

Identifying Triggers

We all have triggers, both positive and negative. They can be conscious or unconscious. When they are conscious they can be easily identified. More obvious or conscious triggers include: a specific conversation topic, a person, a song, a smell or anything else that we *know* makes us react emotionally. The biggest challenge we have when addressing our triggers is most of them are unconscious—meaning we are not aware they are happening.

For example, you may be having a conversation or doing something and you get mad, defensive, or anxious for no apparent reason. You aren't aware of what made you feel that way and so often you blame the person you're talking to or the situation you're in. It can be frustrating, however it's important to keep in mind that these triggers were originally created by our brain as a way to help us be efficient with our responses to the world around us and, ultimately, to keep us safe.

Every time we get emotional about something it create associations in our brain to whatever is going on around us at the time. The best example is music. If you've ever listened to a song while experiencing emotional situations in your life (positive or negative), that song will forever trigger the emotion to come back when you listen to it in the future. This is why that song you listened and cried when your girl or boyfriend broke up with you still makes your heart ache or why your favorite high school anthem still pumps you up.

Unfortunately, sometimes the associations our brain creates link the emotion to something that was not truly the cause. This faulty wiring can do more harm than good. For example, if your parents told you "we need to talk" every time just before you got in trouble, then in the future if a friend or spouse says "we need to talk" you'll immediately become defensive.

The key to recognizing your negative triggers is to become a student of your own emotions—especially when the emotion does not seem to fit the situation. By becoming aware of triggers, you start to take their power away.

Ask yourself:

What things trigger me emotionally?

In what way do you react to those triggers? Is it appropriate or necessary?

Why do you react the way you do to those triggers?

What can I replace it with or create a positive trigger?