



Flight, Fight or Freeze

The flight-fight-freeze response is the human system's natural physiological and psychological reaction to a threat. When you are confronted with a situation that overwhelms you and leaves you paralyzed in fear, you do not respond by choice, instead your survival instincts kick in and take over. Your body's survival mechanism is designed to protect you in the way it perceives it will most likely survive. Accordingly, flight-fight-freeze is not a conscious or deliberate decision, instead it's an automatic reaction.

Flight

The urge to go to safety or to distance yourself from the danger is known as the flight response. There is no shame in running away or hiding.

The flight response may include:

- Restless legs
- Numbness in legs or feet
- Anxiety or shallow breathing
- Big or dilated eyes
- Leg or foot movement
- Reported or observed fidgety-ness or restlessness,
- Feeling trapped
- Tense muscles
- Sense of running in life- one activity-next
- Excessive exercise

Fight

You may respond to the threat by fighting. The fight response can be physical or verbal.

The fight response may also include:

- Crying
- Hands in fists, desire to punch
- Flexed or tight jaw, grinding teeth
- Tense muscles tense
- Sweating
- Racing heartbeat
- Fight in eyes, glaring, fight in voice
- Desire to stomp, kick, smash with legs, feet
- Feelings of anger or rage
- Knotted stomach or nausea, burning stomach

Freeze

It is also a possibility to freeze in the moment. You may blame yourself and ask questions like “why didn’t I fight back, or scream for help?” or others may ask you “did you struggle?” but it is important to remember, that freezing is an automatic, involuntary response to a threat. It’s not a conscious decision, your body is trying to protect you. Anyone can freeze. Nothing is “wrong” with you and it is not your fault.

The freeze response may include:

- Feeling stuck in some part of body
- Feeling cold or frozen
- Numb,
- Pale skin
- Sense of stiffness or heaviness
- Holding breath or restricted breathing
- Sense of dread
- Heart pounding
- Decreased or increased heart rate
- Orientation to threat