






5 Fs of Trauma Response

Most of us have heard of the “fight or flight response,” referring to our automatic reaction of fighting or running away when we face a threat. We actually have 5 hardwired responses to trauma: fight, flight, freeze, flop, and friend. In a moment of danger, these responses all happen automatically to try to keep us safe. Sometimes these responses can continue even when the trauma is not happening as our brain and body continue to work to keep us safe from danger. How might understanding your own response to trauma be helpful? How can understanding trauma responses help us better respond to and support others? How can we practice seeing others’ unhelpful behaviors as possible trauma responses?

Response	Common Thoughts and Feelings	Common Behaviors
 Fight	“It’s all your fault!”; feeling anger or rage	Talking back to adults, storming out, showing aggression towards self or others, showing defiance, blaming others
 Flight	“I’ve got to get out of here!”; feeling anxious or overwhelmed, feeling the urge to flee	Leaving the class unexpectedly, spacing out or seeming not to listen, being intentionally or unintentionally distracted, missing class
 Freeze	“I can’t,”; feeling panicked, overwhelmed, or numbed-out	Giving up quickly, spacing out/ seeming not to listen, showing frustration or overwhelm
 Flop	“It’s all my fault” or “It’s not worth it”; feeling sad, depressed, hopeless, apathetic	Appearing disengaged, showing little emotion, missing class
 Friend	“Please help me! I can’t do it.” Feeling helpless or powerless, low confidence	Not taking responsibility for oneself, relying on others (peers, adults) to help solve problems