

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care for DIS – How Does the Brain Respond to Trauma?

How does the brain respond to trauma?

You may have heard of the “fight or flight” response, but fighting and fleeing are not the only ways that the brain responds to traumas. The human brain is built to automatically assess threats and respond to them in one of four instinctive ways.

Response	What Happens?	Physical/Mental Impact
FIGHT	The body prepares to <u>fight</u> back against a perceived threat	Body prepares for physical conflict – increased adrenaline, heart rate, breathing, muscle tension. All focus is on danger and opportunities to win the fight.
FLIGHT	The body prepares to escape from a perceived threat	Body prepares for physical escape - increased adrenaline, heart rate, breathing, muscle tension. All focus is on potential escape routes.
FREEZE	The mind tries to evaluate a perceived threat while the body tries to become less noticeable to the threat	Thinking speeds up while the body dissociates (an “out of body” feeling), becomes numb, and becomes unable to move
APPEASE	The mind and body try to placate the perceived threat (in this case, another person/people) in order to reduce immediate danger	Body adopts submissive posture (cringing, eyes averted, head bowed) and the mind speeds up to identify immediate ways to give the threatening person/people what they want