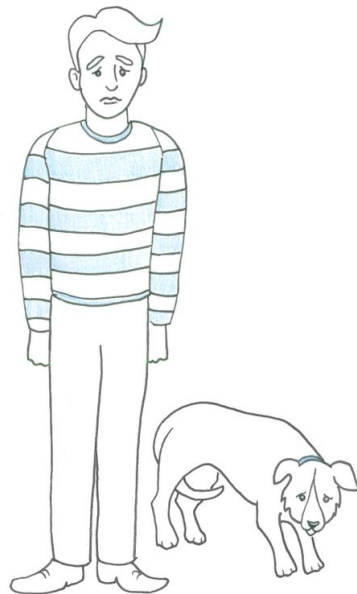


# Are You a Fighter, Flee-er or Freezer?



**WHAT YOUR  
DEFAULT STRESS RESPONSE  
SAYS ABOUT YOU**



# Are You a Fighter, Flee-er or Freezer?

This 'fight-flight-freeze worksheet' is to teach you the bare bones of your nervous system health so you can really understand how this powerful system works (yours is working right now!) and what it takes to make it healthy.

When you begin to understand how these survival instincts work (and how to notice when they are "on" when they shouldn't be) you gain access to your very own personal medicine cabinet.

**I want to start by asking you a few questions:**

## Question #1)

When you encounter a mild, moderate and/or severely stressful situation, harmful or traumatic event, what's your default pattern?

### A) Do you have a tendency to fight?

*Maybe you:*

- Get defensive and try to prove your case? (Even if you know you're wrong. You hold your ground anyways and would NEVER admit fault.)
- Raise your voice and display raging bull-like tendencies?
- Become a bit of bully and even get scary to the people you love?

### B) Do you have a tendency to flee?

*Maybe you:*

- Ignore the situation and pretend it didn't happen?



- Leave the room, or conversation and do your best to avoid any and all confrontation?
- Get busy and pre-occupied with something that's completely opposite to the situation at hand - you start cleaning, or knitting, etc... in the hope that it will just go away on its own?

### C) Do you have a tendency to freeze?

*Maybe you:*

- Go completely blank and find it hard to express ANYTHING, let alone make any kind of social engagement?
- Hope that if you get really quiet and still and don't make a peep the issue will just go away on its own? (No one will know, right?)
- Completely forget the stressful or traumatic situation even happened and when someone asks you about it you kind of say "what are you talking about?" (And you really do have NO recollection of the incident.)

### D) All of the above:

*Maybe you:*

- Want to fight in some situations?
- Find yourself wanting to flee in others?
- Go completely blank and shutdown in others?

**Write in your response here:**

Were you one distinct response (fight, flight, freeze) or did you realize you were a combo of a couple? Or, all three pending the situation?



## Quick Fact

These three responses - fight, flight and freeze - are necessary.

They are your SURVIVAL INSTINCTS. And, you need them! They keep you out of harm's way. You couldn't survive without them. **It's YOUR Nervous System, your autonomic (read: automatic) nervous system that governs these responses.**

## Your Survival Instincts in Action

Here are some basic real-life examples of these automatic stress responses in action.

**A** - Let's say you're cutting onions and you are wearing flip flops and then all of a sudden the knife slips out of your hands and it is headed straight for your bare feet. But, in an INSTANT, and without thought (because this kind of thing happen in fractions of a second) you pull your foot out of the way and you miss the falling knife.

**This is a FLEE response. This is your automatic nervous system working FOR YOU. It's keeping your body, in this case your toes and foot, safe.**

**B** - Maybe you're at a beach, and some creepy person decides to set up really close to you and they start to harass your best friend. Your friend is not comfortable with this and her default if to *freeze* in these situations: she is too afraid to speak up and defend herself. But you don't have ANY troubles defending her. You raise your voice a bit, puff up your shoulders and show your "feathers" and ask this creep to leave.

**That's your FIGHT response working for YOU and YOUR friend. It's keeping her (and you) safe.**

**C** - Let's say you are driving along the highway and you come across a pretty bad accident, and it's clear that people are hurt. You can even see some carnage and it doesn't look pretty. It's even a bit horrific, so much that even



though it's tough to look, you kind of stare and fixate on what you see. Your body kind of goes numb and you don't really feel anything (even though you know you should be).

**This is your FREEZE response working FOR YOU. It's not allowing you to feel the horror that you are witnessing.**

*I could give you a dozen more examples ranging from simple to very complex, but I won't.*

For now, all you need to understand is that you've got these automatic body responses: Fight, Flight, Freeze. They're a built-in system in your body, part of what is called by science the *Autonomic Nervous System*.

## Question #2)

Can you think of a time when you experienced your survival instincts helping you out?

- A. Getting you out of harm's way?
- B. Giving you the "juice" to set a big boundary and show some healthy fight energy?
- C. When you needed to flee and leave a stressful or threatening situation?
- D. When you might have gone into freeze (aka: shutdown or shock) after an accident?

Write in your response here:



## **Time is of the essence when it comes to these survival energies**

Remember how I said above that these fight, flee and freeze response ARE necessary? *We need* them to survive?

Well, this is true, yet they are NOT meant to be on 24/7.

They are meant to stop once the stressor, or threat, or harmful event is over: So we can go back to normal *easy* functioning that's less alert and on guard.

