

What sets you off, and why.

You've got the architecture (Module 1) and a working dashboard (Module 2). This week: the specific things that reliably light it up. Triggers, mapped properly, and the 2am loop finally explained — the two mechanisms that have probably cost you more sleep and more regrettable messages than anything else in this process.

Triggers are wiring, not weakness

A certain tone in a text. The letterhead. The empty seat at your kid's game. When one of these drops you from steady to redline in half a second, that's not a character defect — it's your brain's pattern matching doing exactly what it's built for. It has linked those cues to pain, so it fires the alarm early to protect you. The system that flinches at the letterhead is the same system that yanks your hand off a hot exhaust. Good system. Wrong century, wrong fight.

You don't get rid of triggers by being tougher, and pretending they don't exist just guarantees they arrive as ambushes. You disarm them the way you'd handle a known hazard in any workshop: identify, label, and plan for it. The evidence is simple and useful — a trigger you saw coming hits with about half the horsepower of one that ambushed you. Anticipation is the discount. Mapping is how you buy it.

The four part anatomy

Every trigger runs the same four part sequence, and the map works because it separates parts that usually blur into one overwhelming moment:

PART	WHAT IT IS	EXAMPLE
The cue	The specific thing that trips the wire. Nail it precisely.	Her name on the screen after 8pm.
The story	The instant interpretation your brain supplies, before thinking.	“Here we go — she's taking more time off me.”
The body	Where it lands physically, in order.	Chest tightens, then the jaw.
The urge	What the alarm wants you to do right now.	Fire back. Set the record straight tonight.

The map is the disarming. Once cue, story, body and urge have names, the moment stops being one wall of heat and becomes four parts you can work on — and the story, in particular, stops getting waved through as fact.

WORKSHOP EXERCISE 3.1

Map your top three.

Pick the three triggers that cost you the most, and run each through the anatomy. If “everything sets me off” feels true right now, that's the load talking — find the sharpest three. Precision in the cue column matters most: not “texts,” but which texts, from whom, about what, at what time of day.

TRIGGER 1

CUE	STORY	BODY	URGE

TRIGGER 2

CUE	STORY	BODY	URGE

TRIGGER 3

CUE	STORY	BODY	URGE

The pre load

Now take Trigger 1 and write the first thirty seconds of your planned response — what you'll actually do when the cue lands, starting with the body (Module 4 gives you the full toolkit; for now: slow exhale, feet on the floor, phone face down). Rehearsing in a calm state is what gives you access to the plan in a hot one.

WHEN [CUE] HAPPENS, MY FIRST 30 SECONDS ARE:

PART TWO

The 2am loop.

The hearing replayed. The text reread. The thing you should have said, drafted and redrafted on the ceiling at 2am. That loop has a name — rumination — and a mechanism worth understanding, because it's quietly one of the most expensive habits in this whole process.

What's actually happening

Rumination is your brain replaying a problem it can't solve. It's not broken thinking — it's a good engine given an unfinishable job. The brain treats unresolved threats as open loops and keeps returning to them, searching for a resolution the situation doesn't offer. The catch: every replay re fires the stress response as if the event were happening again. Which wrecks the sleep you're lying there not getting. Which shrinks tomorrow's regulation capacity before the day starts. Which makes tomorrow's triggers hit harder, which gives the loop more material. That's the cycle, and plenty of men live in it for years without anyone explaining it.

Why trying harder fails

You cannot out will a loop. “Stop thinking about it” hands the brain a job that requires thinking about it. Suppression reliably backfires — the loop returns harder, usually around 2am when there's nothing to compete with it. The fix isn't force. The fix is giving the brain a different job, and — this is the part that sounds too simple — formally closing the loop it keeps checking.

The park it protocol

Three steps, done at the moment the loop starts: write the worry in one line (one line — parking, not journalling; journalling explores, parking closes). Give it an appointment — a real daytime slot, tomorrow, when the control room is online. Put the pad down. When the loop returns, and it will, the answer is the same every time: “parked — 7am.” The brain accepts a scheduled resolution far more readily than a suppressed one, because the loop is now technically closed: the problem has a time and a place.

The loop isn't weakness and it isn't madness. It's an open case file the brain keeps pulling. Park it properly — one line, one slot — and the file gets a lid.

THIS WEEK'S TOOL

The park it pad.

Keep this by the bed for seven nights. One line per worry, one slot per line, pad down, lights out. At the appointed time next day, give the worry its ten minutes: act on it if it's actionable, park it again if it's not. Both count as keeping the appointment.

NIGHT	THE WORRY, IN ONE LINE	ITS APPOINTMENT	KEPT?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			

Rules of the tool

One line means one line — if it's running to three, you're solving, not parking. Night appointments don't count; the slot must be daytime, control room hours. And if the same worry parks itself five nights running, that's not the tool failing — that's a trigger worth taking back to your map before Module 4.

Knowledge check — Module 3

T / F Triggers are learned wiring — the brain pattern matching cues to past pain.

T / F A trigger you anticipated tends to hit about as hard as one that ambushed you.

T / F The 2am loop is the brain replaying a problem it can't solve.

T / F The best way to stop rumination is to try harder to stop thinking.

T / F Writing a worry down in one line and giving it a daytime slot helps close the loop.

BEFORE MODULE 4

Dashboard word daily, park it pad nightly, and keep your three trigger maps — Module 4 builds straight onto them. Next week is the big one: regulating before the redline — the tools that work when willpower doesn't.

Psychoeducation, not clinical treatment or legal advice. If the loop's content turns toward hopelessness rather than the matter, that's one for MensLine 1300 78 99 78 — any hour, and it's exactly what they're for. Lifeline 13 11 14 · Dads in Distress 1300 853 437 · Emergency 000.