

EMOTIONAL RESOURCE

5.2 TRIGGER MANAGEMENT

Our ability to deal with our triggers, to know what our options are, and to know what we want to do about them in the future, is an essential part of managing emotional reactions. If we are unclear about what we want to change, then emotional reactions are likely to keep happening. We sometimes call difficulties like these *problem-solving difficulties*. It is natural for people to have problems like this when they have been overwhelmed by situations in the past, or when they have just not had the help to learn how to deal with triggers effectively. After all, none of us are born knowing how to do this; it's something we need to learn.

Trigger Management involves looking at our triggers in a careful, step-by-step way, to think about what we want to change. In this sense, it is a 'what' and not a 'how' skill. It only helps you figure out *what* you want to do about the trigger, not *how* to go about it (see handout **5.3 Trigger Experiments**, which we will cover next for that). It helps you identify a goal for change; it is not a plan to achieve that goal specifically. Broadly speaking, there are two main ways of dealing with a trigger: avoiding being triggered in the first place, or coping differently with it after we are triggered.

Avoiding a trigger is a reasonable course of action if eliminating it from our life is possible, and will work in the long-run. This is not the same as avoidance that is part of an autopilot reaction caused by emotion. Here we are making a conscious decision, which is thought-through and based on an understanding of what is best for us. Learning to cope differently after we are triggered is reasonable if avoiding a trigger is not possible or practical. Over time this can actually reduce our sensitivity to being triggered in the first place!

Considering both options and their relative pros and cons is important. You may choose one or the other, or a combination of both. The **Trigger Management**

Worksheet can help you to work through the different options. However, the basic steps are detailed below and will help you complete the worksheet:

Trigger Management - Instructions

Identify your trigger:

- Be as clear and specific as you possibly can be about the trigger.
- Is a trigger theme present in this situation?

Brainstorm solutions for avoiding getting triggered:

- Consider all the different ways you could avoid coming into contact with this trigger in the first place
- Write down any ideas that come to mind, no matter how silly they seem.

Brainstorm solutions for coping differently when triggered:

- Consider how you would like to cope or behave when you are triggered, if this cannot be avoided.
- Write down any ideas that come to mind, no matter how silly they seem.

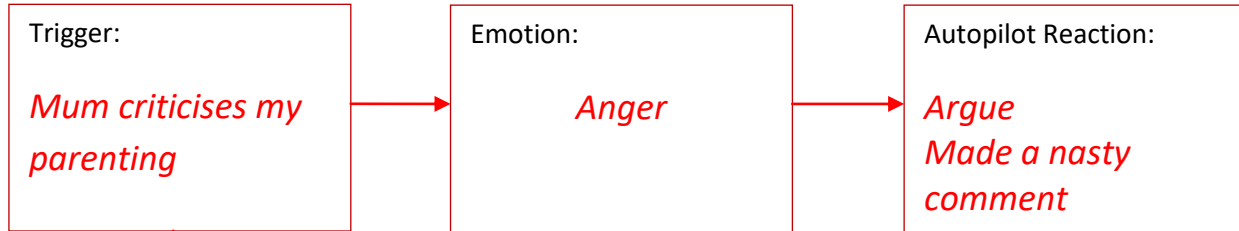
Set a trigger goal:

- Take a look at all the different solutions you have come up with. What seems most reasonable or likely to work?
- Which is the most realistic to try, considering your time and resources at this stage?
- Be sure to consider both short-term and long-term consequences.
- Which solution seems best? Avoiding the trigger, coping with the trigger differently, or a combination of both?

Remember that this is an exercise to help you think about what you want, not how to achieve it. Once you have a goal, you can create a Trigger Experiment (see handout **5.3: Trigger Experiments**) to help you work towards it.

Trigger Management Worksheet

Step 1: Pick a common emotional reaction.



Step 2: Define your trigger as clearly as possible.

What exactly is it about this that triggers you? Is there a trigger theme?

It feels just like when I was younger. I can't do anything right. Being a good mum is really important to me.

Step 3: Consider the options that could help you:

Avoid getting triggered:

Avoid mum entirely

Avoid being around her with my daughter

Only see her when I am feeling up to being around her

Cope differently when triggered:

Ignore her comments and stay calm

Explain my problem with her comments in a calm way

Learn to accept that this is the way she is and that might not change

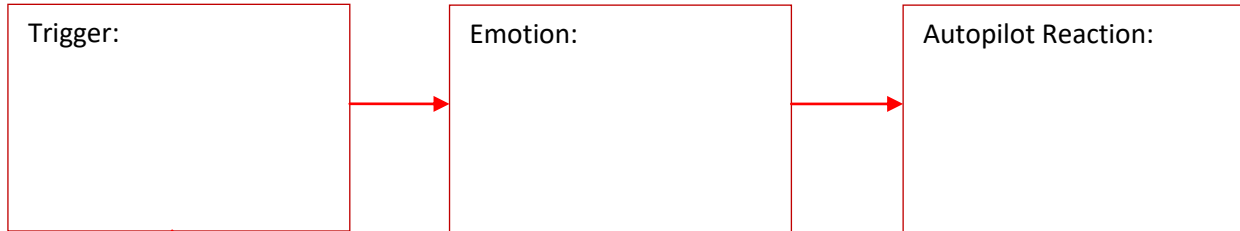
Step 4: Set a trigger goal:

Consider these options. What might work best? What you would like to do about your trigger in the future?

I want my mum and daughter to have a relationship, but I can't let her treat me this way forever, or let my daughter see me out of control with anger. I need to accept that this is how mum is sometimes and learn to tolerate my own feelings so I don't do things I regret. I can try expressing my feelings to her when we're both in the zone and limit my contact if that doesn't work.

Trigger Management Worksheet

Step 1: Pick a common emotional reaction.



Step 2: Define your trigger as clearly as possible.

What exactly is it about this that triggers you? Is there a trigger theme?

Step 3: Consider the options that could help you:

Avoid getting triggered:

Cope differently when triggered:

Step 4: Set a trigger goal:

Considered these options, what might work, and what would you like to do about your trigger in the future.

**Don't worry about how to put it into practice just yet; your Trigger Experiment will help with that.*