Personal Trigger Identification Guide for Healthcare Clinicians

This comprehensive guide is aimed to help healthcare clinicians recognise and manage their emotional triggers when interacting with patients, especially when faced with objections.

Through reflection, journaling and practical exercises clinicians will learn to navigate challenging interactions, reduce emotional strain and create more positive patient outcomes.

The guide covers understanding triggers, emotional pattern recognition, physical response mapping, action-oriented response planning and guided reflection with scenario practice.

AT **by Annette Tonkin**



Made with Gamma

Introduction

As healthcare clinicians, managing your own emotional responses is key to providing the best possible care for your patients.

This guide will help you recognise your triggers, identify patterns and develop thoughtful strategies to respond more effectively.

Understanding Triggers: A Personal Exploration

Triggers are emotional reactions to situations or interactions that feel challenging. The first step in managing them is to understand what they are and why they happen.

- [ ] **Personal Story Prompt**

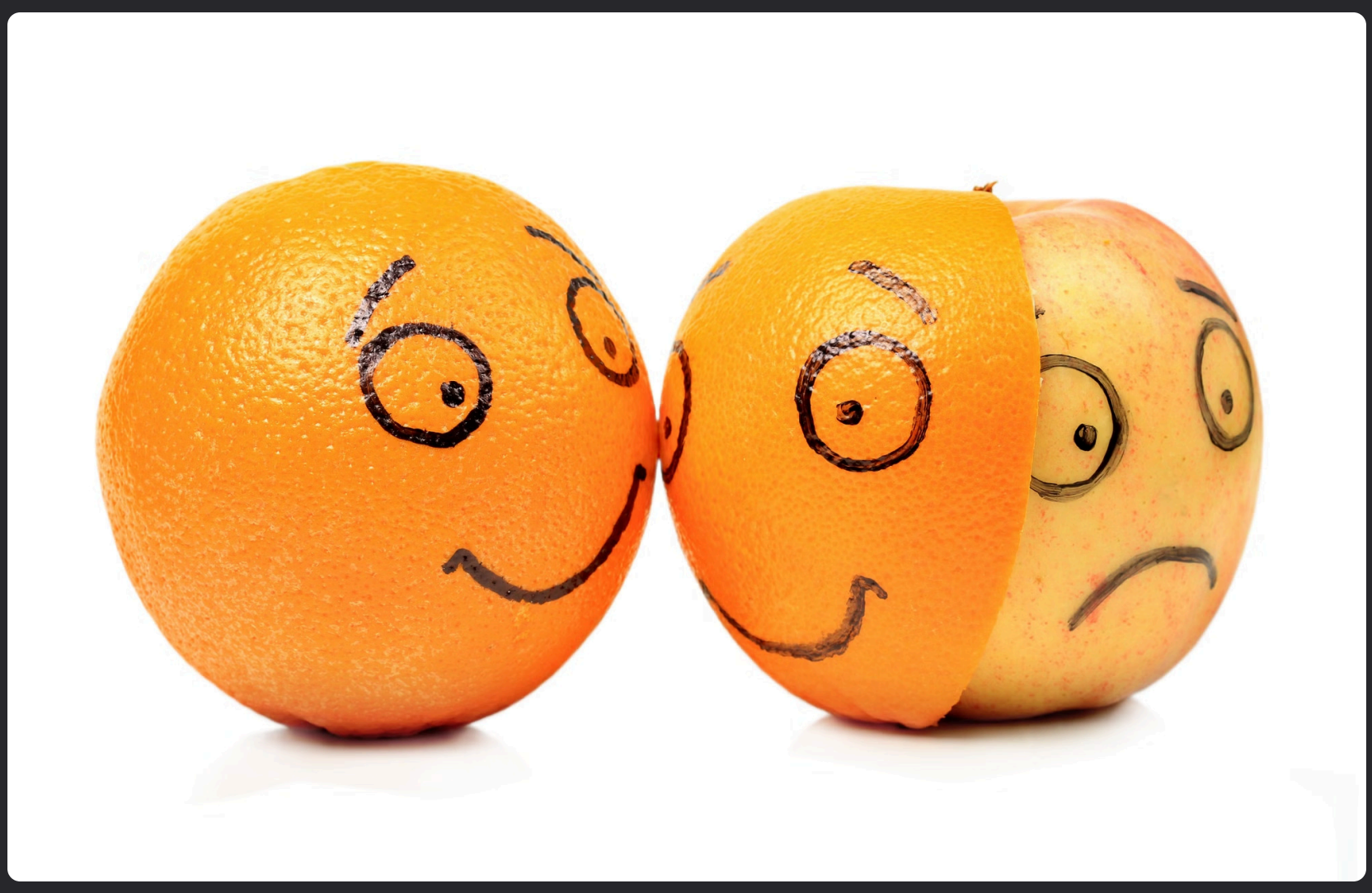
  Think of a recent situation where a patient's objection caused a strong emotional reaction in you.

  Write down what happened, how you responded and why you think you felt that way.

