

## **Responding, Not Reacting to Hot Buttons & Triggers Playbook**

Hot Buttons/Triggers definition: Any stimulus (event, word, behavior, etc.) that has become emotionally conditioned within us so intensely it makes us react.

### **Step One.**

Get in the habit of taking an emotional temperature check. Realize you've been triggered.

Ask yourself 3 questions:

“What sensation am I feeling in my body?”

“What emotions am I feeling?”

“On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being severe, how triggered am I?”

### **Step Two.**

Start shifting your emotional state in the moment by influencing your physiological state. Some examples are:

- Breathing. Apply the 90-second rule by Jill Bolte Taylor.
- Think of an incantation/mantra that resonates with you. Something short and simple, such as:  
“Anger does not build anything, but it can destroy everything.”
- Rub a worry stone. A worry stone is a small stone you rub, and the repetitive, tactile action can reduce stress and redirect restless energy.
- Ask a question:
  - “Help me understand what I think you just said or meant...Can you repeat it please?” (Aikido technique redirects energy)
  - Repeat back exactly what they said in a calm tone and as a question (for example, “I’m wasting your time?”)
- What is something you could do that will be effective for you?

### **Step Three.**

Decide to either create a physical and/or mental space (this activates your Prefrontal Cortex, the PFC, which is the part of the brain that helps us regulate our thoughts, emotions and actions)

Creating a (safe) physical space:

- Remove yourself from the environment
- Talk with someone

Creating mental space and a gap in the moment so you can respond:

- Revisit step one but after the moment has transpired.
  - On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being severe, how triggered were you?
  - On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being severe, how triggered are you now?
  - What sensations are you feeling?
  - What made you react this way?
  - What’s a possible message behind the emotion you are experiencing? Every emotion is connected to a need you have.
- Ask yourself questions:  
“What else could they have meant?”

“What else could they have intended?”

“What would have been a better way for them communicate with me?”

#### **Step Four.**

- Communicate what you’re experiencing and what you want the other person to do instead.
- Utilize “I” Statement:  
*“I feel \_\_\_\_\_, when you do \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Would it be possible for you to instead \_\_\_\_\_ (provide an example of what they can do to modify, add or delete their behavior).?”*

A couple of strategies to keep in mind:

- We might want to communicate some of our hot buttons to others *BEFORE* we are triggered so they are more mindful of what they say/do
- This takes practice. Repetition is the mother of skill and so you will have to practice, modify your approach and repeat until it becomes easier.

The first few times we’ll struggle to manage our hot buttons. Over time, just like exercise, we’ll get better and better and we might find one day that those hot buttons and triggers to which we reacted to have been eliminated or minimized.