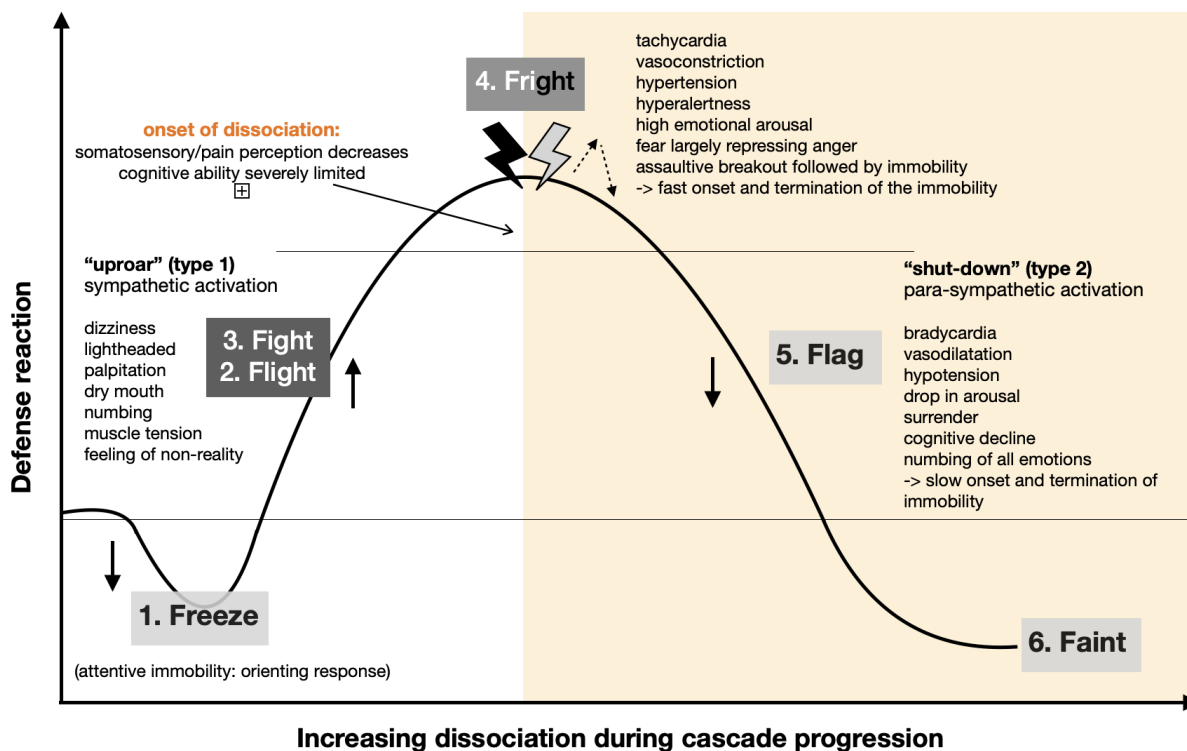




Usefulness of knowledge about acute stress reactions

A) Different time – different reactions

- Knowledge about these reactions can help in recognising how long the person was probably exposed to a stressor
- e.g., if a person reports certain freeze symptoms (or if you observe freeze reaction), it probably means that person was exposed to stressor shorter than if you see dissociation symptoms
- see, e.g., Schauer & Elbert (2010) “defence cascade”



Redraw from: Schauer, M., & Elbert, T. (2010). Dissociation following traumatic stress: Etiology and treatment. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie/Journal of Psychology*, 218(2), 109–127. and Mantini, A., & Smyle, J. (2016). Trauma and Grief. https://www.aboriginallegal.ca/assets/mmiw_workshop_js.10.19.pdf

B) Neuro-psycho-physiology of acute stress and psychoeducation – a way how to help to forgive:

- Knowledge about neuro-psycho-physiology of stress reaction is not only important for helpers, but it is also useful for victims to know the basic information about these automatic involuntary reactions.
- It can help in the process of forgiveness (Rotschild, 2000).

You can talk with the victim about the automatic and involuntary mechanism of body reaction in the acute phase of stress, you can explain the role (adaptation and survival) of these reactions, e.g., in this way:

Fight/Flight/Freeze/Submit are automatic reactions that start with the aim to save us!

- **Fight** can lead to the risk of injury, death, or other consequences, but winning increases our chances to survive; looking aggressive sometimes can be enough to make an opponent back down;
- **Flight** – a successful escape can lead to survival, often with fewer costs than other options;
- **Freeze** gives time to evaluate a situation and makes us less noticeable if the fight or flight is not possible;
- **Submit** is an instinctive reaction to save us from suffering.

These can help to answer the questions that victims may have after trauma, such as „Why wasn't I able to do something?“, „Why did I hurt somebody?“, „Why I was so aggressive?“, „Why did I run away and did not help others?“, etc.

C) Stressor (trauma) severity and brain-body reaction intensity:

- The more severe the stressor, the more intensive brain-body reactions occur, and more obvious symptoms are present.
- Symptoms can appear in different intensities and can pass different periods of time.
- Different immediate reactions (symptoms) tend to combine into more complex reactions.