

healing

TRAUMA

WITH Irene Lyon



What's your survival style?

VIDEO 1 WORKSHEET



FIGHT



FLIGHT



FREEZE

Is your primary style fight, flight or freeze?

When you picture yourself in everyday life, and particularly in a stressful situation, do you...?



Have a tendency to fight?

THIS OFTEN SHOWS UP AS:

- Having a quick flash of anger or frustration that is disproportionate to the situation.
- Getting defensive and trying to prove your case (Even if you know you're wrong, you hold your ground anyway and find it hard to admit fault).
- Raising your voice and/or displaying aggressive (or rage-like) tendencies.
- Possibly getting scary to the people you love.



Have a tendency to flee?

THIS MIGHT SHOW UP AS:

- Ignoring a situation or pretending it didn't happen.
- Feeling like you really want to get away, like if you just get a fresh start then things will change, which may show up as thinking about moving (or actually moving) away from situations, cities, jobs, relationships, etc.
- Leaving the room or conversation and doing your best to avoid any and all confrontation.
- Getting busy and preoccupied with something that's completely the opposite of the situation at hand - you start cleaning, or knitting, etc in the hope that it will just go away on its own.



Have a tendency to freeze?

THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

- Going completely blank and finding it hard to express ANYTHING.
- Having little or no desire or ability to go out or make any kind of social engagement.
- Hoping that if you get really quiet and still and don't make a peep the issue will just go away on its own (No one will know, right?).
- Completely forget a stressful (or traumatic) situation even happened... when someone asks you about it you might say "what are you talking about?" (And you really do have NO recollection of the incident).
- Having time pass without much awareness, be it for minutes, hours, days or years.



A mix of responses

Many of us default to different responses in different situations.

MAYBE YOU:

- Tend towards fight in some situations?
- Find yourself wanting to flee in others?
- Go completely blank and shutdown in others?

QUESTION 1

Which style or styles feel most familiar to you? Did you identify strongly with one distinct response (fight, flight, freeze) or with a mix of different responses?

You Need Your Survival Responses!

THESE THREE RESPONSES - FIGHT, FLIGHT AND FREEZE - ARE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT.

They are your SURVIVAL INSTINCTS. You need them! They keep you out of harm's way. In fact, you couldn't survive without them. It's YOUR Nervous System, your autonomic (read: automatic) nervous system, that governs these responses.

Your Survival Instincts in Action

Here are some basic real-life examples of these automatic stress responses in action.

A Let's say you're cutting onions and you are wearing summer sandals and then all of a sudden the knife slips out of your hands and it is headed straight for your bare toes and feet. But, in an INSTANT, and without thought (because this kind of thing happens in fractions of seconds) you pull your foot out of the way and you miss the falling knife.

THIS IS YOUR FLEE RESPONSE WORKING FOR YOU. IT'S KEEPING YOUR BODY, IN THIS CASE YOUR TOES AND FEET, SAFE.

B Maybe you're at a beach, and someone who you read as unsafe decides to set up really close to you and they start to harass your best friend. Your friend is not comfortable with this and her default is to freeze in these situations: she is too afraid to speak up and defend herself. But you don't have ANY troubles defending her. You raise your voice a bit, puff up your shoulders and show your 'feathers' and ask this person to leave.

THAT'S YOUR FIGHT RESPONSE WORKING FOR YOU AND YOUR FRIEND. IT'S KEEPING HER (AND YOU) SAFE.

C Let's say you are driving along the highway and you come across a pretty serious accident, and it's clear that people are hurt. You can even see some injured people and it doesn't look pretty. Maybe it's even so severe that it's tough to look at, but you find that you kind of stare and fixate on what you see. Your body kind of goes numb and you don't really feel anything (even though you think you should given the situation).

THIS IS YOUR FREEZE RESPONSE WORKING FOR YOU. IT'S NOT ALLOWING YOU TO PROCESS ALL THE FEELINGS AND SENSATIONS THAT COME WHEN ONE WITNESSES A HORRIFIC EVENT.

There are dozens more examples ranging from simple to very complex.

For now, what's important to understand is that you've got these automatic body responses: Fight, Flight and Freeze. They're a built-in system in your body, part of what science calls the *Autonomic Nervous System*. And they are designed to protect you and keep you safe.

QUESTION #2

Can you think of a time when your survival instincts helped you out?

MAYBE BY..

- Getting you out of harm's way?
- Giving you the 'juice' to set a big boundary and show some healthy fight energy?
- Allowing you to flee and leave a stressful or threatening situation?
- Instinctively going into freeze (aka: shutdown or shock) after an accident or during a threatening and/or abusive event?

Take a moment to reflect and write your response here:

We Can Get Stuck in Survival Mode.

