



## Fight-flight-freeze responses explained

When a person experiences something traumatic, their body responds with a response known as the **“fight, flight, freeze (submit)” response**. This is an **automatic** response, and **people cannot choose** how their bodies will respond. It is an inbuilt, natural response to something threatening that helps us survive when we feel we are in danger.

Sometimes we will respond with a **fight response**. Your muscles tense, you start to sweat, your heart beats faster – you act on impulse to save and preserve yourself. You fight.

If you're unable to fight; you need to get to safety, and fast. Your blood pressure rises and your blood sugar increases. The adrenaline you feel pushes you to flee the situation. When you feel threatened, this means running from danger, or hiding, seeking cover, or finding higher ground. This is the **flight response**.

Often forgotten, but possibly the most common when facing danger, is the **freeze and/or submit response**. Chances are, you're picturing yourself dealing with a situation in the best way by either running for safety or readying to face (fight) the problem. In reality, a very common natural human reaction is neither of these; people often freeze or submit.

We know when people experience sexual assault their bodies will **often respond with a freeze or submit response**, and shut down. This is your brain reacting to fear in the most primitive way, like an animal in the headlights of a car. Freezing is your primal, desperate attempt to stop the predator from attacking you. When facing danger, it's common for our minds to slow down and assess the situation. Blood is diverted from the brain and thinking becomes incredibly difficult. Submitting is often used as a last response- we go along to the abuse because at that time **it can keep us safe from being hurt even more**. People who freeze or submit in trauma do not choose to, and often beat themselves up afterwards for being “passive”, when in reality, they have no control on how their body responds. It's the same with our fight-or-flight reactions. People very rarely have control and are therefore not to “blame” for their instinctive responses. **Their body was simply doing what it needed to do, in the face of danger, to survive.**

For more information or for further support, you can call Gippsland CASA on (03) 5134 3922.



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