

How to Use Trigger Cards

We encourage you to continue using the Trigger Cards at home. Consider making a Trigger Card for each member of the family.

What is a Trigger Card?

Trigger Cards are the main tool used on the Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit to start building these skills:

- Emotion regulation – being able to name and manage emotions
- Distress tolerance – skills that are used to handle distress from negative emotions, such as anger management and relaxation skills
- Problem solving skills – practicing assertive communication

Coaching and reinforcing these skills is an important part of the Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit program. We encourage you to continue using the Trigger Cards with your child or teen at home.

How can Trigger Cards help my child or teen?

Trigger Cards can help your child or teen:

- Understand what causes or “triggers” their distress, such as sadness, anger or urges to self-harm
- Learn the warning signs and bodily cues that are the first signs of their distress, such as a flushed face, shaking, clenched fists or quietness
- Know the ways they have tried to cope in the past, such as destroying property, threatening others, self-harm, social isolation and avoidance
- Identify and practice new ways to cope in the future, such as distraction, belly breathing or talking it out
- Assess whether the way they chose to cope with their distress was helpful
- Make a COPE Sequence or coping action plan that includes:
 - Calm: What can help me stop, slow down, and develop a plan?
 - Options: Think of and list what skill might be most useful in the given situation.
 - Plan: Of the options, chose a skill to try.
 - Evaluate: Was the chosen skill helpful in the moment?

How do we use Trigger Cards?

You can use the Trigger Cards to help your child or teen learn which situations lead to emotional and behavioral distress. They can also help your child learn when a coping skill may be helpful and outline a plan for using one. Having a plan can help prevent a crisis.

For example, if loud, crowded places are a trigger for your child or teen and you are going to the neighborhood street fair, you and your child can use the Trigger Card to make a plan for how to cope with possible triggers.

To Learn More

- Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine Unit 206-987-2055
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

The plan might include:

- Going to the street fair for a short time.
- Taking breaks away from the crowd and noise.
- Deciding that it is not a good time to go to the street fair and making a plan for another fun activity that will not be noisy or crowded.

The Trigger Cards can help you support and coach your child in times of distress.

Using the Trigger Cards at home

Some suggested uses for Trigger Cards at home:

- Have each member of the family make a Trigger Card and discuss them with each other.
- Bring your child's Trigger Card to counseling or therapy appointments to continue conversations about managing emotions and using coping skills.
- Share your child's Trigger Card with their teacher (if appropriate) so they are aware of your child's triggers, warning signs, and coping skills.

Using the Trigger Cards over time

Trigger Cards are a work in progress, what is stressful to your child or teen now may not be later on. Your child will develop more coping skills as they practice them. Over time, as your child or teen develops more skills, those that were once helpful may be replaced with others. We encourage you and your child to add and subtract from their Trigger Card as they develop and change.