



# MANAGING TRIGGERS

Distressing and painful memories of combat and military experiences can be triggered by different things. Here's what you can do to manage them:

## STEP 1 BE MORE AWARE OF YOUR TRIGGERS



- Create a strategy for triggers.
- Become aware of the specific things that trigger a stress reaction.
- Develop a list of the situations that trigger memories — this can take time.
- Pay close attention to your triggers and start cataloging them.

## STEP 2 LIST YOUR EXPECTED COMBAT AND OPERATIONAL STRESS TRIGGERS



List the triggers you expect to come up or those you've already experienced. Even if this is new to you, there is no time like the present to start thinking about your triggers.

## STEP 3 MAKE A PLAN

To manage triggers effectively, you need to have a toolkit of strategies. These are a few examples:



**Relaxation Exercises:** Simple ways of reducing tension and stress through deep, slow breathing or simple muscle relaxation strategies (e.g., tensing and releasing muscle groups or stretching).



**Distraction:** Focusing on something else (e.g., a friend or a pet) or doing something pleasant (e.g., humming a tune or listening to music).



**Thought Challenging:** Getting your reactions under control by examining and challenging unhelpful thoughts (e.g., reminding yourself that your reaction is about the past, not the present).



**Getting Support:** Talking to someone you trust about your feelings or experiences.



**"Emotion-Surfing":** Learning to ride out feelings of anxiety, sadness, or even anger by reminding yourself the intensity of the feelings always decreases over time and can be tolerated.



**Sticking With a Routine:** Creating a consistent daily routine will provide you with some structure. Having structure will provide purpose and predictability.



**Writing Things Down:** Writing about your experiences, even if you throw the paper away afterward, can help you clarify what is bothering you and help identify solutions.

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# TRIGGERS



These are examples of specific things and situations that can trigger a stress reaction.



## **OBJECTS:**

items associated with what happened



## **PLACES:**

similar places where bad things happened



## **PEOPLE:**

individuals from the Middle East, other service members, veterans



## **EVENTS:**

driving a vehicle, attending a funeral or memorial service



## **SOUNDS:**

fireworks, thunder, loud people



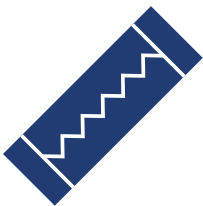
## **ODORS:**

diesel fuel, barbeque, smoke



## **EMOTIONS:**

sadness, anger, fear



## **TASTES:**

the flavor of the gum you were chewing when the trauma happened



## **BODILY SENSATIONS:**

feeling tense or exhausted



## **WEATHER:**

hot and dry days



## **TIME:**

season of the year, anniversary of an event

We would all rather not think about painful life experiences, but that's impossible. Avoidance of these memories (e.g., distracting yourself, drinking, getting angry with others, etc.) can provide short-term relief but at a cost. Learning to manage your response to triggers is one step on the path to healing from combat and operational experiences.



To learn more about Wounded Warrior Project® mental health programs, visit [woundedwarriorproject.org/mentalwellness](https://woundedwarriorproject.org/mentalwellness)