

# Stress Response

Blue Knot Foundation fact sheet about the stress responses that can occur automatically when we feel threatened.

- All people experience stress or feel threatened at different times.
- When we are threatened or feel threatened, a part of the brain (the amygdala) detects the threat. The amygdala signals to our body and brain that we are in danger and we feel fear, panic and distress.
- Our stress response takes over and we go into survival mode. In survival mode our conscious thinking brain switches off and we react automatically to protect ourselves.
- Our stress response is part of our biology. It helps us survive danger. It does not involve any planning or thinking.
- We respond to stress in one of three main ways. We fight, we run away (flight) or we freeze (shut down).
- When we fight or flee, we become agitated (on high alert). We call this hyperarousal.
- When we freeze, we shut down, go numb or dissociate (we disconnect from our current experience – this is not conscious). We call this hypoarousal.
- Freeze can be active or ‘play dead’ freeze. The ‘play dead’ (faint or fawn) happens when we cannot defend ourselves anymore and we appease or please instead.
- When the danger passes, our thinking brain turns back on. Our body becomes calm. We return to a resting state.
- In the resting state we can repair. This happens with everyday stress. Trauma is different.

