

RECOVER ARRIVE BECOME

CLINICAL THERAPY PRACTICE

FIGHT • FLIGHT • FREEZE • APPEASE

COMMON PROTECTIVE STRESS RESPONSES

People do not choose every automatic survival response. Different responses can appear at different times or together.

FIGHT

- The body prepares to confront or push back against danger.
- You may feel angry, tense, argumentative, defensive, or ready to protect yourself or someone else.
- A fight response does not automatically mean someone is violent or aggressive.

FLIGHT

- The body prepares to get away from danger.
- You may feel restless, urgently need to leave, avoid reminders, stay very busy, or look for exits.
- Avoidance can bring short-term relief while making some fears harder over time.

FREEZE

- The body may become still, numb, disconnected, confused, or unable to act.
- Speech, decision-making, memory, or movement may feel difficult in the moment.
- Freezing during danger is an automatic protective response - not consent or agreement.

APPEASE / FAWN

- You may try to reduce danger by pleasing, agreeing, apologizing, calming another person, or putting their needs first.
- This can develop when resistance has felt unsafe or ineffective.
- Appeasing to survive does not mean you wanted or approved of what happened.

AFTER THE DANGER

- You might shake, cry, feel exhausted, become irritable, replay events, or feel numb.
- Try food, water, rest, gentle movement, grounding, and connection with safe people.
- Avoid judging yourself for what your nervous system did automatically.

BUILDING MORE CHOICE

- Notice early signs that your alarm system is activating.
- Orient to the present and practice calming skills when you are not in crisis.
- Boundaries, safety planning, and trauma-informed therapy can increase options over time.
- Seek immediate help if you are currently unsafe.

Survival responses are information, not character flaws.

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