most effective ways to reduce their impact.

Common Emotional Triggers

You may be triggered by:

Conflict or arguments

Feeling criticised

Rejection

Being ignored

Loud noises

Crowded places

Financial worries

Relationship difficulties

Work or study pressures

Feeling out of control

Certain places

Anniversaries or important dates

Memories of difficult experiences

Poor sleep

Physical illness or pain

Social media

Loneliness

Feeling overwhelmed

You may have several triggers, and that's completely normal.

Activity 2 – My Personal Triggers

Write down situations that regularly cause strong emotions.

Situation or Trigger

How does it make me feel?

How does my body react?

What do I usually do?

Repeat for as many triggers as you can identify.

Early Warning Signs

Many people notice signs before emotions become overwhelming.

Physical signs

- ☐ Faster heartbeat
- ☐ Tight chest
- ☐ Sweating
- ☐ Shaking
- ☐ Headache
- ☐ Muscle tension
- ☐ Feeling sick
- ☐ Feeling restless
- ☐ Changes in breathing
- ☐ Feeling exhausted

Emotional signs

- ☐ Irritable
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Sad
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Tearful
- ☐ Hopeless
- ☐ Numb
- ☐ Easily frustrated
- ☐ Feeling out of control

Activity 3 – My Warning Signs

What usually happens before your emotions become overwhelming?

Physical signs:

Thoughts I notice:

Emotions I experience:

Behaviours I notice:

Reflection

Recognising your triggers and early warning signs gives you the opportunity to respond differently. The earlier you notice them, the easier it can be to use healthy coping strategies before emotions become overwhelming.

Remember:

> "You may not be able to stop every trigger, but you can learn to recognise them and choose how you respond."

Next: Module 3 – Managing Strong Emotions (practical grounding techniques, breathing exercises, and coping strategies).

Module 3 – Managing Strong Emotions

Experiencing strong emotions is part of being human. The goal isn't to stop yourself from feeling emotions—it's to learn ways to respond that help you feel safer, calmer, and more in control.

Understanding the Stress Response

When you're triggered, your brain may react as though you're in danger, even if there isn't an immediate threat.

You might notice:

A racing heart

Fast breathing

Sweaty palms

Feeling tense

Difficulty thinking clearly

Wanting to avoid the situation

Feeling angry or tearful

These reactions are normal and often settle with time and support.

Grounding Techniques

Grounding helps bring your attention back to the present moment.

The 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Take a slow breath and notice:

5 things you can see

4 things you can touch

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste

Calm Breathing Exercise

Try this for one to two minutes.

1. Breathe in gently through your nose for 4 seconds.
2. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.
3. Repeat several times, allowing your shoulders to relax.

Longer, slower exhalations can help many people feel calmer.

Activity – My Calm Box

Think of things that help you feel safe and settled.

Ideas include:

- ☐ Favourite music
- ☐ Photos of loved ones
- ☐ Positive quotes
- ☐ Stress ball
- ☐ Soft blanket
- ☐ Herbal tea
- ☐ Book
- ☐ Colouring pages
- ☐ Lavender scent
- ☐ Journal
- ☐ Other:

Helpful Coping Strategies

Tick any strategies you'd like to try.

- ☐ Go for a short walk
- ☐ Stretch your body
- ☐ Drink a glass of water
- ☐ Listen to calming music
- ☐ Write down your thoughts
- ☐ Phone someone you trust
- ☐ Spend time in nature
- ☐ Read a book
- ☐ Do a puzzle
- ☐ Practice mindfulness
- ☐ Take a warm bath or shower
- ☐ Be kind to yourself

Activity – My Personal Coping Plan

When I notice I'm becoming triggered, I will:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Reflection

Which coping strategy worked best today?

How did your emotions change after using it?

What would you like to practise more often?

Remember

Strong emotions are temporary. They may feel intense, but they do not last forever. Each time you recognise a trigger and choose a healthy coping strategy, you are strengthening your ability to respond with greater confidence and self-compassion.

> "You cannot always control what happens to you, but you can learn new ways to care for yourself through difficult moments."

Next: Module 4 – Building Healthier Responses and Long-Term Resilience.

Module 4 – Building Healthier Responses and Long-Term Resilience

Understanding your triggers is an important first step. The next step is learning how to respond in ways that support your wellbeing rather than making difficult emotions feel even stronger.

Remember, progress takes time. Small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference.

Pause Before You React

When emotions become intense, it's easy to react quickly. Taking a brief pause can help you choose a response that aligns with your values and goals.

Try asking yourself:

What am I feeling right now?

What triggered this emotion?

What do I need in this moment?

Will my next action help me feel better later?

Even a short pause can create space for a more thoughtful response.

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

When we're upset, our thoughts can sometimes become extreme or self-critical.

Examples:

Instead of:

"I always get things wrong."

