

# Common Strategies for Coping with Unresolved Trauma

While all of these nervous system responses are normal and available in every human body, they tend to be more *reactive* or *intense* when we have unresolved trauma.

## ❖ First Line of Defence ❖ (LOWER/DORSAL PARASYMPATHETIC) *The Child Brain*

These reactions are automatic and are not driven by conscious thought. When we are triggered and respond in one of the following ways, we may be regressing to the tools we used as a child when we first experienced trauma.

**Sounds like:** *“If I can constantly be aware of other people’s emotions and reactions and do what they want, then I can prevent the danger. If I can’t prevent it, I can make it stop sooner through . . .”*

1. Shutdown
2. Collapse
3. Submit
4. People-Please

## ❖ Second Line of Defence ❖ (SYMPATHETIC) *The Teenage Brain*

As we grow older, but before we’re able to have an adult perspective on events around us, our reactions may develop to these almost teenage-resistance responses. These are designed to protect or defend us from danger and may be our primary response if we have been traumatized in childhood. While these responses are helpful when facing imminent physical danger, they are less adaptive when they become primary responses in relationship dynamics.

**Fight:** *“We can get angry. We can act out.”*

**Flight:** *“We can run away. We can avoid this and stay safe.”*

## ❖ **Third Line of Defence** ❖

### (UPPER/VENTRAL PARASYMPATHETIC – PREFRONTAL CORTEX)

### ***The Adult Brain***

Our prefrontal cortex does not fully develop until around age 25. As an adult, we have access to the following tools when faced with a threatening situation. If, however, we have unresolved trauma – especially childhood trauma – these tools will be knocked “offline” and we will respond with one of the above automatic reactions.

1. Regulate emotions
2. Ground in the present
3. Provide perspective

In both the first and second lines of defence, protection and survival are the only objective and collateral damage to those around us are not considered. If we remain trapped in these automatic responses, we will cause harm to ourselves, our relationships and those we love most. But there's good news: We *can* train ourselves to respond with the maturity and self-control of our adult brains.

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### **NEED HELP?**

Call our care team to book a free, one-time phone consultation with one of our registered Christian counsellors. Call **1.800.661.9800** weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pacific time, or visit **[FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Counseling](https://FocusOnTheFamily.ca/Counseling)** to learn more.

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