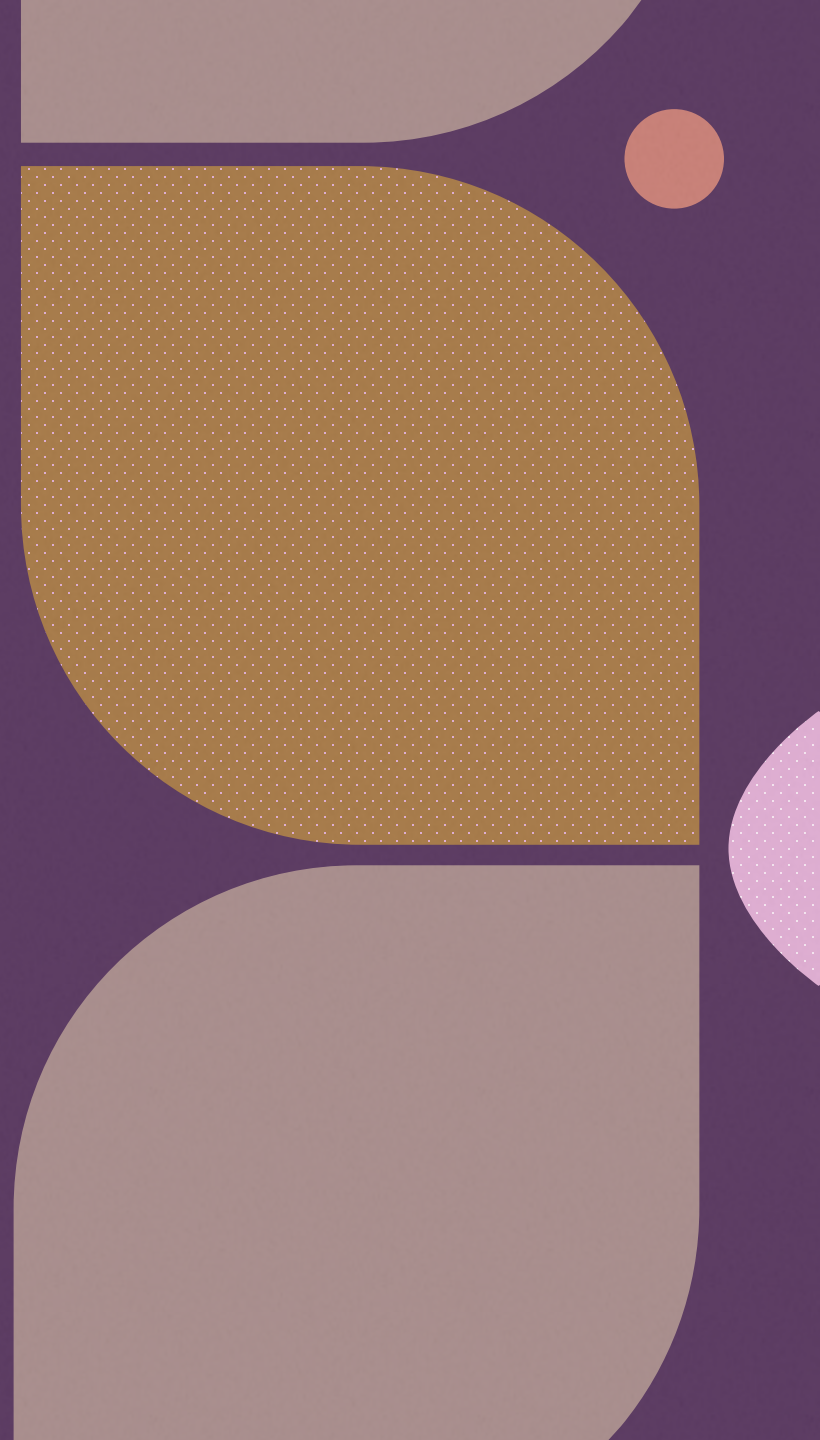# Building Awareness of Avoidance "TRAP"s and Facing Triggers

