

Betrayal-Trauma Triggers and Activation Signs Worksheet

Betrayal-trauma triggers are reminders, situations, thoughts, or experiences that activate feelings connected to the betrayal. A trigger may be obvious, or it may seem unrelated at first.

Learning to recognize your triggers and early activation signs can help you pause, create safety, and choose a supportive response.

Part 1: Common Betrayal-Trauma Triggers

Place a checkmark next to any triggers you have experienced.

Communication Triggers

- ☐ Delayed responses to calls or messages
- ☐ Changes in tone of voice
- ☐ Vague, incomplete, or inconsistent answers
- ☐ Defensiveness during conversations
- ☐ Feeling dismissed, blamed, or misunderstood
- ☐ Avoidance of difficult conversations
- ☐ Hearing certain words, phrases, names, or explanations
- ☐ Discovering new or conflicting information
- ☐ Other: _____

Technology and Privacy Triggers

- ☐ Phone notifications
- ☐ Hidden or turned-over devices
- ☐ Password changes
- ☐ Deleted messages or internet history
- ☐ Social media activity
- ☐ Secretive phone or computer use
- ☐ A partner leaving the room to take a call
- ☐ Unexplained apps, accounts, charges, or contacts
- ☐ Other: _____

Situational Triggers

- ☐ A partner arriving home late
- ☐ Unexplained changes in schedule
- ☐ Work trips, nights out, or time apart
- ☐ Being in places connected to the betrayal
- ☐ Anniversaries, holidays, or significant dates
- ☐ Seeing someone connected to the betrayal
- ☐ Sexual or romantic scenes in television, movies, or books
- ☐ Hearing stories about infidelity, secrecy, or deception
- ☐ Other: _____

Relational and Intimacy Triggers

- ☐ Physical or emotional distance
- ☐ Changes in affection or sexual intimacy
- ☐ Feeling rejected or unwanted
- ☐ Comparing yourself to others
- ☐ Discussions about attraction, sex, or relationships
- ☐ Feeling pressured to forgive, trust, or “move on”
- ☐ Receiving affection that feels confusing or unsafe
- ☐ Conflict, criticism, or perceived abandonment
- ☐ Other: _____

Internal Triggers

- ☐ Intrusive memories or mental images
- ☐ Dreams or nightmares
- ☐ Sudden feelings of suspicion
- ☐ Remembering past lies or discoveries
- ☐ Questioning your memory or judgment
- ☐ Feeling vulnerable, tired, lonely, or overwhelmed
- ☐ Body-image concerns
- ☐ Fear that more information will be discovered
- ☐ Other: _____

Part 2: My Activation Signs

Activation signs are the emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral changes that occur when your nervous system senses danger.

Place a checkmark next to the signs you notice in yourself.

Emotional Signs

- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Panic
- ☐ Anger or rage
- ☐ Sadness or grief
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Hopelessness
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Emotional numbness
- ☐ Feeling abandoned or rejected
- ☐ Other: _____

Physical Signs

- ☐ Jaw tightness or teeth clenching
- ☐ Racing heart
- ☐ Chest tightness
- ☐ Shaking or trembling
- ☐ Nausea or stomach discomfort
- ☐ Muscle tension
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Difficulty breathing
- ☐ Feeling hot, cold, dizzy, or lightheaded
- ☐ Restlessness or an urge to escape
- ☐ Other: _____

Cognitive Signs

- ☐ Feeling like I am in a “fog”
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Racing thoughts
- ☐ Obsessing over details
- ☐ Replaying conversations or discoveries
- ☐ Imagining worst-case scenarios
- ☐ Difficulty distinguishing fear from current facts
- ☐ Questioning my memory or perception
- ☐ Feeling confused or disoriented
- ☐ Feeling unable to make decisions
- ☐ Other: _____

Behavioral Signs

- ☐ Checking phones, accounts, locations, or messages
- ☐ Repeatedly asking questions or seeking reassurance
- ☐ Withdrawing from others
- ☐ Avoiding conversations or reminders
- ☐ Raising my voice or becoming confrontational
- ☐ Crying or becoming unable to speak
- ☐ Isolating myself
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- ☐ Changes in eating, work, or self-care
- ☐ Using substances or other behaviors to numb emotions
- ☐ Other: _____

Part 3: Understanding My Trigger Pattern

Describe a recent situation in which you felt triggered.

What happened immediately before you became activated?

What thoughts, memories, or fears came up?

What emotions did you experience?

What physical sensations did you notice?

What did you feel an urge to do?

What did you actually do?

Part 4: Rate Your Activation

When this trigger occurred, how activated did you feel?

0 — Calm and grounded

1–3 — Mildly unsettled

4–6 — Moderately activated

7–8 — Highly activated

9–10 — Overwhelmed or unable to feel safe

My activation level was: _____ / 10

What helped lower the intensity, even slightly?

Part 5: My Early Warning Signs

The earliest signs that I am becoming activated are:

1.

2.

3.

When I notice these signs, I can pause before my activation becomes more intense.

Part 6: Creating Safety

When I feel triggered, the following may help me feel safer or more grounded:

- ☐ Take slow, intentional breaths
- ☐ Place my feet firmly on the floor

- ☐ Name five things I can see
- ☐ Step away from the conversation temporarily
- ☐ Ask for clarification without demanding immediate answers
- ☐ Write down my thoughts before responding
- ☐ Contact a trusted support person
- ☐ Attend a therapy or support-group session
- ☐ Remind myself of what I know in the present moment
- ☐ Engage in movement, stretching, or a calming activity
- ☐ Set a boundary
- ☐ Ask for a specific form of reassurance
- ☐ Other: _____

My Personal Grounding Plan

When I notice that I am becoming activated, I will first:

A person I can contact for support is:

A boundary or request that may help me feel safer is:

A grounding statement I can remind myself of is:

Examples may include:

- “I am having a trauma response, and I can pause.”
- “This feeling is intense, but I do not have to respond immediately.”
- “I can seek information while also caring for my nervous system.”
- “I am allowed to ask for safety, honesty, and support.”
- “I can take this one moment at a time.”

Reflection

Which triggers affect you most frequently?

Which activation signs tend to appear first?

What responses help you feel supported rather than dismissed or overwhelmed?

What would you like your partner, therapist, or support system to understand about your triggers?

Triggers and activation signs are not personal failures. They are understandable nervous-system responses to an experience that disrupted safety, trust, and connection. Recognizing these patterns can help you respond with greater awareness, self-compassion, and support.