



Handout 3: Classroom Triggering

Triggers are sensory stimuli connected with a person's trauma. Even years after a traumatic event or circumstance has stopped, certain sights, sounds, smells, touches, and even tastes can set off a cascade of unwanted memories and feelings. When this happens, survivors can react with a range of behaviors, some of which can be off-putting, especially if you don't know what's going on.

Common Triggers

Emotion	Conditions	Actions	Requirements
Aggressiveness	Anniversaries	Lack of choices	Completing forms
Angry looks	Bright lights	Long waits	Lost privileges
Criticism	Certain colors	Loud or abrupt noises	Requests to repeat
Feeling ignored	Darkness	Signs and images	Small spaces
Impatience	Disorder/chaos	Songs	
Not believed	Crowding	Tone of voice	

Signs of Distress

Emotional	Physical	Behavioral	Cognitive
Anger/rage	Headaches	Argumentative	Forgetfulness
Anxiety	Holding breath	Cringing/flinching	Fragmented recollection
Fear	Increased breathing	Crying	Inability to relate history
Helplessness	Light-headedness	Restlessness	Unable to decide
Powerlessness	Nausea	Spaced-out/vacant stare	Unable to focus/concentrate
Sudden sadness	Rapid heart rate	Startled response	Unable to speak/respond
Worry	Rise in blood pressure	Stiffness/tension	
	Stomachaches	Suspicion	
	Sweating	Uncooperative	
	Trembling	Unresponsive	

Reengaging a Triggered Student—SAVE

Stop what you're doing and focus on the situation.

Appreciate and understand the person's state: "I can see you're upset."

Validate the person's experience: "It makes sense that you feel angry."

Explore resolutions: "How can I help?" or "Who would you like to talk to about what you're feeling?"

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments. (2016). *Safe place to learn* (Resource Package).

U.S. Department of Education. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-place-to-learn-k12>

