



Create the Conditions

Module 5:

Managing Triggers.

Theme: Recognising emotional triggers and developing healthier responses.

01

(1 min)

Introduction and Learning Objectives

Triggers are emotional reactions that stem from past experiences, wounds, or beliefs. We cannot always control what triggers us, but we can be in control of how we respond to these triggers. Understanding our own triggers helps us avoid reacting impulsively in our work with young people. Learning to pause and process emotions allows us to respond with clarity and compassion instead of defensiveness or avoidance.

By the end of this module, you will:

- 1. Recognise** common emotional triggers and where they come from.
- 2. Understand** how triggers impact your reactions and interactions.
- 3. Learn** practical tools to pause, process, and respond instead of reacting impulsively.
- 4. Develop** a personal plan to manage emotional triggers in your work.

02

(5 min)

Guided Visualisation

This visualisation will guide you through the experience of encountering a trigger. If emotions arise, simply observe them without judgment. You are in control of your response, and you always have the power to step into awareness.



03

(20 min)

Reflective Journaling & Self-Inquiry

Continuing on from the visualisation, take 20 minutes to journal your thoughts. There are no right or wrong answers, this is your personal reflection space to engage with the prompts as deeply as you are able.

Journal Prompts:

What does it feel like in my body when I am triggered?

- a. Does my heart race?
- b. Do I tense up?
- c. Do I shut down?

What types of situations or words trigger me the most?

- a. Where do these reactions come from?
- b. What past experiences shaped them?

How do I typically respond when I feel triggered?

- a. Do I react immediately?
- b. Do I withdraw?
- c. Do I overcompensate?

What would it look like to pause and choose my response instead of reacting impulsively?

Trauma-Informed Reminder

Triggers are not signs of weakness — they are invitations to heal. The more awareness we bring to them, the more power we have over our responses.

04

(20 min)

Interactive Activity: Creating a Personal Trigger Plan

This activity helps you develop a conscious strategy for handling triggers before they escalate and we react in ways that aren't in line with who we want to be and how we want to show up.

Instructions:

Identify 1-3 triggers in your work or even your personal life that you feel comfortable to explore. The following list of examples covers a wide range of potential emotional triggers that may arise in both professional and personal contexts. Triggers are deeply personal and often stem from past experiences, unmet needs, or ingrained beliefs. Recognising them is the first step toward responding rather than reacting. Use some from this list or create a list of your own.

Triggers Related to Respect & Boundaries:

- Being interrupted while speaking (feeling unheard or disrespected).
- Someone ignoring or dismissing your opinion (feeling unvalued).
- Being expected to work beyond your limits (difficulty saying no, fear of letting people down).
- Not having your boundaries respected (feeling a lack of control over your time and energy).
- Colleagues or young people challenging authority in a disrespectful way (feeling undermined).

Triggers Related to Communication & Conflict:

- Being criticised especially in front of others (feeling embarrassed or inadequate).
- Having someone raise their voice at you (feeling unsafe, activating past experiences of aggression).
- Feeling like you're not being listened to or taken seriously (frustration at being over looked).
- Dealing with passive-aggressive behaviour (confusion or frustration due to lack of directness).
- Being confronted unexpectedly (feeling caught off guard or unprepared).
- Receiving vague or unclear feedback (feeling anxious about expectations).

Triggers Related to Authority & Power Dynamics:

- Being questioned or second-guessed in your role (feeling like you need to prove yourself).
- Feeling micromanaged or controlled (fear of losing autonomy).
- Seeing favouritism in a professional setting (feeling unfairly treated or undervalued).
- Feeling powerless in decision-making (frustration from a past lack of control).
- Young people challenging authority aggressively (bringing up feelings of being disrespected or helpless).

Triggers Related to Overwhelm & Emotional Load:

- Being expected to be emotionally available all the time (burnout, exhaustion).
- Feeling responsible for fixing others' problems (deep need to be useful or avoid failure).
- Witnessing trauma or distress in young people (triggering personal pain or helplessness).
- Juggling too many responsibilities without enough support (feeling unseen or taken advantage of).
- Noticing a lack of appreciation for your efforts (feeling undervalued or unseen).

