



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

Understanding Survival Responses

Trauma responses are the mind and body's way of trying to protect someone during periods of stress, fear, instability or emotional harm.

When a person experiences ongoing stress, emotional abuse, fear, conflict or unsafe environments, the nervous system can become stuck in survival mode.

This means the body may continue reacting as though danger is still present, even when everything appears calm on the outside.

Many people living with trauma responses believe they are “overreacting”, lazy, too emotional or bad at coping, when in reality their nervous system has been under pressure for a long time.

Trauma responses are not weakness. They are protective survival patterns.

1. Fight Response

The fight response happens when the nervous system reacts to stress or danger through anger, defensiveness or control.

This may look like:

- Irritability or frustration
- Feeling easily triggered
- Snapping during conflict
- Defensiveness or emotional outbursts
- Feeling constantly “on edge”
- Difficulty calming down after stress

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

Example:

Someone asks a simple question, but your body reacts as though you are being criticised or attacked.

2. Flight Response

The flight response is linked to urgency, overworking, overthinking or constantly staying busy to avoid discomfort.

This may look like:

- Difficulty relaxing or slowing down
- Constant overthinking
- Keeping busy to avoid emotions
- Perfectionism or pressure to “keep going”
- Anxiety around rest or stillness
- Feeling guilty when not being productive

Example:

Even when exhausted, you struggle to stop because slowing down makes you feel anxious or emotionally overwhelmed.

3. Freeze Response

The freeze response happens when the nervous system becomes overwhelmed and shuts down.

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

This may look like:

- Feeling emotionally numb or disconnected
- Struggling to make decisions
- Avoiding tasks because everything feels too much
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- Feeling stuck or unable to move forward
- Wanting to withdraw from the world

Example:

You know there are things you need to do, but your body feels heavy, exhausted or mentally blocked.

4. Fawn Response

The fawn response develops when someone learns to stay emotionally safe by pleasing others, avoiding conflict or prioritising everyone else's needs.

This may look like:

- Struggling to say no
- Fear of disappointing people
- Over-explaining yourself
- Constantly trying to keep the peace
- Ignoring your own needs or feelings
- Feeling responsible for other people's emotions

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

Example:

You agree to things you do not want to do because conflict, rejection or disapproval feels emotionally unsafe.

5. Hypervigilance & Emotional Overload

Many people living with trauma responses become highly alert to moods, tension or possible danger.

This is called hypervigilance.

This may look like:

- Constantly scanning for problems
- Overanalysing conversations or body language
- Struggling to fully relax
- Feeling emotionally exhausted after social interaction
- Being easily startled or overwhelmed
- Difficulty feeling safe, even in calm environments

Example:

Your body reacts strongly to stress, tension or conflict even when other people do not notice anything is wrong.

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

6. Trauma, Burnout & Exhaustion

Living in survival mode for long periods of time can be mentally, emotionally and physically exhausting.

People experiencing trauma responses may:

- Feel permanently drained
- Struggle with motivation or focus
- Experience emotional overwhelm
- Feel detached from themselves
- Find everyday tasks difficult
- Become emotionally numb or disconnected

Many people continue functioning outwardly while internally feeling exhausted or overwhelmed.

7. Trauma & Neurodivergence

Trauma responses can sometimes overlap with neurodivergent experiences such as ADHD, autism or sensory overwhelm.

For some people, trauma can increase:

- Emotional dysregulation
- Sensory sensitivity
- Burnout
- Rejection sensitivity

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

- Executive functioning difficulties
- Anxiety and shutdown

This can make it difficult to separate trauma responses from long-term coping patterns.

8. Healing & Nervous System Safety

Healing from trauma is not about “getting over it” quickly.

Many survivors need time, understanding and emotionally safe support to help their nervous system feel regulated again.

Healing may involve:

- Understanding survival responses
- Rebuilding confidence and self-trust
- Learning emotional boundaries
- Accessing support without shame
- Creating safer routines and environments
- Allowing rest without guilt

Small steps toward safety and stability can make a significant difference over time.

If This Feels Familiar

You are not failing because you are overwhelmed.

Many trauma responses develop because the mind and body adapted to survive difficult, unsafe or emotionally unpredictable situations.

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

Understanding these patterns can be an important first step toward healing, self-compassion and support.

Support & Further Resources

You deserve support that understands both the emotional and nervous system impact of trauma.

WeAreUnmuted

Turning silence into understanding through lived experience.

Our vision is to break silence and rebuild lives, for this generation and the next

hello@weareunmuted.co.uk

Registered Address: c/o RISC, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS

WeAreUnmuted CIC | Company No: 17128806