



FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE OR FAWN

WORKSHEETS TO HELP YOU
UNDERSTAND AND NAVIGATE
YOUR FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE,
OR FAWN RESPONSES TO
STRESS AND WORRY.



THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

A NATURAL HUMAN RESPONSE THAT IS DESIGNED TO KEEP YOU SAFE

Have you ever wondered why your heart races, palms get sweaty, and muscles tense up when faced with a perceived threat or stressful situation? These physiological responses are part of the innate fight or flight response, a natural instinct that has helped humans survive and adapt since the beginning of time. In this blog, we will explore the fight or flight response, its purpose, and how understanding it can empower us in navigating life's challenges.

The fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response, also known as the acute stress response, is a physiological reaction triggered when our brains perceive a threat or danger. Rooted in our evolutionary history, this response enabled our ancestors to respond to acute physical threats, such as a predatory animal. While we may not face the same kind of immediate physical dangers in our modern world, the fight or flight response still plays a crucial role in our lives.

When we encounter a stressful or threatening situation, our brains send signals to the body's autonomic nervous system, triggering a cascade of physiological changes. The sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system takes charge, releasing stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol into our bloodstream.

This response enables our bodies to quickly mobilize energy, increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and oxygen intake to prepare us for action. This surge of energy can enhance strength, speed, and stamina, allowing us to either confront the threat head-on (fight) or flee to safety (flight).

Beyond these visible physical changes, the fight or flight response also influences our cognition by prioritizing the brain's focus on immediate survival. This can lead to heightened attention, improved sensory perception, and a narrowing of our focus on potential threats.

In modern society, the fight or flight response is often triggered by non-life-threatening situations like public speaking, exams, or job interviews. While these stressors may not pose a direct physical threat, our bodies still respond in the same way, preparing us to cope with the perceived challenges at hand. However, frequent or chronic activation of the fight or flight response can negatively impact our overall well-being. Prolonged exposure to stress hormones can increase vulnerability to mental and physical health issues such as anxiety disorders, hypertension, and weakened immune function.

FIGHT RESPONSE

CONFRONT A THREAT OR CHALLENGE HEAD-ON

In the "fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response," the "fight" aspect refers to the physiological reactions and mental state that prepare us to confront a threat or challenge head-on. When the fight response is activated, our bodies gear up for action, readying us to counter the perceived danger.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Physical sensations

1. Do I feel my heart beating faster?
2. Are my muscles getting tense or tight?
3. Am I breathing rapidly or shallowly?
4. Do I notice any physical discomfort or unease?

Thoughts and Emotions

1. What am I thinking or telling myself in this situation?
2. Am I feeling angry, frustrated, or threatened?
3. Do I feel a strong urge to argue, shout, or become confrontational?
4. Are my thoughts focused on defending or attacking?



Body language and behavior

1. Am I getting ready to physically confront someone?
2. Do I feel the need to assert myself or prove I am strong?
3. Am I clenching my fists, squaring my shoulders, or adopting an aggressive posture?
4. Are my actions or words aimed at dominating or winning in a conflict situation?

Impacts on relationships

1. How does the fight response affect my interactions with others?
2. Are conflicts escalating because of my fight response?
3. Do I feel people withdrawing from me or responding negatively to my aggression?
4. Are my relationships being damaged as a result of my fight response?

Self-reflection and coping strategies

1. Can I identify triggers or situations that consistently activate my fight response?
2. Are there healthier ways I can respond to challenges or conflicts?
3. How can I communicate my needs assertively without resorting to aggression?
4. What relaxation or self-soothing techniques can I use to manage my fight response?



FLIGHT RESPONSE

SEEKS TO FLEE OR ESCAPE FROM THE
THREATENING OR DANGEROUS SITUATION

This response is a natural survival mechanism that helps individuals remove themselves from harm's way. It can be seen in various situations, such as running away from a predator, escaping from a fire, or avoiding a physical confrontation.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Physical sensations

1. Do I feel my heart racing or pounding in my chest?
2. Am I experiencing rapid breathing or shortness of breath?
3. Do I notice tension or discomfort in my body?
4. Are there physical signs of restlessness or wanting to escape?