Our body and its systems (digestive, immune, hormonal, muscular, cardiovascular, brain, etc.) don't want to live in constant fight, flight, freeze. And when it does, these very systems start to break down and get sick. :-)

When we stay revved up in the fight/flight/freeze survival energies our stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, get depleted and overused.

**Let's face it, our current society 'typically' doesn't support a low stress lifestyle.**

Many of us are constantly ON and always on the GO. (sound familiar?)

Then, add in trauma from accidents, early adversity and abuse, highschool bullying, emotionally disconnected, overly angry, unpredictable and/or verbally abusive parents, and a home life that never felt safe, supportive and secure... and there you have it: the perfect breeding for being groomed (and grooved) into fight, flight and freeze nervous system pathways.

## **Moment of Honesty**

**1. How often do you feel stress: these distinct survival instincts I've been teaching you about?**

- a. Once day?
- b. A few times (1 to 5) a day?
- c. Many times (5 or more) a day?
- d. All the time?



## 2. Then, do you ever stop to notice them so you can properly release the stress?

If you typically don't stop and pause to notice them, I can help you with this, stick with me and I'll teach you how. It's takes some practice, but it is the best kind of medicine you'll ever give yourself

## Trapped Stress is Toxic and it Causes Illness (But, It Doesn't Have To)

When we don't come down and out of our stress responses we (can) end up with stress-related ailments.

Here's a list of some (but not all) of the ailments and troubles that can visit us when we are stuck ON in these patterns:

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### Physical & Emotional Troubles

- Heart disease
- Obesity
- Chronic fatigue syndrome
- Addiction
- Sleep troubles (insomnia; sleep apnea)
- Anorexia nervosa
- Osteoporosis
- Adrenal fatigue
- Fibromyalgia
- Chronic pain
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Ulcerative colitis
- Crohn's disease
- Osteoarthritis
- Depression
- Anxiety attacks
- Panic attacks
- Low self-esteem
- Low self-work
- Helplessness and hopelessness
- Susceptibility to certain cancers (specifically breast and melanoma)



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## Relational Troubles

- Toxic relationships that perpetuate (or repeat)
- Trouble communicating and expressing oneself
- Inability to set clear boundaries
- Difficulty with intimacy and deep love
- Struggle demonstrating and/or feeling empathy
- No desire to connect and/or bond with others
- Parenting struggles

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## Productivity Troubles

- Procrastination
- Resistance
- Mental blocks
- Trouble focusing (“brain fog”)

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## I know. Those are a lot of problems!

*(Crazy how much is up there, right?)*

Our nervous system runs the show and when it's turned on and doesn't know how to come down and out of the fight, flight, freeze energies this constant state of “on guard” and “under threat” and “survival” creates TONS of INTERNAL STRESS.

I call this 'toxic' stress and it wreaks havoc on your body systems: The physical, mental and emotional.





## Very Important Point of Research

The connection between early life stressors\* and early adversity with the health problems that are listed above are scientific fact. The research is so conclusive that many in the medical and health professions of psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience are touting early life adversity, trauma and insidious, unrelenting stress during childhood as a bigger epidemic than heart disease and cancer! (See references for my sources.)

Like I said: Toxic stress makes us sick and unwell. But it doesn't have to.

You have a choice. Yes you do!

These fight, flight, freeze reactions are real and we need them, but if we aren't careful, they stay stuck ON for too long.

Because you are here and learning this very important information, you are a step ahead of the rest.

1. You are now more aware of your own reactions and how your own biology, those fight/flight/freeze instincts, have helped in you in past traumatic and stressful events.
2. You have reflected on how you feel stress during the day, and whether or not you actively engage in practices that help to release it.
3. You have listed what, if any, "troubles" might be plaguing you.

This *Fight, Flight, Freeze Worksheet* is one of the first steps in gaining an understanding of what your nervous system is and how it calls the shots in your body. I find that when people gain awareness of the biology of their stress responses, it gives them the chance to get a step ahead of their stress reactions. This in turn gives more opportunity, more time, and choice to choose a different way forward.



## TAKE ACTION NOW!

Leave a comment in our **Healthy Nervous System Revolution Facebook Group** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nervoussystem/>) and let us know what you learned about your default stress response and how this response might be hindering you or your clients from having optimal health and well-being.

See you over there! Irene.



## \* What an early life stressor actually is?

A full explanation of certain early adverse experiences can be read about in my reference #1 just below. In this study, The ACE Study, early adversity are things such as neglect, physical, sexual and verbal abuse, a parent or caretaker that is in depression, an alcoholic, or has been incarcerated. So as you can see, more prominent types of stressors which are commonly understood as early childhood trauma. The other categories of early life stress that are less commonly talked about are: medical interventions at a young age, as an infant and child. Even dental procedures can be incredibly traumatic for small children. Premature birth and incubator time away from parental care is considered an early traumatic event, as is forced birth by the use of forceps, vacuum etc. High fevers, choking, suffocation and drowning are other high-stress events that mimic a near-death experience and can render a child incredibly fearful and put into a state of traumatic shock.

## References

1 *The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study*, also more commonly known as The Ace Study, is a groundbreaking piece of research that is unveiling the links between early childhood trauma and adult chronic illness. You can learn more about it here: <http://www.cestudy.org/>

2 *The Body Keeps The Score - Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D. In chapter 9, p. 148. Dr. Van Derk Kolk's personal conversation with Dr. Robert Anda (former researcher at the Center for Disease Control) and his shock that the statistics of The Ace Study could mean that they had "stumbled upon the gravest and most costly public health issues in the United States: child abuse."

