

# Chapter 1

## Understanding Emotional Triggers

*"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response."*

*— Viktor Frankl*

### **From Outburst to Awareness**

Smita, the mother of two, often lost her temper when her 7-year-old son, Kiran, refused to follow instructions. Whether it was picking up toys or finishing homework, his constant defiance left her feeling disrespected, unheard, and powerless.

One evening, after repeatedly asking Kiran to clear his toys, Smita's frustration exploded. She yelled at him, her voice trembling with anger. As soon as she saw the fear in his eyes, guilt washed over her. Despite promising herself to stay calm, she had reacted impulsively once again.

Smita wasn't alone. Many mothers experience these moments, where the emotional trigger, a child's defiance, often leads to an automatic reaction. But what if, instead of reacting, Smita had a pause button to calm herself and choose her response?

This is where this simple yet powerful technique can transform the way mothers overcome their emotions.

## **Emotional Triggers in Mothers**

Emotional triggers are like invisible buttons embedded within us, often shaped by our past experiences and beliefs. When these buttons are pushed, intense emotions can arise, leading to impulsive reactions. For mothers, these triggers are particularly sensitive due to the emotional investment in their children's well-being.

Recognizing and understanding these triggers is the first step toward responding thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively. Research supports that emotional self-awareness enhances a parent's ability to regulate their emotions and foster a calmer home environment.

## **What Are Emotional Triggers?**

According to the **American Psychological Association (APA)**, emotional triggers are stimuli, thoughts, memories, or external events that provoke strong emotional reactions. These triggers often stem from past experiences, unmet needs, or deeply held beliefs.

A study by **Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child** found that parents who are aware of their emotional triggers are more likely to respond calmly to stressful situations, reducing the likelihood of harsh parenting.

## Common Emotional Triggers for Mothers

### 1. Disrespect and Defiance

- **Trigger:** A child talking back.
- **Underlying Belief:** “I’m not respected.”
- **Reaction:** Yelling, withdrawing, or threatening punishment.

Studies by **Dr. Laura Markham**, author of *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids*, suggest that parents who feel disrespected often project unresolved issues from their childhood.

### 2. Sibling Rivalry and Quarrelling

- **Trigger:** Children arguing or fighting.
- **Underlying Belief:** “I’m failing as a mother.”
- **Reaction:** Overreacting, punishing, or stepping away.

Research by **The Journal of Family Psychology** shows that mothers who experience frequent guilt or self-blame often react more harshly during sibling conflicts.

### 3. Public Embarrassment

- **Trigger:** A child throwing a tantrum in a public place.

- **Underlying Belief:** “Others are judging my parenting.”
- **Reaction:** Reacting with anger, using threats, or abandoning the situation.

A study conducted by the **University of Michigan** reported that 64% of parents feel heightened stress in public scenarios, leading to reactive behaviour.

### **Why are Emotional Triggers Heightened for Mothers?**

- **Hormonal Influence:** Hormonal shifts during postpartum and menstruation cycles can intensify emotional responses. According to the **American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists**, up to 15% of mothers experience postpartum depression or anxiety, making emotional regulation more difficult.
- **Mental Load:** Mothers often carry the invisible burden of managing household tasks, childcare, and emotional caregiving. This mental load can lead to burnout, amplifying emotional reactivity.

### **How Recognizing Emotional Triggers Can Help?**

Imam Al-Ghazali deeply explored the human soul and its emotional reactions. He advised understanding the root causes behind anger and emotional upheaval.

“Anger begins with madness and ends in regret. The intelligent one is he who knows the beginning and restrains himself.”

– *IhyaUlum al-Din*,  
*Book on Patience and Gratitude*

Al-Ghazali emphasized that unchecked emotions arise from triggers rooted in ego (nafs), expectations, or past experiences. Recognizing these causes is essential to respond wisely.

Ibn Qayyim, a student of Ibn Taymiyyah, wrote extensively about emotions in his works like *Madarij al-Salikeen* and *Zad al-Ma'ad*.

**“The origin of every evil lies in a person’s inability to control his desires and anger.”**

He also explained how unchecked anger can damage relationships, especially within families, and how being mindful of the triggers that provoke such anger leads to emotional mastery.

### **1. Reduced Reactive Parenting:**

- When mothers recognize triggers, they can pause, reflect, and choose a calmer response.
- According to **Dr. Dan Siegel**, author of *The Whole-Brain Child*, mindful parenting reduces

emotional outbursts and fosters better emotional regulation in children.

## 2. **Improved Parent-Child Relationship:**

- A study from the **Journal of Child and Family Studies** found that parents who regulate their emotions experience a 25% improvement in their relationship with their children.

## 3. **Better Mental Health:**

- Recognizing triggers decreases feelings of guilt, shame, and self-criticism. This supports long-term emotional well-being.

## **What is this Technique About?**

Imagine having a **mental remote control** that instantly shifts your emotional state. This technique allows you to associate a specific gesture, touch, or thought with a calm and positive state.

Just like hearing a favourite song can bring back joyful memories, you can create a positive emotional response using anchoring.

## **How This Hack Works in Simple Terms:**

1. **Identify a Calm State:** Recall a time when you felt completely relaxed and at peace. Take a couple of

deep breaths. Focus on your breathing and the rise and fall of your abdomen.

2. **Choose a Physical Touch as a ‘Switch’:** This can be a gentle press on your thumb and forefinger, pinching the little finger, punching the opposite hand, or placing your hand on your heart.
3. **Relive the Calm Moment:** Visualize the scene, engage your senses, and feel the emotions of calmness.
4. **Activate the Anchor:** While feeling the calm state, perform your chosen physical action. Repeat this several times to strengthen the connection.
5. **Test Your Anchor (Switch):** The next time you feel triggered, activate your anchor to regain emotional control.

## **A Step-by-Step Guide for Mothers**

### **Step 1: Recall a Moment of Calmness**

- Close your eyes and think of a time when you felt completely peaceful. Maybe it could be a quiet moment at the beach, reading a book, or cuddling your child.

## **Step 2: Visualize and Feel**

- Imagine the sights, sounds, and scents of that moment. Feel the warmth of happiness, the ease of relaxation. Let it fill your mind and body.

## **Step 3: Choose Your ‘Switch’**

- As you immerse in this positive state, gently press your thumb and forefinger together or place your hand on your chest. Breathe deeply.

## **Step 4: Strengthen the ‘Switch’**

- Repeat the process a few times until the calming state is firmly associated with the action.

## **Step 5: Use Your Anchor When Triggered**

- The next time your child’s behaviour triggers you, pause. Activate your anchor by using the physical action. Take a deep breath, feel the calmness, and choose your response instead of reacting.

## **Smita’s Transformation**

After practicing anchoring for a week, Smita faced another challenging moment. Kiran refused to complete his homework. She felt the familiar rush of frustration, but this time, she pressed her thumb and forefinger together.



Almost instantly, a sense of calmness washed over her. Instead of yelling, she sat beside Kiran, gently asking, “Is there anything bothering you? Let’s try to resolve. Anything stopping you?” He opened up about how the homework felt overwhelming. With her calm state, Smita now guided him through small steps, making the task manageable. For the first time, they completed the homework without tears or shouting.

**My Tip:** This Technique empowers mothers to break free from reactive patterns. It creates space for calm responses, fostering a nurturing environment at home.

*"You are not your emotions. You are the observer of your emotions."*

With anchoring, you regain control not just of your emotions, but of your relationships and your peace of mind.

**Daily Practice:**

Every morning, spend two minutes reinforcing your anchor using a positive memory. The more you practice, the stronger your emotional resilience will become.