Thoughts and Emotions

1. What thoughts or fears are running through my mind in this situation?
2. Am I feeling scared, anxious, or overwhelmed?
3. Do I have a strong urge to run away or hide?
4. Are my thoughts focused on avoiding the situation or person?



Body language and behavior

1. Do I find myself trying to escape or remove myself from the situation?
2. Am I exhibiting signs of nervousness or unease, such as fidgeting or pacing?
3. Do I avoid eye contact or withdraw emotionally?
4. Are my actions or words aimed at distancing myself from the perceived threat?

Impacts on relationships

1. How does the flight response affect my relationships with others?
2. Do I struggle to engage in healthy communication or conflict resolution?
3. Am I avoiding social situations or interactions due to my flight response?
4. Are my relationships being strained because of my tendency to run away or avoid confrontations?

Self-reflection and coping strategies

1. Can I identify common triggers or situations that make me want to flee?
2. Are there alternative ways to handle challenging situations without resorting to flight?
3. How can I express my concerns or needs assertively while bravely facing my fears?
4. What self-calming techniques or strategies can I use to manage my flight response?



FREEZE RESPONSE

AN INDIVIDUAL BECOMES IMMOBILE, OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY A STATE OF FEAR OR FEELING OVERWHELMED

When faced with danger or a traumatic event, the body's freeze response can result in physiological changes, such as decreased heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension. These reactions can also involve dissociation or numbing, where the individual may feel detached from their emotions or surroundings.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Physical sensations

1. Do I feel my body tense up or become stiff?
2. Am I experiencing a rapid or shallow breath?
3. Do I notice a sense of heaviness or paralysis in my body?
4. Are there physical signs of freezing, such as immobility or difficulty moving?

Thoughts and Emotions

1. What thoughts or fears are running through my mind in this situation?
2. Am I feeling scared, overwhelmed, or powerless?
3. Do I find it hard to think or make decisions when I freeze?
4. Are my thoughts focused on self-preservation or avoiding further harm?



Body language and behavior

1. Do I find myself becoming still or motionless?
2. Am I avoiding eye contact or averted gaze?
3. Are my muscles tightened or do I feel locked in place?
4. Do I exhibit signs of being "stuck" or immobilized, both physically and mentally?

Impacts on relationships

1. How does the freeze response affect my relationships with others?
2. Do I struggle to engage or interact with others when I freeze?
3. Am I finding it hard to ask for help or express myself during a freeze response?
4. Are my relationships being strained because of my tendency to become unresponsive?

Self-reflection and coping strategies

1. Can I identify common triggers or situations that make me freeze?
2. Are there alternative ways to manage overwhelming situations without freezing?
3. How can I use grounding techniques to bring myself back into the present moment?
4. What support systems or coping strategies can I develop to break through my freeze response?

FAWN RESPONSE

BEING COMPLIANT, SUBMISSIVE, OR EXCESSIVELY ACCOMMODATING

The fawn response can manifest as people-pleasing behaviors, overextending oneself to meet others' needs, or suppressing one's own desires and boundaries to make others happy. It often stems from a survival instinct to try to diffuse potential harm or conflict through submission or compliance.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Recognizing the Fawn Response

1. Do you sometimes feel the need to please others or make them happy to avoid conflict?
2. Have you found yourself being overly accommodating or submissive in certain situations?
3. Do you feel anxious or fearful when you think about standing up for yourself or asserting your personal boundaries?

Understanding Your Feelings and Needs

1. How do you feel when you ignore your own desires or boundaries to make others happy?
2. What are some situations or people that tend to trigger the fawn response in you?
3. How are you affected when you suppress your own needs or desires for the sake of others?



