

Cultural Daily

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What is Fight, Flight, or Freeze?

Our Friends · Tuesday, April 20th, 2021

Fight, flight, or freeze a reaction to trauma or perceived imminent danger. Imagine a bear is chasing you. If you tried to fight them, that would be a reaction to fear. You're trying to defend yourself. Maybe your fear makes you run away. That would constitute flight. Perhaps you're so afraid that you freeze on the spot. These are examples of fight, flight, or freeze.

What happens in your body during fight, flight, or freeze?

Fight, flight or freeze activates the autonomic nervous system. The response starts in your amygdala and continues to the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus turns on the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol are released. As a reaction, your body sweats, you may start shaking, sweating and breathing heavily. You also can experience symptoms of a panic attack, such as shortness of breath and increased heart rate. People report feeling hypervigilant. That's where your eyes are aware of everything around you. You are highly aware of your surroundings. Another symptom that many people don't talk about is that your pain tolerance is lowered. Fight, flight, or freeze impacts your body as well as your mind.

The mind perceives a threat

During fight, flight, or freeze, your mind perceives a threat. Your **body responds** to that threat. It does everything it can to protect you from that danger. The trouble is, sometimes, that reflex can be overactive, which happens to people who have panic disorder or anxiety. People with these conditions experience fight, flight, or freeze more often than those who do not have the conditions.

Anxiety disorders and fight, flight, or freeze

When you have anxiety, you're highly aware of everything around you. Those who are anxious and triggered are scared that something is unsafe or dangerous. That starts the fight, flight, or freeze response. Even though there is no actual danger, your body believes that it needs to protect you. That's something you can talk about in therapy, and you can also practice relaxation techniques when you know logically there is no danger, but your body is responding as if there is.

Trauma and fight, flight, or freeze

Those who have experienced traumatic events also feel fight flight or freeze. They experience this sensation during the traumatic event, and when they are triggered afterward. Let's say that an individual lost their home during a hurricane. When they hear the sound of a storm outside, they're

afraid because it reminds them of the trauma of it dealing with the hurricane and the fight, flight, or freeze reflex is activated. Their heart starts racing, and they want to run away. These individuals can also benefit from grounding and relaxation exercises.

Relaxation exercises for fight flight or freeze

Relaxation exercises can help people who are experiencing fight, flight or freeze. One common exercise for fight, flight, or freeze is sensory grounding. The individual names five things they see around the room, four things they hear, three things they feel, two things they smell, and one thing they taste. That distracts the person from feeling anxious and out of control. They get back to the room around them, and it takes them out of fight, flight, or freeze. Another thing that is essential when you have these symptoms is to seek the help of a licensed therapist.

Find a therapist for anxiety or trauma

Sometimes it is difficult to cope with anxiety and trauma. It is so intense that it can take a toll on relationships. You can read more about that on [Mind Diagnostics](#). You don't know how to manage the symptoms. You are not alone in these feelings. Individuals who are suffering from anxiety or traumatic events need to see a therapist. Whether you see somebody in your local area or online, a licensed mental health professional can help you with these concerns. Don't be afraid to reach out for help if you need it. You don't have to suffer from fight, flight, or freeze symptoms alone. You can learn grounding exercises and work through your mental health issues.

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