Remember how I said above that these fight, flee and freeze response ARE necessary? We need them to survive?

Well, this is true, yet they are NOT meant to be on 24/7.

They are meant to stop once the stressor, or threat, or harmful event is over: So we can go back to normal, easy functioning that's less alert and on guard.

Our body and its systems (digestive, immune, hormonal, muscular, cardiovascular, brain, etc.) don't want to live in constant fight, flight, or freeze. And when they do, these very systems start to break down and get sick. :-)

When we stay revved up in the fight/flight/freeze survival energies our stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol get depleted and overused.

LET'S FACE IT, OUR CURRENT SOCIETY 'TYPICALLY' DOESN'T SUPPORT A LOW STRESS LIFESTYLE.

Many of us are constantly ON and always on the GO (Sound familiar?).

Then, add in trauma from accidents, early adversity and abuse, highschool bullying, and maybe emotionally disconnected, overly angry,

unpredictable and/or verbally abusive parents, plus a home life that is never felt safe, supportive and secure.. and there you have it: the perfect breeding ground for being wired 24/7 into fight, flight and freeze nervous system pathways.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU FEEL THESE SURVIVAL INSTINCTS?

- Once a day?
- A few times (1 to 5) a day?
- Many times (5 or more) a day?
- All the time?

MANY of us spend way more time in survival responses than our bodies and minds were designed to do. And as you'll read next, when we do, it creates illness and limitation in our lives in ways that traditional approaches and willpower often do little to really change.

TRAPPED STRESS CAUSES ILLNESS & LIMITATION (BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO)

If we don't ever come down and out of our stress responses we will end up with stress-related ailments.

Here's a list of some (but not all) of the ailments and troubles that can visit us when we are stuck ON in these patterns:

PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL TROUBLES

Heart disease	Ulcerative colitis
Obesity	Crohn's disease
Chronic fatigue syndrome	Osteoarthritis
Addiction	Depression
Sleep troubles (insomnia; sleep apnea)	Anxiety attacks
Anorexia nervosa	Panic attacks
Osteoporosis	Low self-esteem
Adrenal fatigue	Low self-work
Fibromyalgia	Helplessness and hopelessness
Chronic pain	Susceptibility to certain cancers (specifically breast and melanoma)
Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)	

RELATIONAL TROUBLES

Toxic relationships that perpetuate (or repeat)	No desire to connect and/or bond with others
Trouble communicating and expressing oneself	Parenting struggles
Inability to set clear boundaries	Going blank in the middle of a conversation
Difficulty with intimacy and deep love	
Struggle demonstrating and/or feeling empathy	

PRODUCTIVITY TROUBLES

Procrastination	Fear of failure
Resistance	Fear of success
Mental blocks	Trouble asking for help
Trouble focusing ("brain fog")	Lack of inspiration
Dissociation	No sense of real purpose
The need for perfection	Lack of drive
Never being good enough	Inability to move forward
Playing small	Scattered thoughts

Physical & emotional troubles adapted from the book, 'Scared Sick-The role of childhood trauma in adult disease'. Karr-Morse and Wiley. 2012

I KNOW. THOSE ARE A LOT OF CHALLENGES!

(Crazy how much is up there, right?)

Our nervous system runs the show and when it's turned on and doesn't know how to come down and out of the fight, flight, freeze energies this constant state of 'on guard' and 'under threat' and 'survival' creates TONS of INTERNAL STRESS.

I call this 'toxic' stress and it wreaks havoc on your body systems: The physical, mental and emotional. It's also cumulative.



TOXIC STRESS MAKES US SICK AND UNWELL. BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO.

You have a choice. Yes you do!

BECAUSE YOU ARE HERE AND LEARNING THIS VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION, YOU ARE A STEP AHEAD OF THE REST.

- You are now more aware of your own reactions and how your own biology, those fight/flight/freeze instincts, have helped you in past traumatic and stressful events.
- You have reflected on how you feel stress during the day.
- You have listed what, if any, "troubles" might be plaguing you.

This *What's your survival style?* worksheet is one of the first steps in gaining an understanding of

how your nervous system responds, how it calls the shots in your body, and how this shows up in your life.

I find that when people gain awareness of the biology of their stress responses it gives them a chance to get a step ahead of their stress reactions - and when you add in the right tools this leads to being able to work with them, and help them come down over time.



SO THERE'S VERY GOOD NEWS HERE! WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON, YOU HAVE MORE POWER TO CREATE HEALING AND CHANGE.

Join the conversation!

[Come on over to Irene's Nervous System Facebook Group and leave a comment!](#) and let us know what you learned about your default stress response and how it shows up in your - or your clients' - life.

See you over there!

Irene