Triggers Related to Personal Trauma & Past Experiences:

- Someone using a dismissive tone that reminds you of a past harmful relationship (unresolved emotional wounds).
- Being spoken to in a way that mirrors past bullying or manipulation (feeling vulnerable or unsafe).
- Hearing triggering language about gender, race, or identity (feeling unseen or devalued).
- Being around someone who reminds you of a past abuser or authority figure (subconscious emotional responses).
- Engaging in discussions about topics that directly relate to your past traumas (feeling emotionally flooded).

Triggers Related to Injustice & Inequality:

- Hearing sexist, racist, or homophobic remarks (frustration, anger, helplessness).
- Seeing young people treated unfairly based on their background (deep sense of injustice).
- Being in an environment where harm or abuse is ignored or downplayed (moral distress).
- Hearing people defend harmful behaviours or systems (feeling invalidated).

Triggers Related to Control & Uncertainty:

- Not knowing what's expected of you in a situation (anxiety, fear of failure).
- Feeling forced into situations without choice (loss of autonomy).
- Last-minute schedule changes or unclear instructions (feeling destabilised).
- Unpredictable behaviour from young people or colleagues (uncertainty or past experiences of chaos).
- Being asked to do something outside your ethical comfort zone (internal moral conflict).

Triggers Related to Failure & Self-Worth:

- Making a mistake and being called out on it (shame or fear of incompetence).
- Not meeting your own high expectations (perfectionism).
- Comparing yourself to others who seem more successful (self-doubt, imposter syndrome).
- Feeling like you're not making an impact (fear of inadequacy).
- Getting negative feedback, even when constructive (difficulty separating feedback from personal worth).

How to Use The List:

- Once you have identified which triggers resonate the most with you, write down a specific situation where you've felt these triggers arise. Where were you? What was happening?
- Reflect on where they may stem from; past experiences, values, insecurities?
- Brainstorm how you can pause, process, and choose a healthier response.
- Consider how you typically react to these triggers; do you shut down, get defensive, or overcompensate? Do you get loud or get quiet? Do you have the awareness, language and consciousness to articulate what is happening for you?
- Describe how these triggers affect you physically, emotionally, and mentally.
- Develop a personal pause strategy for each trigger that works for you. E.g: deep breathing, stepping away, using a grounding technique.
- Write a new response you'd like to practice when you notice yourself being triggered. This awareness will empower you to respond to triggers with intention, rather than being controlled by them.

Reflection Questions After the Activity:

- How would my professional and personal relationships change if I could respond rather than react?
- What would it feel like to have more control over my emotions instead of being controlled by them?
- What's one self-regulation tool that I can commit to practicing?

05

(10 min)

Personal Reflection

Take time to reflect (or write if you prefer) on the following:

- Why do people struggle to regulate their emotions when triggered?
- How can self-awareness of our own triggers help us better connect with young people?
- What are some effective de-escalation techniques for ourselves and others?
- When was the last time I felt triggered?
- What would I do differently if I had paused and chosen my response?

06

(5 min)

Closing Takeaway & Action Step

Key Insight:

Noticing a trigger gives us power over it. We do not have to be at the mercy of our emotional reactions, we can always choose a different way, and respond instead of reacting.

Actions for the week ahead:

Practice noticing your triggers before reacting. Use your personal trigger plan at least once in a real-life situation.



Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to explore your triggers and emotional responses. The work you did today is not easy—it takes courage to look at the moments that unsettle us, to sit with discomfort instead of reacting, and to build awareness around our emotions. The more we understand our own triggers, the better equipped we are to hold space for young people who may be experiencing their own emotional struggles. You are not just learning tools for yourself, you are modelling emotional intelligence for those who need it most.

By choosing to pause, reflect, and respond with intention, you are breaking cycles of reactivity and creating a culture where emotions can be processed in safe and healthy ways. Thank you for your willingness to do this work, it truly makes all the difference.