

Understanding and coping with emotional triggers



What are emotional triggers?

Emotional triggers are events, situations or interactions that evoke a strong emotional reaction, often because they remind us of past experiences or trauma. Emotional triggers can cause rapid mood changes and affect behavior.

Emotional triggers may include:¹

- Poor treatment or ignored personal boundaries
- Challenges to personal beliefs or integrity
- Feelings of rejection, betrayal, disapproval or exclusion
- Loss, including a person, relationship, job, community or belief system
- General life changes or insecurities

You may experience stress in your body before you register it in your mind. Emotional triggers not only cause intense feelings but can also activate a physical fight or flight response.²

Physical signs may include:

- Increased heart rate or pulse
- Nausea or other digestive discomfort
- Rapid breathing
- Sweaty palms or flushed skin

Note: These symptoms can also result from physical conditions. Consult your healthcare professional.

Coping with emotional triggers

Emotional triggers can affect different people differently. Learn how to recognize signs within yourself and learn what helps you cope. Here are some ideas:

- **Pause if it's safe to do so and reflect on what happened.** Think about other times you've felt this way. Take deep breaths to help calm yourself.
- **Stay curious.** If the trigger isn't clear, approach your emotions with curiosity. Notice patterns and allow yourself to feel without judging your emotions or their cause.
- **Ground yourself in the present** moment by engaging in practices such as deliberate breathing, taking a walk and engaging your five senses.

Seeking support

If you struggle to identify triggers or respond calmly, consider talking to a professional. A counselor can support you in recognizing triggers, developing coping skills and improving your emotional well-being.

We're here to help you cope with emotional triggers. Give us a call today.

¹Can you identify your emotional triggers? Available at: Clevelandclinic.org. November 2024. Accessed November 2025.

²Understanding stress: causes, symptoms, and treatment. Available at: Mcleanhospital.org. Accessed: November 2025.

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