

## **The Fight-or-Flight Response**

The fight-or-flight response is your body's natural survival system, designed to protect you from perceived danger. When your brain senses a threat—whether physical or emotional—it automatically activates this response to prepare you to either confront the situation or move away from it.

### **What happens in the body?**

When the fight-or-flight response is activated, you may notice a range of physical and mental symptoms, such as:

- Increased heart rate and faster breathing
- Sweating
- Cold or pale skin
- Muscle tension
- Dry mouth
- Nausea or “butterflies” in the stomach
- Racing thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Shaking or trembling

### **Common Triggers**

The fight-or-flight response can be activated by a range of situations, including:

- Emotional or psychological stress (e.g., work pressure, social situations, public speaking, deadlines, confrontation )
- Feeling overwhelmed or under pressure
- Conflict or perceived judgement from others
- Physical danger (e.g., accidents or unsafe situations)
- Intense emotional distress (e.g., trauma, fear of failure, phobias)
- Reminders of past traumatic experiences
- Environmental Stressors (e.g., loud noises, crowded or uncomfortable environments)

### **The Four Responses: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn**

You may respond to perceived threats in different ways:

- Fight: Confronting the threat (e.g., becoming defensive or irritable)
- Flight: Avoiding or escaping the situation
- Freeze: Feeling stuck, numb, or unable to act
- Fawn: Trying to please others or avoid conflict to stay safe



### **Ways to manage the response**

Although this response is automatic, there are ways to help your body feel calmer:

- Deep breathing
- Grounding techniques (such as those included in the Grounding Techniques worksheet)
- Meditation or mindfulness
- Gentle movement (e.g., walking, stretching)

### **Looking for practical ways to manage these symptoms?**

You can explore grounding techniques, sensory soothing, and coping tools in the Anxiety Toolkit found on my Resources page.