Trigger

- Trauma Reminder
- Can be internal (inside us) or external (outside us)
- Objectively safe (more or less) but FEELS unsafe
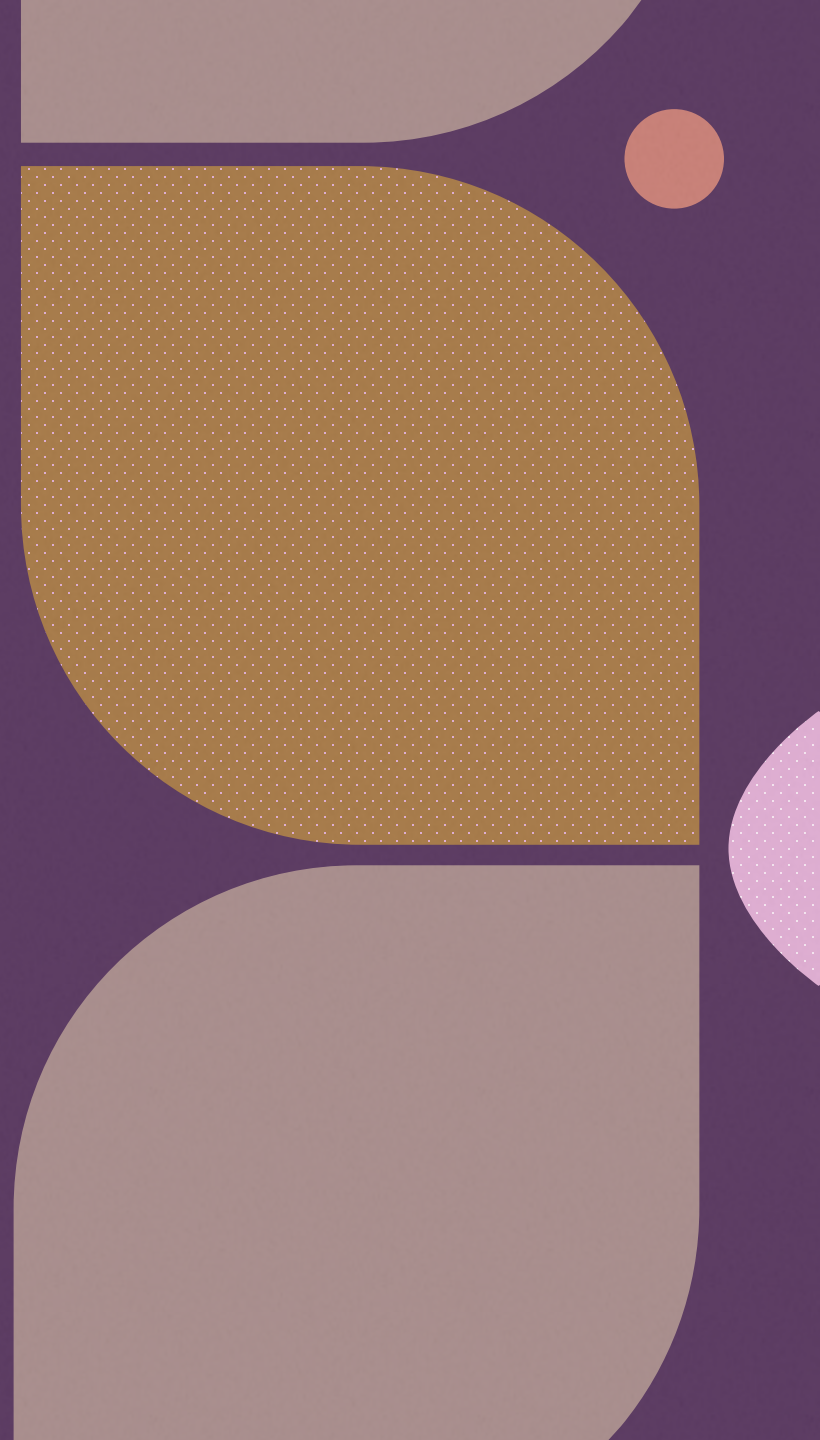
Types of Triggers

- <u>Places</u>

- <u>People</u> (specific people or types of people)

- <u>Activities</u> (e.g., driving, crowds, types of TV or movies, physical intimacy, emotional conversations)

- <u>Objects</u> (e.g., mementos, photos)

- <u>Thoughts</u> (e.g., memories or mental images, thoughts considered "bad" or "wrong")

- <u>Feelings</u> (e.g., fear, shame, dirtiness, helplessness, incompleteness)

- <u>Sensations</u> (e.g., sights, sounds, smells, tastes, types of touch; body sensations like racing heart, pain, nausea, sexual arousal)

How do we respond to Triggers?

- Avoid the trigger

- When we really want to avoid the <u>feeling</u>

How does this avoidance impact us?