Try:

"I made a mistake, but everyone makes mistakes."

Instead of:

"Nobody cares about me."

Try:

"I'm feeling lonely today, but there are people who care about me."

Instead of:

"I can't cope."

Try:

"This feels difficult, but I have managed hard days before."

Activity – Reframing My Thoughts

Situation:

My first thought:

A kinder, more balanced thought:

Setting Healthy Boundaries

Healthy boundaries help protect your mental wellbeing.

Examples include:

- ☐ Saying no when you're overwhelmed.
- ☐ Taking regular breaks.
- ☐ Limiting time with people who leave you feeling drained.
- ☐ Reducing social media if it affects your mood.
- ☐ Asking for help when you need it.

Building Daily Resilience

Resilience doesn't mean never struggling. It means developing habits that help you recover from challenges.

Small daily actions include:

Getting enough sleep where possible.

Eating regular meals.

Staying hydrated.

Moving your body.

Spending time outdoors.

Keeping in touch with supportive people.

Doing something enjoyable every day.

Practising self-compassion.

Activity – My Resilience Plan

Three things I can do every day:

1.

2.

3.

Three people I can reach out to:

1.

2.

3.

Three activities that usually improve my mood:

1.

2.

3.

Reflection

Think about a difficult situation you managed better than you expected.

What helped you?

What strengths did you use?

How can you use those strengths again?

Remember

Triggers may still happen, but they do not have to control your life. Every time you recognise a trigger, pause, and choose a healthy response, you are building confidence, resilience, and emotional wellbeing.

> "Resilience isn't about never falling—it's about learning that you can get back up, one step at a time."

Next: Module 5 – Creating Your Personal Trigger Management Plan, followed by a personalised action plan, workbook summary, congratulations, disclaimer, copyright, and information about Safe Haven Connect CIC.

Module 5 – My Personal Trigger Management Plan

By reaching this final module, you've taken an important step towards understanding your emotions and developing healthier ways to respond.

This plan is yours. It doesn't need to be perfect—it just needs to be practical and realistic.

My Most Common Triggers

Write down the situations, people, or events that are most likely to trigger strong emotions.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

My Early Warning Signs

When I'm becoming overwhelmed, I usually notice:

Physical

☐ Racing heart

☐ Tight chest

☐ Sweating

- ☐ Shaking
- ☐ Headache
- ☐ Fast breathing
- ☐ Feeling tense
- ☐ Other:

Emotional

- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Feeling numb
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed
- ☐ Tearful
- ☐ Other:

My Healthy Coping Strategies

When I notice these warning signs, I will try to:

- ☐ Slow my breathing
- ☐ Ground myself using the 5-4-3-2-1 technique
- ☐ Go for a walk

- ☐ Listen to calming music
- ☐ Journal my thoughts
- ☐ Stretch or exercise
- ☐ Have a warm drink
- ☐ Practice mindfulness
- ☐ Speak to someone I trust
- ☐ Take a break
- ☐ Other:

My Support Network

People I can contact when I need support:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Professional services I can contact:

My Personal Wellbeing Goals

Over the next month I would like to:

- ☐ Recognise my triggers earlier
- ☐ Improve my coping skills
- ☐ Sleep better
- ☐ Reduce stress
- ☐ Exercise more
- ☐ Spend more time outdoors
- ☐ Be kinder to myself
- ☐ Strengthen relationships
- ☐ Ask for help when needed
- ☐ Other:

Weekly Check-In

This week I am feeling:

😊 Excellent

😊 Good

😐 Okay

😞 Struggling

😓 Very difficult

One thing that went well:

One challenge I experienced:

One thing I learned about myself:

One thing I will focus on next week:

Final Thoughts

Learning about your emotional triggers is not about avoiding life—it's about understanding yourself with greater compassion.

There will be good days and difficult days, and that's okay. Each time you pause, recognise a trigger, and choose a healthier response, you're building resilience and confidence.

Progress isn't measured by never feeling overwhelmed. It's measured by the small steps you take towards caring for yourself.

Congratulations!

Well done on completing the Understanding Emotional Triggers Workbook.

Every page you've completed is an investment in your wellbeing. Keep using the strategies you've found helpful and return to this workbook whenever you need a reminder of the tools you've learned.

> "Every small step you take towards understanding yourself is a step towards a healthier, more hopeful future."

Disclaimer

This workbook has been created by Safe Haven Connect CIC for educational and self-help purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical, psychological, or therapeutic advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

If you are experiencing severe distress, have concerns about your mental health, or feel that you may be at risk of harming yourself or others, seek immediate support from a qualified healthcare professional or your local emergency services.

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About Safe Haven Connect CIC

Safe Haven Connect CIC is a UK community interest company dedicated to providing free, practical mental health and wellbeing resources, helping people build resilience, improve wellbeing, and access support when they need it.

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