

UNDERSTANDING YOUR BODY'S RESPONSE TO THREAT

Fight • Flight • Freeze • Appease

Your mind and body are designed to respond automatically to perceived danger. These responses are not choices—they are built-in survival mechanisms meant to protect you.

In moments of stress or threat, your nervous system reacts quickly, often before you have time to think. These reactions are natural and not a reflection of weakness or failure.

Why These Responses Happen

When your brain senses danger, it shifts into survival mode. This activates physical and emotional changes to help you stay safe, such as:

- Increased heart rate
- Faster breathing
- Muscle tension
- Heightened focus on potential danger

These changes prepare your body to respond quickly.

Common Threat Responses

Fight – Confronting the Threat

Your body prepares to defend itself.

- May feel anger, intensity, or a surge of energy
- Urge to argue, protect, or push back
- Focus narrows on the source of the threat

Flight – Escaping the Threat

Your system pushes you to get away to safety.

- Urge to leave, avoid, or withdraw
- Restlessness or feeling “on edge”
- Focus shifts to finding an exit or escape

Freeze – Shutting Down

When action doesn't feel possible, the body may pause.

- Feeling stuck, numb, or unable to respond
- Difficulty thinking or speaking
- Sense of disconnection or “blankness”

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Appease (Fawn) – Keeping the Peace

When the threat involves others, your system may try to reduce harm through compliance.

- Prioritizing others' needs over your own
- Trying to keep the situation calm or avoid conflict
- Difficulty expressing your own thoughts or boundaries

Important to Remember

- These responses are automatic—not intentional
- Your body is trying to protect you in the moment
- Different situations may trigger different responses
- There is no “right” or “wrong” response

Reflection

- Which response do you notice most often in yourself?
- In what situations does it tend to show up?
- How does your body feel when this response is activated?

Building Awareness

Learning to recognize your response patterns is the first step toward feeling more regulated and in control. With time and support, you can begin to respond more intentionally, rather than react automatically.