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## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

# 'Glimmers' are the opposite of triggers. Here's how to embrace them.



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### Key Points

"Triggers" are widely understood, but few people know about their opposite: glimmers.

Glimmers are small moments that spark joy or peace, which can help cue our nervous system to feel safe or calm.

Experts say this mindset shift can make a positive impact on our mental health.

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"Trigger" has become a commonplace term in our cultural lexicon, but few people know about the opposite of triggers: glimmers.

Coined by Deb Dana, a licensed clinical social worker who specializes in complex trauma, in her 2018 book "The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy," "glimmers" refers to small moments when our biology is in a place of connection or regulation, which cues our nervous system to feel safe or calm.

"We're not talking great, big, expansive experiences of joy or safety or connection," she says. "These are micro moments that begin to shape our system in very gentle ways."

And the concept has taken hold. On TikTok, for example, one video about glimmers has gained more than 78,000 likes and hundreds of comments expressing appreciation for the idea of embracing glimmers

"I love this ... and (I'm going to) hold on tight to it," one user commented. "Ohhhh this is my new favorite thing ever," another wrote.

## So, what is a glimmer?

Glimmers aren't just tiny moments that bring joy or happiness, they can also spark ease, relaxation, safety, connection or a feeling that the world is OK even for a fleeting moment.

Glimmers can be found in different places and senses. Some examples include:

In nature, admiring your garden or seeing the stars in the sky.

Noticing a stranger's smile or the warmth of a loved one's voice.

Feeling comforted by furry friends.

Unexpected church bells or your favorite song playing on the radio.

"You feel something happen inside," Dana says. "There's an energy that happens around a glimmer, and then your brain then marks it as well."

## **Who can benefit from glimmers?**

Noticing glimmers can be beneficial for everyone, but is especially helpful for people who have experienced trauma.

"The thing I love about glimmers is that, working with trauma survivors, it's so respectful of their suffering," Dana says. "It allows them to understand that their biology is wired in a way that we don't discount the trauma or the crisis or the ongoing suffering, but we recognize that their biology is exquisitely set up to be able to also notice the micro moments of goodness."

Our brains have a natural tendency to look for the bad, says Amy Morin, a licensed clinical social worker and editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind.

"Being on the lookout for danger can help us stay physically safe," she says. "But since we are no longer lurking in the forest hiding from hungry animals, we don't need to focus on the negative quite so much to stay physically safe."

The concept of glimmers is that recognizing small, positive moments over and over can begin to shape our system. This shift to recognizing the bright side can have a beneficial impact on our mind and health.

"It's really good for us to have a break from our uncomfortable emotions sometimes," Morin says. "A little joy and some relaxation can reduce your emotional distress."

And when your emotions go down, your logic goes up, she adds.

"That means you might be able to tackle a problem from a different angle because you see things a little differently," she says. "Or you might be able to talk yourself into doing

something difficult, once your anxiety subsides a little. Less emotional distress can also help you take more positive action. And that positive action can help make your life better."

## How to embrace glimmers

You can recognize what a glimmer is, but how do you embrace them? Luckily, it doesn't require a lot of practice, Dana says.

"What we've discovered is as you begin to see a glimmer, you begin to look for more," she says. "It's just what we do... and we then delight in finding them. That's your nervous system beginning to shape toward the patterns of connection that are inherently waiting in there to be deepened and brought alive."

Dana invites people to set what she calls a "glimmer intention." You may decide "I'm going to look for one glimmer before lunch."

"We want to start small because for many people, finding a glimmer is a challenge. For people who have lived in a trauma-saturated life, it's hard to look outside of that."

You can also keep a glimmer journal to write down what you discovered and reflect at the end of the day.

And because we're wired for connection, if there's someone else in your life who wants to go on a "glimmer journey" with you, you can share your glimmers with them, which brings them alive, Dana explains.

Morin suggests allowing yourself to fully embrace feel-good emotions.

"Sometimes, people don't want to feel them because they know those emotions won't last, or they might feel guilty for feeling good during a hard time in their lives," she says. "But trust that it's OK to allow yourself to experience them. Enjoy them while they last. And know that you'll have more moments of joy in the future as well."

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