

Responding to a Traumatized Youth Who Has Been Triggered: A Guide for Non-Mental Health Professionals

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<p>Signs a youth has been triggered</p>	<p>PTSD symptoms can be “triggered” by many subtle things that the mind connects to the traumatic event. Signs of being triggered include any of the symptoms of PTSD:</p> <p>Re-experiencing: Being unable to get unwanted thoughts about the event out of one’s mind; flashbacks in which one feels like the event is happening again right here and now</p> <p>Avoidance: Strong negative reactions to thinking about, talking about, going near, or acknowledging the traumatic event</p> <p>Negative mood or thoughts: Irritability or anger, self-defeating or hopeless thoughts, inability to experience feelings</p> <p>Hyperarousal: Edgy, on the alert for danger, jumping out of one’s skin at unexpected sounds</p> <p>Dissociation: Feeling like one is a dream, or like the world is unreal</p>
<p>Check your own level of arousal</p>	<p>Strong emotions can be contagious, and being with someone who is emotionally aroused can make us aroused as well. But, as they tell us every time we get on an airplane, we have to take care of our own “oxygen masks” before we are in a position to help someone else with theirs. Check your breathing (is it shallow and fast?) and heart rate (is it racing?) If so, use deep, slow breathing and a calm, focusing thought (“I can handle this”) to center and calm yourself.</p>
<p>Use a calming voice</p>	<p>Voices are powerful communicators of calm and reassurance to humans—we respond to our parents’ voices when we are still in the womb. Lower your voice, speak slowly and calmly. Just like emotional arousal can be contagious, so can a calming voice.</p>
<p>Put a label on what’s happening, using words the youth will accept</p>	<p><i>“Jared, you’re showing me you are [angry, stressed, frustrated, worried, bothered, not really here with me] right now. I’m sure there’s a reason for that and I want to know about it. But before we can talk about it, I’d like us to both be calm and in control.”</i></p>
<p>Invite the youth to engage in a self-calming exercise with you.</p>	<p><i>“I want to invite you do so something with me, because it is something I know helps me to feel more calm and in control.”</i> (It is much more persuasive and effective if you walk the youth through an exercise you actually use yourself and you find works for you.)</p>

<p>Belly breathing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your belly. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose deep down into your lungs. Notice how your belly rises as though there is a balloon in there filling up, but your chest moves only slightly.</i> • <i>When you've taken a deep breath, pause for a moment then slowly let the air out through your mouth. Be sure to breathe out fully, so your breathing out takes longer than your breathing in. Notice how your belly goes down, like you are emptying that balloon of air.</i> • <i>As you breathe out, allow your whole body to relax. You might imagine your arms and legs going loose, like a rag doll. As you breathe out, think of a calming word or phrase, such as. 'Calm,' 'I'm OK,' or "Peace.'</i> • <i>Do 10 slow, full abdominal breaths. Try to keep your breathing smooth and regular, without gulping in breaths or puffing your breath out all at once. Remember to pause briefly after every breath you inhale. The process should go like this: <i>Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale (count 'one'). Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale (count 'two'). Slow inhale ... Pause ... Slow exhale (count 'three'). ... and so on ...</i></i>
<p>Grounding: Using the five senses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Name 5 things you can see in the room with you</i> • <i>Name 4 things you can feel ("chair against my back, feet on floor, jeans on my legs")</i> • <i>Name 3 things you can hear right now ("someone walking in the hall, birds outside")</i> • <i>Name 2 things you can smell right now, or 2 things you like the smell of</i> • <i>"Name 1 good thing about yourself</i>
<p>Grounding: Here-and-now</p>	<p>Although it is very unlikely you will ever encounter having a dissociative episode in your office, here-and-now questions are a way to bring them into the present:</p> <p><i>"Jared, listen to my voice. I am _____, your probation officer. Can you hear my voice? Nod your head if you can hear my voice.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where are you right now?</i> • <i>What is the day of the week?"</i> • <i>What is the date?</i> • <i>How old are you?</i> • <i>What season of the year is this?</i>