

*This is the 6th article of 7 in the Managing Your Triggers Toolkit.
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atctools.org/resources/tools-for-transformation*

How to Stay Centered in Triggering Situations

In previous articles, we've explored how to recover from being triggered. It is, however, also possible to proactively protect oneself against getting triggered when entering a potentially challenging situation.

When we anticipate problems or begin to experience something that feels threatening, our natural tendency is to tense our muscles and restrict or even hold our breath. It's as if we're steeling ourselves against attack. We often start the physiological process of triggering even before anything has happened, all in anticipation of a possible negative event. This instinctive response comes with a price: stress, muscle tension, exhaustion of our adrenals, immune system suppression, and a diminishing of our creative intelligence.

A better alternative is actually to not protect or resist in this instinctive way, but rather to get *out* of the way.

Imagine for a moment that you're a wire mesh screen, full of holes like a screen door. Take a moment . . . actually do this. Now imagine that this unpleasant energy coming towards you is like the wind. Instead of resisting, let the unwanted energy blow through all the holes in your wire mesh screen. Experience that you can stay calm and spacious, as the unwanted energy passes right through.

We call this **meshing**.

Meshing is a skillful way to prepare yourself for situations that are likely to be stressful and/or emotionally triggering.

But meshing is *not* about being passive in the face of unpleasant situations. When we are tense, our responses tend to be rather primitive: fight, flight or freeze. When we stay open and relaxed, we can be far more creative and resourceful in how we choose to respond to what life brings us.

Here is an example of how one person used meshing in a challenging interaction:

"I began to be verbally assaulted by the editor, who was going on and on about how I had ruined 6 months of his work. I remembered to mesh, and in the quiet of that space, I was actually able to listen to his real concerns underlying his tirade. When I was able to respond to what I felt he was really wanting, the conversation took quite a turn for the better, and we were able to come to a good resolution."

Meshing, adapted from martial arts, is a practice of staying open and centered in challenging and potentially triggering circumstances, allowing us to respond more intelligently and effectively.