

Day 4: Identify Your Triggers

Here is an exercise that might help you learn to identify your triggers. Once you understand how certain people, things, and environments can influence your emotional state, you can work on developing effective coping strategies.

1. Find a quiet space and make sure you are mentally prepared before, during, and after this exercise. I will ask you to think about situations that trigger your emotions, which might be distressing.
2. In your journal or on a piece of paper, make three columns.
 - On top of the first column, write "Trigger."
 - On top of the second column, write "Emotion."
 - On the top of the third column, write "Response to Emotions"
3. Try to remember the last time you had an intense negative emotional response. This could be intense anger, loneliness, fear, sadness, shame, or emptiness. Under the "Trigger" column, make a note about what was happening just before you felt the emotional response. You can be triggered by something that happened in the environment around you, such as a fight with a friend, or something that happened in your mind, such as a memory or thought.
4. In the "Emotion" column, write the emotional responses you had to the trigger. You might have more than one emotional response to a single trigger. Leave this column blank if you struggle with spotting the type of emotion you experienced at that time.
5. In the "Response to Emotion" column, record the response you had to the emotions you listed in the second column. In them. Remember not to be too hard on yourself or pass judgment about your feelings or how you responded to them.
6. Identify two or three recent instances where you experienced an intense emotional response. Then, repeat steps 3, 4, and 5 for each episode.
7. Review the list you have created, and see if you notice a pattern. Are there particular types of situations, people, or things that repeatedly appear?
8. Moving forward, when you experience episodes of intense emotion, add these experiences to your list. For each episode, reflect on the event that triggered the emotion, the emotional response you had, and what you did in response to those feelings. As you reflect, see if you can identify other patterns or triggers.
9. As you add to your list, you will become more familiar with the types of situations that tend to trigger your negative emotions. This knowledge will help you learn to predict when, what, or who brings up the worse in you.
10. If you happen to have a therapist, it would be worth sharing this list with them and they could help you develop your coping skills and strategies to prepare you best for when it will happen again.
11. I know it is not always possible to avoid all our triggers but if there is some that you can, I would strongly encourage you to do so.