- Short term: relief *from the immediate thing that feels worst*

- Long term

    - decreases contact with values -> limits our freedom, world gets smaller, other values are impacted

    - creates more pain/problems/exhausting

    - We don't learn that the trigger is more or less safe and our fear persists

**Note on subtle avoidance & "safety behaviors"

- Usually in situations involving strong emotions where escape isn't an option

- Done to prevent harder parts; make the situation easier or safer
  - Exs: avoid caffeine, avoid eye contact, keep pill bottle close, tuning out or distracting oneself

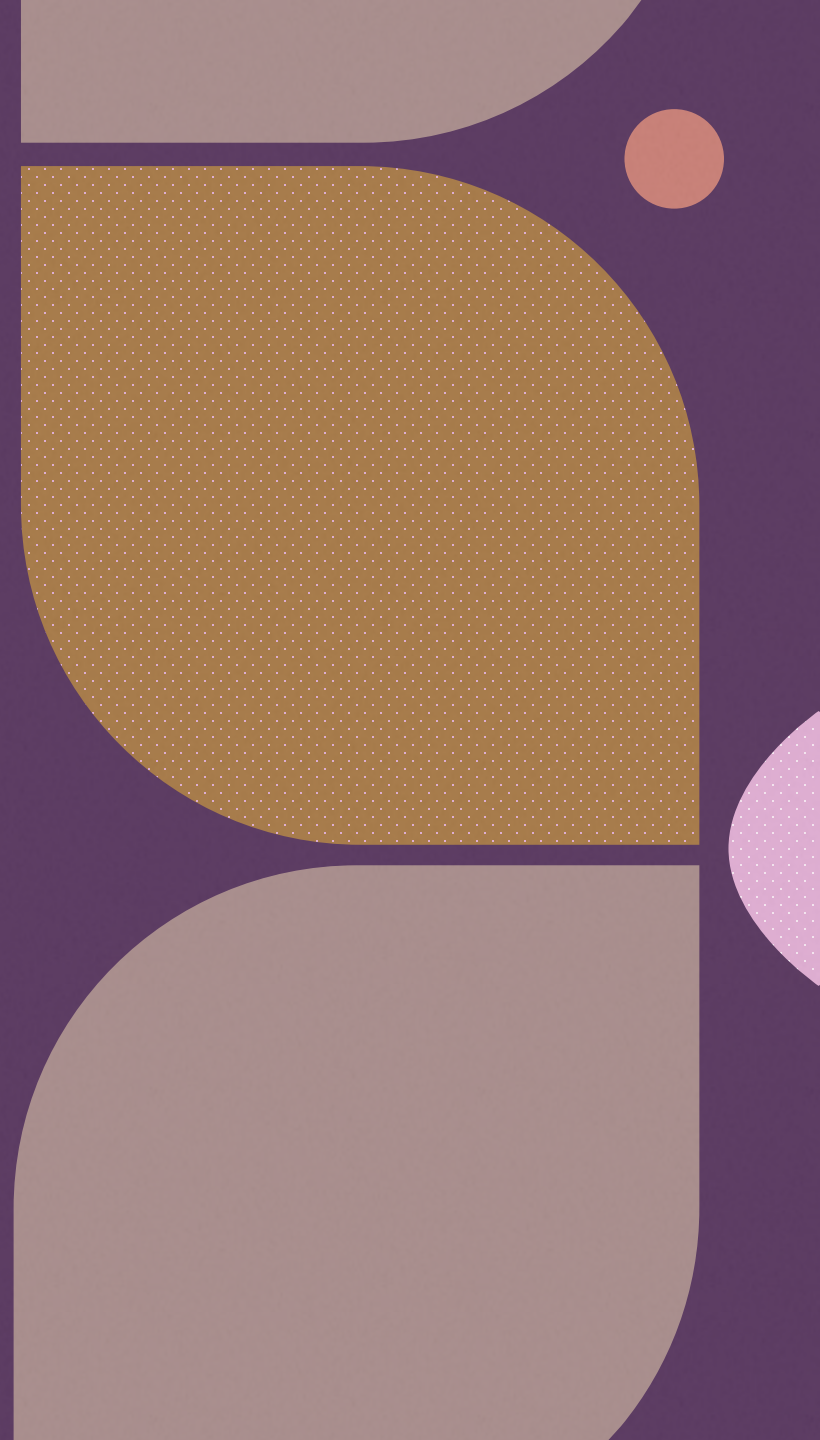- ***Undercuts exposure effectiveness***

Alternative?

- Committed Action – setting goals to approach triggers, even when uncomfortable, and face the <u>feeling </u>we are avoiding

    - learn they are safe

    - increase contact with values

    - can be less difficult over time

- Another word for this: exposure

So how do we do this?

- Avoidance patterns can become automatic without realizing WHAT we are avoiding

- In order to change: have to build awareness so we can interrupt the pattern and forge a new path

- Takes practice, deliberate effort, and time

TRAP

- Tool we use to bring awareness to avoidance patterns