Recognizing the Impact of the Fawn Response

1. Have you ever felt taken advantage of when you constantly try to please others?
2. How does constantly seeking approval or avoiding conflict affect your overall well-being?
3. Are there any negative consequences, such as a reduction in self-esteem or difficulty expressing your true feelings, that you associate with the fawn response?

Developing Healthy Boundaries

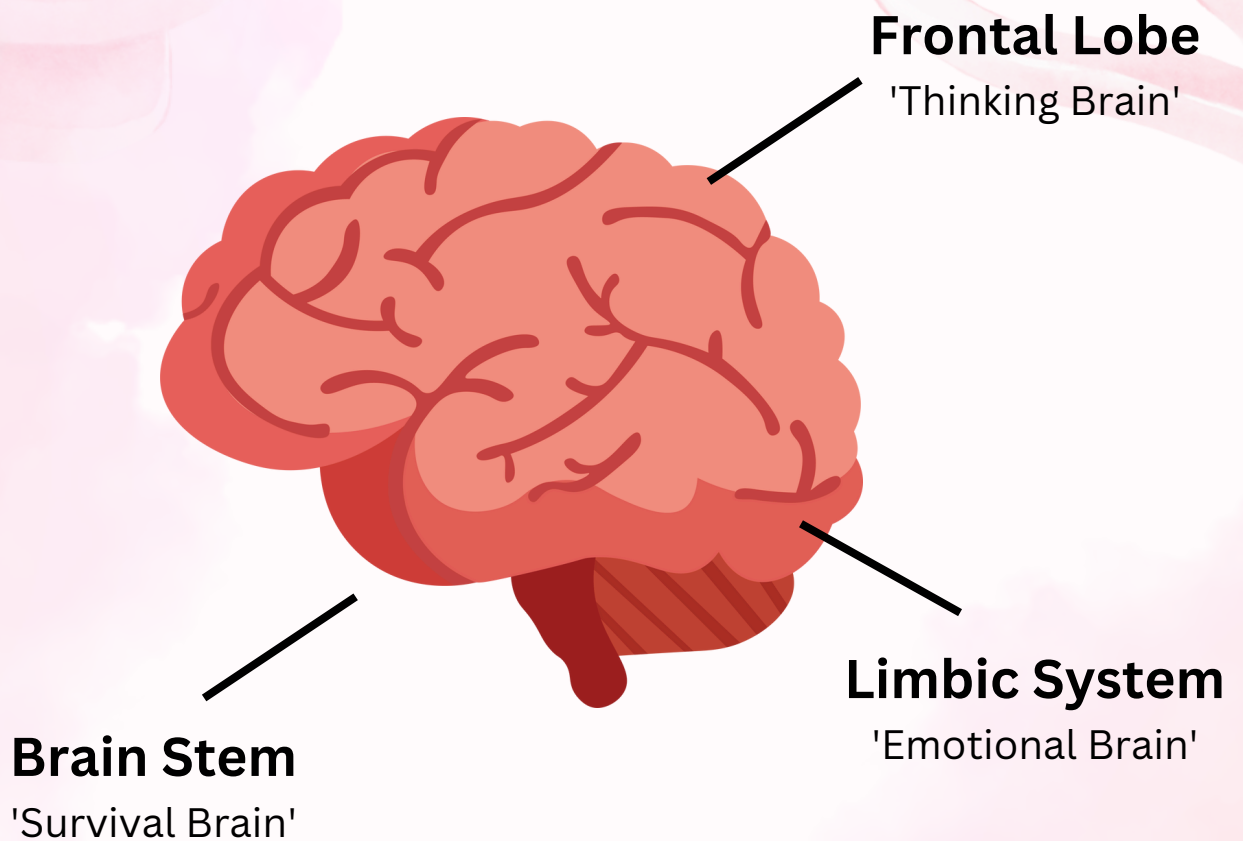
1. Do you feel comfortable setting boundaries with others and saying 'no' when necessary?
2. How can you differentiate between being kind and accommodating versus compromising your own needs?
3. Are there any situations in which it is important to prioritize your well-being over pleasing others?