- [ ] **Reflective Journal Prompt**

  What circumstances make you feel most emotionally reactive?

  Are there recurring patterns in patient interactions that trigger you?



Made with Gamma

Emotional Pattern Recognition with an Emotion Wheel

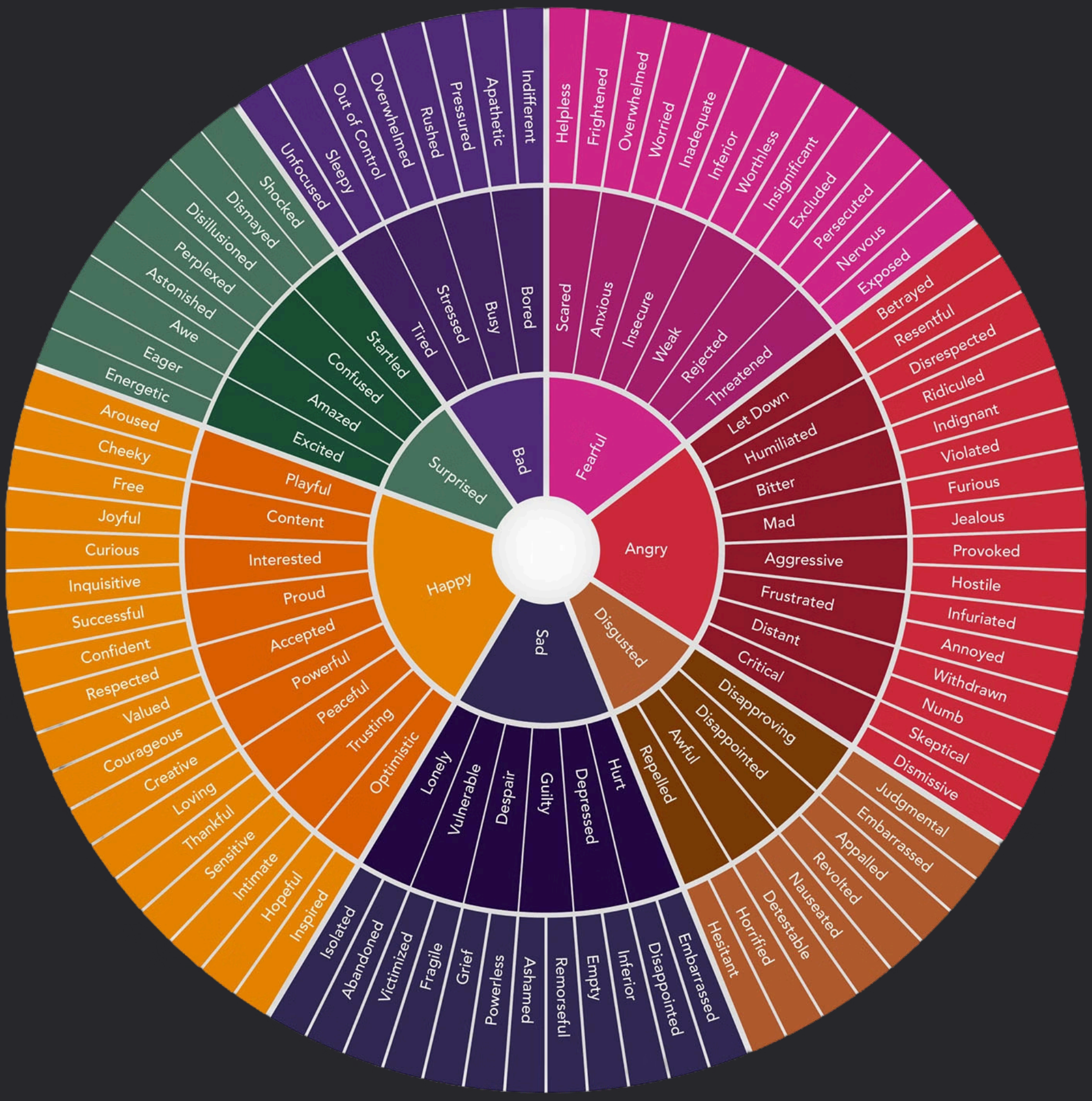
Understanding your emotional triggers involves going deeper than just identifying "anger" or "frustration".

Use the **Emotion Wheel** below to explore a wider range of emotions, such as **embarrassment, disappointment, helplessness** or **hopefulness**.

The more specific you can be about your emotional state, the more effectively you can manage your response.

Exercise

After an emotional response, take a moment to use the **Emotion Wheel** to articulate what you are feeling. Write down your findings.



Made with Gamma

Physical Response Mapping

Your body often knows when you're triggered before your mind does. Common signs include a tight chest, a clenched jaw or shallow breathing.

