

When Calm is a Trigger

Exposure to trauma can cause our nervous system to “over correct” and see most people and places as dangerous or threatening in some way. The nervous system would rather assume danger rather than risk vulnerability.

You might notice:

- Hyper alertness and hypervigilance
- Racing/obsessive thoughts
- Easily startled
- Anger/irritability
- Tightness in the body
- Difficulty sleeping
- A Self-critical mind (assumptions about being left, not being worthy, SI, etc.)
- Other: _____

Consequences of living in a state of hyperarousal:

- Fatigue
- Difficulty trusting or developing intimacy
- Chronic pain/GI distress
- Avoidance behavior/world gets smaller
- Limited pleasure and enjoyment
- Other: _____

Fears of calming down:

- ◇ “If I am calm, I won’t be safe.”
- ◇ “If I am calm, I will miss something.”
- ◇ “If I am calm, I will get hurt.”
- ◇ “Nothing and nowhere are safe.”
- ◇ “If I am calm, I will not be in control.”
- ◇ “If I am calm, I will be powerless and not able to stand up for myself.”
- ◇ Other: _____

Challenges to fears:

- Some people and places are safe, some places and some people are unsafe.
- Calmness, or any nervous system state, does not *predict* or *ensure* safety.
- I can think more clearly when I am calmer. This helps me have *more* control, not less.
- I have what I need to be able to respond to threat if I need to. I can choose when I need these resources rather than using them all the time.
- Other: _____

Ways to change calmness from being a trigger:

1. Practice deep breathing when you are in a state of panic. You should ask yourself to breathe deeply for a short amount of time --five inhales and exhales. Then gradually over time, increase the amount of inhales and exhales.

2. Practice healthy distractions when you find yourself overwhelmed by fear. Examples of healthy distractions are: Focusing on conversing with your friend; Thinking about a productive project or Fantasizing about the Caribbean vacation you desire. *[Use orienting skills to come back to here and now.]*

3. Be in touch with the younger parts of yourself that have been hurt when you were a child. Practice locating and soothing them.

- Where do you notice the hyperarousal in your body? How old do you feel when you are blended with this fear? Does this remind you of an earlier time when you felt this way? What would you have wanted a healthy adult to say to you that would have made you feel safe, comforted, or well taken care of?

4. Practice meditation for a short period of time and gradually increase it.

5. Formulate questions are about why calmness is a fear trigger for you and then answer those questions.

6. Don't beat up on yourself for not being immediately successful here. Being patient with yourself is key here. Calmness has triggered fear for you for a long period of your life. It will take time for these techniques to work.

7. Practice deep breathing, meditation, healthy distractions when you are not in a panic state. This will help you grow accustomed to calmness and not be frightened by it.

-Bob Livingstone, LCSW <https://www.mentalhelp.net/blogs/when-calmness-is-a-trigger-for-fear-and-how-to-change-it/>