

TRIGGERS LIST EXERCISE

OVERVIEW

The following exercise is to be used in conjunction with our book, “*What Is PTSD? 3 Steps to Healing Trauma*” for best effect. Please visit www.WhatIsPTSD.com for additional resources.

GOAL

The goal of the *Trigger List Exercise* is to identify the triggers that lead to intensifying your symptoms. Once these emotions, thoughts, bodily sensations, and your reactions are identified, you will have greater awareness of their impact on you and be able to call into action the self-soothing and relaxation skills.

TIME-OUT

Take breaks as you feel they are needed. Always remember, it is not how fast you go but how well you are able to make sense of and integrate your learning and recovery.

MATERIALS AND LAYOUT

Pen or pencil, a quiet space, time, and the form provided on the following pages. Please feel free to download a *Trigger List Form*, and other exercise materials from our website: www.WhatIsPTSD.com/forms.

ROBERT’S SAMPLE TRIGGER LIST

EVENT	TRIGGERS
When did you feel this way?	Driving on the highway – someone cut me off; also, if I hear any loud noises; when someone raises their voice; whenever I cannot get out of a crowded place easily.
Emotions	Fear, anger, confusion, panic
Thoughts	I will never get out of here alive. These drivers are crazy.
Bodily sensations	Shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, tension in my shoulders and arms, stomach discomfort, sweating.
Reactions	Pounding on the steering wheel, swearing.

Robert’s exercise reflects the places and experiences where he (our 24-year-old Military Veteran) felt most unsafe today even though he is no longer in harm’s way. He described the sensation of being in traffic or hearing a loud noise as triggers that can make him feel the same way he did when he felt most at risk during his deployment. Robert might have many other places where he is easily triggered and he filled out a *Trigger List* for each of these occurrences. Mastering the ability to recognize his triggers was a big step in his recovery.

On examination, Robert could see that he was actually reacting in a way that was making him a risk on the road. He was focusing on his anger and unable to pay attention to his driving. He also realized that his past experiences were interfering with what was happening currently. Although it was true that he had encountered a driver who cut him off, he was skilled enough to manage the road. However, he was only just learning to manage his strong responses. With his increased awareness, he was determined to learn more and handle whatever came his way as well as he possibly could.

He can now identify when he felt most vulnerable and started to learn how to apply relaxation to help him through those moments. He was also able to start to challenge the extreme sensations of danger that erupted in him while driving or simply shopping with his girlfriend in a mall.

PATH TO COMPLETE

1. Complete the *Triggers List* on the following page and once completed, answer the following questions.

2. Identify one Trigger in your completed form:

3. Reflect on the moment and write down the emotions, thoughts, bodily sensations, and reactions that go along with this memory.

4. Now reflect on events or situations that evoke the same response. These are your Triggers; recognizing them can be very freeing as you can trace these back to the original traumatic event(s) and begin to ask yourself whether this reaction is more about the past than the present. This is another way to challenge whether you are currently safe or you are responding automatically to something that reminded you of a truly dangerous time.

THE TRIGGERS LIST EXERCISE FORM

EVENT	TRIGGERS
When did you feel this way?	
Emotions	
Thoughts	
Bodily Sensations	
Reactions	