KESTON SCHOOL

MIND & EMOTIONS · FREE SAMPLE

Taming Emotional Triggers

Spot what sets you off and respond instead of reacting

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

By the last page you will know your main triggers, catch a reaction in its first seconds, and choose a response you can stand behind, at home and at work.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Taming Emotional Triggers Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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CHAPTER 1

When Small Things Explode

Recognize your own reaction pattern, see why it keeps repeating, and understand why trying harder to stay calm rarely works.

It is 7:40 on a Tuesday morning. You are already late, the coffee is still brewing, and your partner asks, in a perfectly normal voice, whether you remembered to pay the electricity bill. Something in you flares. Before you have decided anything, you hear yourself say, sharply, “Can you not do this right now?” The kitchen goes quiet. Twenty minutes later, on the way to work, you replay it and wince. The question was reasonable. The reaction was not. And you know it will happen again, maybe at a meeting, maybe with your kids, maybe with a stranger in a parking lot.

What a trigger actually is

In this book, a trigger is any small, ordinary moment that sets off a reaction much bigger than the moment itself. A question about a bill. A colleague who replies “noted” instead of “thanks.” A child who ignores you for the third time. A relative who mentions your weight at dinner.

The size of the reaction is the clue. If someone breaks a promise that cost you money, being angry is proportionate. If someone asks a neutral question and you feel a surge of heat in your chest, something else is going on. The moment has touched something that matters to you, often something that has been touched many times before.

This book uses the word in its everyday sense: the things that push your buttons in daily life. If your reactions are tied to a frightening or traumatic experience, or they regularly feel overwhelming, that is worth exploring with a qualified mental health professional. The practical tools here can sit alongside that support, but they do not replace it.

The three common patterns

People react to triggers in different ways, but most fall into one of three patterns. Many switch between them depending on who is in front of them.

Snapping. The reaction goes outward. You raise your voice, use a sharp tone, say something cutting or slam a door. It is fast and it feels justified in the moment. Afterward comes the regret.

Shutting down. The reaction goes inward. You go quiet, give one-word answers, leave the room or stare at your phone. From the outside it can look calm. Inside, the pressure is just as high.

Stewing. The reaction goes underground. You say nothing at the time, then replay the moment for hours. You rehearse what you should have said, build a case against the other person, and let it leak out later as sarcasm or coldness.

None of these patterns makes you a bad person. Each one is an attempt to protect yourself. The trouble is that each one usually makes the situation worse and leaves you feeling less in control.

> **Key idea:** A trigger is not the moment itself. It is the gap between how big the moment is and how big your reaction is.

Why trying harder does not work

Most people have tried the obvious fix. You promise yourself that next time you will stay calm. You tell yourself to count to ten. Someone tells you to relax, which usually makes things worse.

These approaches fail for a simple reason: the reaction starts before deliberate thinking does. By the time you remember your promise to stay calm, your heart is already beating faster, your jaw is tight, and the sharp sentence is halfway out of your mouth. You are trying to use a slow tool on a fast process.

There is a second reason. Willpower treats the reaction as the enemy. You fight it, lose, and then add a layer of shame on top: “Why do I keep doing this?” Shame makes you more defensive, and a defensive person is easier to trigger. The cycle tightens.

What works instead is understanding the reaction well enough to see it coming. Once you know what tends to set you off, what it means to you, and how it shows up in your body, you can catch it earlier. Earlier is where your choices live.

What changes when you understand your triggers

People who learn to work with their triggers do not become people who never feel anger, hurt or frustration. They still feel all of it. The difference is in what happens next.

Instead of snapping, they notice the heat and say, “Give me a second.” Instead of shutting down, they say, “I need a few minutes, and then I want to talk about this.” Instead of stewing for three days, they raise the issue calmly the next morning.

That shift does not require a personality transplant. It requires three things, which the rest of this book builds step by step:

1. **Knowing your triggers.** Which moments, people and situations set you off, and why.
2. **Catching the reaction early.** Noticing the first signs in your body before they take over.
3. **Having a response ready.** A short, practiced plan for what to do instead.

Each of these is a skill, and like any skill, it improves with small amounts of regular practice.

Try this

Over the next seven days, keep a simple note on your phone titled “Reactions.” Each time you snap, shut down or stew, add one line: what happened, and which of the three patterns you used. Do not analyze anything yet, and do not judge yourself. Just collect.

At the end of the week, spend five minutes reading the list. Circle the one moment you would most like to handle differently next time. That moment will be your practice case throughout the book, and you will return to it in the workbook.

Before you can change a reaction, it helps to know exactly how it unfolds, so the next chapter takes a trigger apart, piece by piece.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A trigger is a small moment that gets a reaction far bigger than it deserves.
- Most people snap, shut down or stew, and many switch between all three.
- Willpower fails because the reaction starts before deliberate thinking does.

→ Workbook, section 1

01 When Small Things Explode

Collect your reactions for one week and pick your practice case.

FILL IN

My reactions this week

Day	What happened	Snap / shut down / stew

CHECKLIST

My usual patterns

- [ ] Snapping - sharp words, raised voice
- [ ] Shutting down - silence, leaving the room
- [ ] Stewing - replaying, sarcasm later

The one moment I most want to handle differently next time:

RATE IT

How much do my reactions bother me right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1 · barely 10 · a lot

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Taming Emotional Triggers and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:

01 When Small Things Explode

02 Anatomy of a Trigger

03 What Reactions Cost You

04 Notice Before You Act

05 Map Your Trigger Chain

06 The Pause Plan

07 Change the Meaning

08 Four Everyday Flashpoints

09 When You Still Blow Up

10 Lower the Baseline

11 The Steady One

12 Mistakes & Checklist

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