

PAGES Framework for Trigger Stories

Some podcasts, books, TV shows, and movies come with valuable trigger warnings at the beginning to give us a heads up about content that may be disturbing or that may trigger trauma responses for abuse survivors. But what do you do when you are the target audience for a trigger warning, and still want to read the story? It's helpful to have a framework for painful narratives: a simple process you can follow when you want to engage with the material but are wary of potential triggers.

The following PAGES framework helped me read a painful episode of *Angel* for our [Still Dead](#) podcast. I'll be using this framework with more stories in the future, and it might be helpful for you, too. I'd love to hear your thoughts about other strategies, so if you'd like to share, contact me on Twitter [@DrKellyJones](#).

1. Practice fierce kindness.

Empathy for ourselves and others is a superpower we all can learn. Almost everyone has experienced deep pain, paralyzing fear, or some kind of trauma. Being aware of your own triggers, and of those of the people around you, is one way to combat the darkness. If something in a story triggers someone, but doesn't bother you, it's still a valid trigger—and vice versa. Watching out for and being respectful of potential triggers for the people you care about, including yourself, is a powerful way to give love.

2. Acknowledge your responses.

Knowing what triggers you in different media helps you find coping strategies. There are some types of violence that I can read in a book, but can't stand to hear or see on screen. I have to look away from scenes of torture, or medical procedures, or any scene with too much cruelty or gore. Knowing your pain threshold is a good way to prepare for engaging with traumatic stories.

3. Get curious.

Inquiry is a powerful tool. Write down your thoughts, and compare your personal notes to the text you're reading. I need a way to bracket my personal experiences and triggers from those of characters. Writing out my thoughts helps me do that, and then I'm able to compare my emotional reactions to my story notes. Curiosity and critical reflection are empowering, and can give you a sense of control when you're dealing with painful material. Any form of data analysis is awesome.

4. Enlist support.

When I watched the "Untouched" episode of *Angel*, I asked a friend to keep me company via text message. I watched the episode in short parts, took breaks, took notes, and texted all my anxiety to my friend, who was good enough to listen and let me rant. He also distracted me with philosophical discussion on a hundred other topics at the same time, because that's what makes me smile. Asking for the kind of support you need is a good way to find comfort and a sense of safety.

5. Stop when you need to.

You don't have to read anything you don't want to read or talk about anything that you don't want to talk about. You can skip anything you need to skip. Starting a story doesn't mean you have to finish it! You can always pause, skip ahead, or stop completely. And if you reach a point where you feel shaky, it can help to have a comfort video or a great song queued and ready. Kitten videos are a good chaser after violent shows. Singing along with a tried-and-true playlist lifts my heart after reading a painful story.