Assertiveness and Self-Advocacy

1. How can you express your needs or desires assertively and respectfully without resorting to the fawn response?
2. Are there any effective communication strategies or tools you can use to stand up for yourself without sacrificing your own well-being?
3. How can you work on building your self-confidence and self-worth so that you feel empowered to express yourself?



A LOOK INSIDE THE BRAIN



'SURVIVAL BRAIN'

Prioritize your survival functions, such as your heart beats faster so that you can breathe in more oxygen, which is important if you need to fight or run away.

More energy makes its way to your limbs so you can run faster and be stronger.

'EMOTIONAL BRAIN'

Your emotions become extremely intense and act as a warning sign to help us quickly respond to danger and threats.

'THINKING BRAIN'

Temporarily goes 'offline' – so that the energy your brain would normally use is now prioritized to other body systems to help keep you safe.

SURVIVING THE PRIMITIVE WORLD: UNDERSTANDING THE FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE, OR FAWN RESPONSE

In the depths of our evolutionary past, humans developed survival instincts that helped us navigate the dangerous world we inhabited. When faced with imminent threats, our primitive ancestors relied on one of four responses: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. These responses allowed our ancient counterparts to survive in a harsh and unforgiving environment. Here we explore the origins and importance of these responses, shedding light on how they assisted early humans in their daily struggles for survival.

FIGHT RESPONSE:

Imagine a scenario in which our ancestor, a cave dweller, encounters a fearsome predator. Instead of cowering and giving up, the fight response is triggered. The cave dweller's adrenaline surges, their heart races, and their body prepares for battle. This instinctual response empowered our ancestors, allowing them to stand their ground and defend themselves in life-threatening situations. The fight response ensured their species' survival through their bravery and resilience.

FLIGHT RESPONSE:

In the face of an approaching predator or danger, the instinctive response of flight kicks in. The same adrenaline rush that fuels the fight response now propels our ancestors to flee, abandoning their current location to secure safety. This vital reaction allowed swift escape from dangerous encounters, giving our ancestors a better chance of survival. The flight response protected their lives by ensuring they could physically distance themselves from threatening situations.

FREEZE RESPONSE

Sometimes, our ancestors' encounter with danger was both sudden and overwhelming. In such cases, the freeze response would engage, causing our ancestor's body to immobilize. By adopting an appearance of inaction, our primitive counterparts could potentially go unnoticed by predators, increasing their chances of survival. The freeze response acted as a camouflage mechanism. By controlling their movements and remaining still, our ancestors minimized the risk of being detected by predators, allowing them to escape unharmed.

FAWN RESPONSE:

While the fight, flight, and freeze responses aimed to protect the individual's survival, the fawn response was a strategy to appease others. When confronted with a potential threat, our ancestors may have tried to gain the favor of the aggressor through submission and cooperation. The fawn response involved attempts at social bonding and cooperation, reducing the likelihood of an attack. This response was especially valuable in group settings, as it helped maintain harmony with fellow cave dwellers and reduced inter-group conflict.

MODERN RELEVANCE:

Though human civilization has progressed by leaps and bounds, remnants of these instinctive responses still exist within us today. While the threats we face differ considerably from those our primitive ancestors encountered, the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses are hardwired into our biology. Understanding these responses not only helps us appreciate the deep-rooted nature of our survival instincts but also provides insights into our present-day stress responses.

The fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response was an essential survival mechanism in the caveman days. These instinctive reactions helped our ancestors navigate dangerous situations and ensure their species' continued existence. While modern civilization presents different challenges, it is still fascinating to recognize how these primal responses continue to influence our behavior and perceptions of danger. By acknowledging and understanding these responses, we can cultivate empathy for ourselves and others, navigating the complexities of our world with greater awareness and resilience.