

## Typical Responses to Triggers

Triggers are expressions or actions that make participants in conversation feel offended, threatened, stereotyped, discounted, or attacked. While it's important to recognize triggering behaviors, it's also critical to consider how we as individuals tend to respond to them. Below is a list of typical – and distinct – responses to triggers. Which ones do you recognize in yourself?

**Anthropologize:** We intellectualize the event, pondering why a person would do such a thing.

**Attack:** We respond with an intention to hurt or offend whoever has offended us.

**Avoidance/Withdrawal:** We avoid future encounters with the person & withdraw emotionally.

**Confront:** We name the hot button issue & demand the offending speech or behavior change.

**Curiosity:** We view the hot button issue as something interesting and engage the person in genuine conversation about why they said or did what they did.

**Discretion:** Because of situational dynamics, we decide it is not in our best interest to respond to the trigger at that time, and determine to address it at another time/in private.

**Discuss:** We name the triggering speech/behavior and invite discussion about it with the group.

**Freeze:** We do not respond because we cannot think about how to respond at the moment.

**Humor:** We respond with humor to make people laugh and dispel the discomfort.

**Internalization:** We internalize the hot button issue and see the negative behavior as deserved.

**Misinterpretation:** We are feeling on guard and expect to be provoked so we misinterpret the speech/behavior of others and are triggered by our interpretation rather than by their conduct.

**Name:** We identify what is upsetting us to the person displaying the triggering speech/behavior.

**Pause and Expand:** We pause the dialogue, identify the issue, and ask the person to say more.

**Rationalization:** We convince ourselves the issue is with ourselves, rather than the person's speech/behavior, and in this way avoid having to confront the triggering conduct.

**Release:** We notice the trigger but do not take it in, choosing instead to let it go.

**Shock:** We are caught off-guard by the trigger and have a hard time responding.

**Silence:** We do not respond to the trigger and remain silent for the rest of the conversation.

**Strategize:** Working with other participants, we develop a response to the triggering conduct.

**Surprise:** We react to the triggering conduct in a wholly unexpected way.

Adapted from: Kaplowitz, Griffin, and Seyka, *Race Dialogues: A Facilitator's Guide to Tackling the Elephant in the Classroom*. (NY: Teachers College Press, 2019).