Actionable Exercise

Spend a week mapping your physical responses to emotional triggers. Use the chart below to log physical sensations and the triggering event. Here are some common reactions:

Triggering Event	Physical Sensation	Emotion Experienced
Patient questioning fee	Tight chest	Anxiety
Resistance to treatment	Clenched jaw	Frustration
Patient repeatedly interrupting during explanation	Shallow breathing	Irritation
Patient showing disinterest in recommendations	Sweaty palms	Anxiety
Patient comparing your advice to Dr. Google	Tension in shoulders	Frustration
Patient questioning qualifications	Rapid heartbeat	Insecurity
Patient arriving late repeatedly	Fidgeting	Annoyance
Patient expressing doubt about treatment efficacy	Dry mouth	Self-doubt
Family member challenging the treatment approach	Stiff neck	Defensiveness
Patient dismisses the importance of prescribed exercises	Clenched fists	Frustration
Patient showing impatience during consultation	Tightened jaw	Annoyance
Patient raising unrealistic expectations	Increased heart rate	Anxiety

Made with Gamma

Worksheet

Use these boxes to record and track your experiences:

Triggering Event

Record specific situations or interactions that cause a reaction.

- What happened?
- When did it occur?
- Who was involved?

Physical Sensation

Note your body's immediate responses.

- Where did you feel tension?
- What physical changes occurred?
- How intense was the response?

Emotion Experienced

Identify the emotions that surfaced.

- What feelings arose?
- How strong were they?
- Did they change over time?



Made with Gamma

Action-Oriented Worksheets for Response Planning

Converting trigger recognition into action starts with planning. This section focuses on creating a proactive, actionable plan that clinicians can use to manage specific triggers.

By identifying your triggers, initial reactions, desired responses and actionable steps, you can develop strategies to effectively handle predictable scenarios.

This structured exercise aims at changing future behaviour based on known triggers. Fill out the worksheet below to define your trigger, desired response and actionable steps for change.

Example Worksheet

Trigger

Patient challenges the legitimacy of the recommended treatment.

Initial Reaction

Defensive, feeling the need to justify the treatment.

Desired Response

Stay calm, validate the patient's concerns.

Action Steps

Use a guiding style by acknowledging the concern e.g., "It feels (or It sounds like) like you are unsure about my suggestion. Would you be against exploring how this treatment could benefit you?"

Practise grounding techniques to remain centred.

Made with Gamma

Trigger

Patient continuously interrupts during explanation.

Initial Reaction

Irritation, wanting to stop the patient from interrupting.

Desired Response

Maintain composure, refocus the conversation.

Action Steps

Politely acknowledge the interruptions and redirect, e.g., "It sounds like you have a lot of thoughts on this, would you be open to me explaining everything clearly first, then we can address your questions?"

Practise deep breathing and use pauses to regain focus.

Trigger

Patient refuses to follow treatment advice.

Initial Reaction

Frustration, wanting to insist on the treatment.

Desired Response

Stay calm, explore patient's perspective.

Action Steps

Use a following style by asking, "It looks like you have a number of concerns about the treatment recommendation. Tell me more about those concerns."

Practise deep breathing before responding.

Made with Gamma

Worksheet for Clinicians

Trigger

Initial Reaction

Desired Response

Action Steps

Trigger

Initial Reaction

Desired Response

Action Steps

Trigger

Initial Reaction

Desired Response

Action Steps

Made with Gamma

Guided Reflection & Scenario Practice

Use these prompts to further reflect on your emotional responses. This section encourages reflective learning based on past experiences.

By analysing past interactions, clinicians can gain insights into emotional triggers and personal responses.

Reflecting on what went well and what could be improved helps enhance emotional management skills and facilitate growth.

- [ ] **Scenario Example 1**

  A patient refuses to engage with an exercise programme you recommended, stating they don't have the time.

  Reflect on how you initially responded.

  Could you have used more empathetic listening or asked an open-ended question to understand their concerns more deeply?

- [ ] **Scenario Example 2**

  A patient openly questions your qualifications during a consultation.

  Reflect on how you managed your emotions.

  How could you have responded in a way that would both validate their concerns and demonstrate your expertise without becoming defensive?

- [ ] **Scenario Practice**

  Recall a time when a patient rejected your advice.

  Write down your response and how the patient reacted.

  What could you have done differently to keep the interaction productive?

- [ ] **Open-Ended Journal Prompt**

  Describe a recent challenging patient interaction.

  What emotional triggers were present?

  How could you respond differently in a similar situation next time?

Scenario	Response	Do Differently
Details:	Details:	Explore options:

Made with Gamma

Share and Connect

Feel free to share this resource to help more clinicians master personal triggers in the clinical setting.

Website

thinking.physio

Email

annette@thinking.physio

Socials

Facebook: **Thinking Physio**

LinkedIn: **Annette Tonkin**

Ready to Build Confidence in Managing Client Objections?

If you found this resource helpful, imagine what personalised coaching can do for your professional growth.

Learn practical strategies to navigate objections with ease, maintain composure in tough situations and guide clients toward successful outcomes—all while boosting your confidence.

Discover how coaching can transform the way you approach challenging conversations.

Schedule a 20' call with me at no cost.

CLICK HERE

Website: **Thinking.physio**

Facebook | **Instagram** | **LinkedIn**



Made with Gamma