Fight vs. Flight Mode

What it means and ways to get out of it.

Fight or Flight is a natural reaction our body has to stress, danger, or perceived threats. It's an automatic response triggered by the sympathetic nervous system (nerves in your body that activate when you're stressed), preparing us to either fight or flee from a situation. In this state, adrenaline surges, heart rate increases, and we experience heightened senses, all of which are designed to help us respond quickly to danger. In modern life, we don't always face physical threats, but we still experience this stress response due to work, relationships, or other stressors. This prolonged or constant activation can lead to anxiety, irritability, and difficulty managing emotions.

Ways to Regulate

1. Deep Breathing Exercises:
- Why it works: focused breathing activates the calming system in your body, which relaxes your muscles and mind.
- How to do it: inhale deeply for 4 seconds, hold for 4, and exhale slowly for 4 seconds. Repeat 3-5 times.

2. Grounding Techniques:
- Why it works: grounding techniques help redirect your focus to the present moment, interrupting the stress response.
- How to do it: use the 5-4-3-2-1 method: Identify 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.

3. Physical Movement:
- Why it works: exercise or movement helps release built-up stress hormones and can trigger a relaxation response.
- How to do it: a short walk, stretching, or any form of light exercise can reset your body's response.

4. Reframing Your Thoughts:
- Why it works: changing negative or catastrophic thinking can reduce perceived threats and ease stress.
- How to do it: pause and ask yourself, "What is the evidence for this thought?" and "What is a more balanced perspective?"

The Warning Signs & Symptoms

- Rapid heartbeat
- Shallow or fast breathing
- Sweating
- Tension in the muscles
- Racing thoughts or worry
- Irritability or intense anger
- Feeling overwhelmed or out of control
- Heightened senses
- Increased pupil size
- Increased blood pressure
- A feeling of dread or panic
- Numbness or apathy
- Feeling outside of your own body

Examples of Triggering Situations

- A job interview
- Heavy traffic
- A heated argument with a partner
- Public speaking
- Sudden loud noises
- A workplace confrontation