SELF-AWARENESS & REGULATION

Being triggered happens. Your response can be practiced.

A trigger can bring an intense emotional or physical reaction. **Self-awareness** helps you recognize what is happening inside you. **Self-regulation** helps you respond intentionally, without denying the feeling or sacrificing your values.

A TRIGGER IS NOT A FAILURE

Stress can activate a rapid response before you have fully considered what is happening. Notice it without judging yourself.

REGULATION IS NOT SUPPRESSION

You can acknowledge anger, fear, or hurt without acting on every impulse. Being regulated does not mean feeling nothing.

NOTICE YOUR EARLY SIGNALS

Which signs tend to appear when you feel threatened, criticized, overwhelmed, or dismissed? Check what fits.

BODY

- ☐ Tension or tight jaw
- ☐ Shallow or rapid breathing
- ☐ Racing heart or restlessness

THOUGHTS

- ☐ "They always / never..."
- ☐ Assuming motives or danger
- ☐ Replaying the situation

REACTIONS

- ☐ Interrupting or withdrawing
- ☐ Defensiveness or sharp tone
- ☐ Urge to fix, flee, or shut down

A CARES REFLECTION: ATTENTION • AWARENESS • INTENTION

ATTENTION

What happened just before I reacted?

AWARENESS

What am I feeling, needing, or assuming?

INTENTION

How do I want to respond with integrity?

THE CARES FOUNDATION: CONSIDERATION

"The conscious regard for the needs, values, and dignity of others, especially when making decisions."

WHEN YOU FEEL TRIGGERED

Six ways to steady your response

Try one strategy rather than all six. The goal is not to force calm; it is to create enough space to respond safely, clearly, and in line with your values.

1 PAUSE + MAKE SPACE

Stop typing or talking for a moment. If safe, request a brief break.

"I want to respond thoughtfully. I need a moment."

2 GROUND IN THE PRESENT

Feel your feet on the floor. Notice three things you see, two you hear, and one you can touch.

"I am here. I can check what is true right now."

3 BREATHE COMFORTABLY

Breathe in gently and out slowly for a few cycles. Do not force the breath; use a different strategy if uncomfortable.

"I can slow my pace before I answer."

4 NAME THE EMOTION

Identify what you feel and where you notice it, without shame or an immediate judgment.

"I feel hurt and defensive. That is information."

5 CHECK THE STORY

Separate what you observed from what you inferred. Consider what you may not yet know.

"What are the facts? What am I assuming?"

6 CHOOSE A NEXT STEP

Respond, set a boundary, reconnect later, or ask for help. Repair if your response caused harm.

"My next response can reflect my values."

BEFORE YOU RE-ENTER THE CONVERSATION

- ☐ Am I ready to listen?
- ☐ Can I speak with dignity?
- ☐ Do I need a boundary or support?

MY NEXT-TIME PLAN: When _____ triggers me, I notice _____. I will try _____ before I respond.

Important: Self-regulation is not a reason to tolerate harm. Prioritize safety, boundaries, or professional support when needed. This resource is educational, not a clinical assessment or treatment guide.