



Check What's Triggered

How to shift from
reacting to responding.

When it comes to our kids, most of us know our triggers:

- Aggression
- Meltdowns
- Property destruction

We believe these behaviors are responsible for our emotional reactions, but they are not. Behaviors (i.e., what our children do or do not do, are the triggers. It is what gets triggered inside of us—our thoughts and our feelings—that drive our actions.

This is important to understand because we are never just dealing with our child's behaviors. We are dealing with all of our thoughts and feelings about our child, ourselves and our parenting that get triggered by the behaviors.

Although we can't control our children's behaviors (the triggers), we can choose how we want to think, feel and act in response to the triggers.

To do this, we first need to identify what **gets triggered** in response to our children's behaviors.

Step 1: Pick your top 3 triggers.

For this step, pick the triggers that you find the most activating.

Trigger 1:

Trigger 2:

Trigger 3:

Step 2: Do a thought download about the triggers identified in Step 1.
Let it all out.

Example Trigger: *Self injurious behavior. I feel helpless when my child hits herself. When she does this I feel there is nothing I can do to help her and that, if she keeps it up, I may be unable to keep her safe at home.*

Trigger 1:

Trigger 2:

Trigger 3:

Step 3: Identify the 3 loudest thoughts (i.e. the ones that come up most often or you find the most overwhelming) that you uncovered during the download and the feelings (one-word emotion) created by these thoughts.

Examples Trigger 1: *Child hits self in the head.*
Thought: *There is nothing I can do to stop her.*
Feeling: *Helpless*

Trigger 2: *Child throws remote at me.*
Thought: *He wants to hurt me.*
Feeling: *Anger*

Trigger 3: *Child stims in public.*
Thought: *Other people are judging us.*
Feeling: *Embarrassed*

Trigger 1:

Thought:

Feeling:

Step 3: Identify the 3 loudest thoughts *continued*

Trigger 2:

Thought:

Feeling:

Trigger 3:

Thought:

Feeling:

Step 4: **Brainstorm neutral thoughts.**

Now that you are aware of the thought that is getting triggered, you can begin the work of deciding how you want to think about the trigger before it happens. Shifting to an intentional thought is not a matter of slapping on a positive thought, that does not work. The trick here is to find thoughts that you already believe will produce a feeling that will support you in taking the action you want to take. You are not aiming for bliss—a neutral thought that produces a neutral feeling is a great first step in shifting from your current Think-Feel-Act cycle to one that supports you.

a) To do this, brainstorm some alternative thoughts about the trigger. Ask yourself:

- What else might also be true about this situation?
- What could I think about this situation that would feel better than my current thought?
- What do I already believe about this current situation that feels better than the Thought identified in Step 2?

Example *She is expressing her frustration; she is in a fight/flight response; this behavior brings her some relief.*

Trigger 1:

Trigger 2:

Trigger 3:

Step 4: Brainstorm neutral thoughts *continued*

For each trigger, select a thought from Step 4(a) that, when you think it, it feels better to you than the thoughts identified in Step 2.

Trigger 1 / New thought:

Trigger 2 / New thought:

Trigger 3 / New thought:

Step 5: Practice your new thoughts.

Now you have to practice whichever thought you brainstormed that you like best.

Start slow. Pick 1 or 2 thoughts to start.

Read them over every morning. Write them down, put them on a sticky note above your computer, and redirect yourself to this thought when you find yourself defaulting to your usual negative thoughts. The more you think the new thoughts and the more you redirect yourself to think these thoughts, the quicker they will become your new default thoughts.

For more information, or to schedule a free consultation, visit
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