

## What is a trigger for Addiction?

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To be triggered is to experience an emotional reaction to something based off a previous history. Triggers can be people, scents, places, harmful substances, or anything else that serves as reminders for intense or distracting emotions.

Oftentimes, triggers are reminders that put people in a mental and emotional place of distress, pain, anger, frustration, and other strong emotions. In the case of addiction and recovery, triggers are often some sort of internal or external stimulus that causes the former addict to desire to use drugs or alcohol again.

Triggers are easily identifiable by the way someone reacts to something. For instance, triggers may occur when someone remembers an event, or when an uncomfortable experience happen. The experience may cause someone to lash out, breakdown, or cope in unhealthy ways. As a result, individuals with unchecked triggers can cope in harmful ways, foster unhealthy relationships, and endure much suffering.

### Triggered: External and Internal Triggers

Triggers can be broken down into 2 categories: internal and external. Both can strongly impact the individual feeling the result of the trigger.

External and internal triggers include:

- Shame/guilt/anger/regret
- Depression and anxiety
- Inconsistency
- A loss of control
- Heartbreak, job loss or grief
- Stress or fear
- Feeling unsafe, feeling misunderstood
- Specific places (home, streets, cities, countries)
- Trauma/PTSD and abuse
- Feeling judged, feeling attacked, feeling invalidated

There are other triggers such as sights, smells, conflict, aggression, news stories, books, and memories which can cause disruption in our lives.

### **Trigger Management: Healthy Coping Skills**

There are healthy ways to cope with difficult triggers, and those suffering can feel reassured they don't have to give triggers power. One of the most important steps to identifying triggers and managing them in healthy ways is to be self-aware. Being self-aware allows for individuals to understand the driving force behind their behaviour, or the trigger before and after they react.

#### **Simple recommended methods to effectively manage triggers include:**

- Exercising
- Resting
- Therapy or counselling
- Meditation or mindfulness
- Spending time with positive people
- Drinking water or tea for relaxation/hydration
- Joining a support group
- Eating nutritional meals
- Using positive distractions
- Reframing negative attitudes or perceptions

Practices like mindfulness allow individuals to focus on right now, placing their mindset in the present moment. This encourages detaching from painful or distressing experiences and can reduce stress. Healthy ways of managing triggers allows individuals to thrive without turning to damaging coping mechanisms that can harm them or others.

### **Trigger Management: Unhealthy Coping Skills**

Unhealthy coping methods can worsen triggers that can manifest as stress, anxiety, depression. In many cases, individuals who have not found healthy coping mechanisms can indulge in toxic behaviours or develop toxic habits. Untreated triggers can create distracting and disempowering habits that can heavily affect individuals and loved ones.

### Some examples of unhealthy trigger management include but are not limited to:

- Misdirected anger
- Violence
- Emotional, psychological, sexual, financial, or mental abuse
- Making excuses for harmful behaviour
- Self-harm
- Developing poor behavioural compulsions
- Abusing harmful substances
- Binge eating or drinking
- Lying/Denial
- Bottling it up
- Exploding with anger or rage
- Befriending people who abuse or sell drugs or alcohol

### What Causes Triggers?

Triggers can either be positive or negative, although negative triggers can have the most damaging effects. There are common triggers that can lead to frustration, broken relationships, depression, isolation, and in some cases, suicide. Triggers can become a problem if they are frequent, and if one is having difficulty coping because of them. For example, a child who grew up in an abusive household may feel anxious when people argue or fight. Depending on his or her involvement in family conflict, he or she may feel afraid, lash out as a defence mechanism, or distance him or herself from conflict.

Emotions like anger, guilt, irritability, and low self-esteem can surface when individuals are triggered, spiralling into various behaviours and compulsions. Unfortunately, the nature of emotional or mental triggers can run very deep and can be traumatizing. Some can push individuals to adopt unhealthy ways of coping, such as self-harm, harm to others, and substance abuse.