

Red Flag or Trigger? A Decision Sheet

Something happened on Thursday and you have been turning it over since. Half of you says this is exactly the thing you keep ignoring in people. The other half says you did this in your last relationship too, about somebody who had done nothing at all. The advice available splits along the same line: trust your gut, or it is just your attachment style. Both are answers to a question nobody has asked, which is whether the thing you are reacting to is happening now or matching something older.

Who this is for: You have been going over one incident for four days, you cannot tell whether you are being warned or being triggered, and asking friends has produced two confident opposite answers.

The gates, in order

Gate 0: the safety check

If any of these are true, the sheet stops here.

Am I frightened of how this person will react? Yes or no:

Am I changing what I do or say to avoid a reaction? Where:

Is anything being controlled: money, phone, who I see, where I go?

Has anything physical or sexual happened that I did not want?

The incident, written flat

What happened, with the interpretation taken out.

What happened, in order, with no interpretation:

The exact words, if there were any:

What I added that was not in the room:

Gate 1: observable or inferred?

Could a camera have recorded it?

Observable: what a camera would have caught:

Inferred: what I concluded from it:

Which pile is my case mostly built from?

What would make the inference checkable either way?

Gate 2: once, or more than once?

One event, or a pattern with dates against it.

Times this has happened, with rough dates:

Is that a pattern, or one event I have rehearsed?

What has changed, if anything, since the first time?

Has it ever been raised directly? What happened then?

Gate 3: the stranger test

Would somebody with no stake see it in the transcript?

Would a stranger reading the flat version see it? Yes or no:

What would they need explained before they could?

Does that explanation hold up once I write it down?

Which friend would disagree with me here, and what would they say?

Gate 4: only with you, or with everyone?

Does the behaviour appear elsewhere in their life?

Does this happen with other people in their life? Examples:

If it only happens with me, when did it start?

What is different about this relationship that could account for it?

Gate 5: how old is the feeling?

The one gate that looks backwards instead of outwards.

When have I felt this exact feeling before, and at what age?

Did the feeling arrive before or after I worked out what happened?

Is the size of the reaction proportionate to the size of the event?

Where is the certainty coming from, if not from the evidence?

Reading your endpoint

Four named outcomes and what each one asks of you next.

My endpoint, in capitals:

If it is information: what I will raise, and when:

If it is activation: what I will do for the next two days instead:

If it is both: one sentence naming the event without the history:

This worksheet is free to print, photocopy and share, including with clients. It is self-reflection material, not a diagnosis, an assessment or a substitute for professional support. If a relationship involves fear, control or coercion, or if working through this raises more than feels manageable, please speak to a doctor, a therapist or a domestic abuse service.