'Ai Pono Hawaii

Trauma Response Reflective Mapping

How Trauma Can Show Up In Eating Disorder Behaviors

FIGHT RESPONSE

When the nervous system moves toward protection through control, resistance, or pushing against threat. Fight responses often attempt to create power or protection in environments that feel overwhelming, invalidating, or unsafe.

Possible Eating Disorder Connections:

- ◻ Rigid food rules that create a sense of mastery
- ◻ Perfectionistic body control or exercise compulsivity
- ◻ Anger directed inward through restriction or purging
- ◻ Competitive comparison around weight or performance
- ◻ Using food or body control to resist vulnerability or dependency

FLIGHT RESPONSE

When the nervous system moves toward escape, avoidance, or distraction from threat or emotional overwhelm.Flight responses often prioritize movement away from distress or internal experience.

Possible Eating Disorder Connections:

- ◻ Obsessive focus on calories, food planning, or body monitoring
- ◻ Compulsive exercise or constant movement
- ◻ Using food restriction to numb emotional intensity
- ◻ Avoiding meals or social eating situations
- ◻ Hyper-productivity or achievement tied to body or food control

FREEZE RESPONSE

When the nervous system immobilizes in response to overwhelming threat. Freeze responses often involve emotional numbness, disconnection, or difficulty initiating action.

Possible Eating Disorder Connections:

- ◻ Emotional numbness associated with restriction or binge cycles
- ◻ Feeling stuck in repetitive food or body rituals
- ◻ Difficulty making food-related decisions
- ◻ Disconnection from hunger, fullness, or body sensations
- ◻ Passive compliance with eating disorder behaviors despite desire for change

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FAWN RESPONSE

When the nervous system prioritizes safety through pleasing, appeasing, or maintaining relational harmony. Fawn responses often develop in environments where safety depended on meeting others' expectations.

Possible Eating Disorder Connections:

□ Changing eating patterns to avoid conflict or judgment
□ Using body or weight to gain approval or belonging
□ Difficulty expressing hunger, needs, or preferences
□ Compliance with external expectations about appearance
□ Using symptoms to maintain relational roles (e.g., "the good one," "the easy one")

SHUTDOWN / COLLAPSE RESPONSE

When the nervous system moves into deep withdrawal, hopelessness, or energy conservation when threat feels inescapable. This response often develops when survival requires enduring rather than escaping threat.

Possible Eating Disorder Connections:

□ Binge eating linked to emotional overwhelm or exhaustion
□ Cycles of restriction followed by loss of control
□ Feelings of hopelessness or resignation around recovery
□ Using food or body focus to numb despair or emptiness
□ Reduced motivation for self-care or nourishment

Making it Your Own

Complete the chart below categorizing which of your eating disorder behaviors may act as a specific kind of trauma response.

Fight	
Flight	
Freeze	
Fawn	
Collapse/ Shutdown	