

# Serenity Now

## FOUNDATIONS

*Healing Adult Victims of Childhood Abuse  
- Survivor to Thriver*

# Why Your Brain Reacts the Way It Does After Trauma

**A Gentle Guide to Understanding the Science Behind  
Your Survival Responses**



# Why Your Brain Reacts the Way It Does After Trauma

## A Gentle Guide to Understanding the Science Behind Your Survival Responses

by **Serenity Now Foundations**

*Because you're not crazy—you're rewiring.*

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### **If You've Ever Wondered...**

“Why am I so jumpy?”

“Why do I freeze up when I need to speak?”

“Why do I overreact—or feel absolutely nothing at all?”

“Why can't I just move on?”

You are not broken.

You are not failing.

You are not weak.

You are running a *survival code* your brain once needed to keep you alive.

This guide will walk you through the **neuroscience of trauma**, why your brain developed certain reactions, and how it's entirely possible to rewire those responses—**without shame**.

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## What Trauma Actually Does to the Brain

Trauma isn't just what happened to you—it's what happened *inside you* as a result.

Your brain is always working to protect you. When danger (real or perceived) shows up, your nervous system shifts into a survival state.

But when that danger is **repeated, unpredictable, or overwhelming**, the brain gets stuck there.

Here's what happens:

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### 1. Amygdala Hijack – The Alarm System

The **amygdala** is your brain's smoke detector. It scans for danger 24/7—even while you sleep.

After trauma, your amygdala becomes **hypersensitive**, triggering intense reactions to minor cues.

- A certain look
- A loud voice
- A text left on "read"

Your amygdala says: *Danger! Even if the threat is long gone.*

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### 2. Prefrontal Cortex Shutdown – Logic Goes Offline

Your **prefrontal cortex** is the part of your brain that helps you:

- Think critically
- Regulate emotions
- Speak clearly
- Make decisions

During a trauma response, the prefrontal cortex shuts down so your survival instincts can take over. This is why you might:

- Go blank in a conversation
- Forget basic things
- Feel like you're “not yourself”

You're not losing your mind—you're losing temporary access to higher brain functions as a **protective measure**.

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### **3. Hippocampus Confusion – Time Gets Warped**

The **hippocampus** helps you sort out past and present.

After trauma, it can misfire. Your brain might:

- React to a current event like it's happening *again*
- Struggle to recall details clearly
- Get stuck in flashbacks or *deja vu*

This is why a neutral tone or setting can suddenly feel unsafe.

Your hippocampus is still learning the difference between *memory* and *now*.

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### **4. Nervous System Imbalance – The Body Feels It All**

The **autonomic nervous system** has two main gears:

- **Sympathetic (fight/flight)** – prepares for action
- **Parasympathetic (rest/digest)** – calms you down

Trauma can lock you into either gear—or cause you to swing wildly between them.

You might feel:

- On edge all the time

- Numb or frozen
- Exhausted by the simplest tasks
- Like your body is “stuck on ON” or “dead inside”

This isn’t your fault. It’s a nervous system trying to keep you *safe*—but it doesn’t yet know how to feel *safe*.

### **So What Does This Mean for Healing?**

It means that:

- You’re not lazy—you’re neurologically overwhelmed.
- You’re not overdramatic—you’re in survival mode.
- You’re not emotionless—you’re disconnected for safety.
- You’re not crazy—you’re compensating for injury.

Understanding this gives you **compassion**, and compassion gives you **access to healing**.

### **Common Trauma Reactions—and Their Brain-Based Origins**

<b>Symptom</b>	<b>Why It Happens</b>
<b>Overreacting to small things</b>	<b>Amygdala is oversensitized to threat</b>
<b>Going blank in conflict</b>	<b>Prefrontal cortex temporarily shuts down</b>
<b>Trouble sleeping</b>	<b>Sympathetic system remains hyperactive</b>
<b>Detachment/dissociation</b>	<b>Brain is protecting from emotional overwhelm</b>
<b>Avoiding joy or good news</b>	<b>Nervous system doesn’t recognize safety yet</b>
<b>Guilt after setting boundaries</b>	<b>Old survival scripts tied to worth or abandonment</b>

## Symptom

## Why It Happens

Struggling to feel progress

Hippocampus hasn't updated the memory of "now"

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### What Rewiring Actually Looks Like

Healing is not about erasing these responses. It's about teaching the brain:

"You're safe now. You can choose something new."

This happens through:

- **Neuroplasticity** – Your brain's ability to form new neural pathways
  - **Repetition** – Practicing new patterns over time
  - **Safety cues** – Teaching the body that calm doesn't equal danger
  - **Compassionate curiosity** – Noticing your reactions without shame
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### The Rewiring Formula (in practice)

Try this next time you're triggered:

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#### 1. Pause and name the state

"This is my survival system activating."

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#### 2. Breathe to downshift the nervous system

4-second inhale, 6-second exhale, repeat 5x

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#### 3. Use a grounding cue

Rub a textured object, feel your feet, name 3 colors you see

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#### 4. Reaffirm safety

“This is not the past.”

“I am safe enough now.”

“I can respond with choice.”

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#### Journal Reflection

1. Which reactions of mine make more sense after reading this?

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2. What part of me have I been judging—when it was just trying to protect me?

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3. What would it mean to respond with self-trust instead of shame?

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#### Reminder: Healing Isn't Linear

Your brain isn't resisting progress—it's *testing for safety*.

It may ask: “Are we really safe *this time*?”

Again and again.

That doesn't mean you're backsliding.

It means you're still healing.

With time, practice, and gentleness, that *testing* becomes *trust*.

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**Want More Support?**

**Join our trauma recovery course: 7 Steps to Turn Your Demons Into Puppies**

→ **Learn how to deactivate your survival responses using neuroplasticity**

👉 **Explore the course** at <https://serenitynowfoundations.com/>

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