

A spiritual director can recognize a trauma response in a directee by observing both verbal and nonverbal cues. Some key signs include:

Physical Signs:

- Shallow or rapid breathing, or holding the breath
- Muscle tension, fidgeting, or a frozen posture
- Change in skin tone (flushed or pale)
- Trembling or shaking
- Glassy eyes or difficulty making eye contact

Emotional & Behavioral Signs:

- Sudden withdrawal or shutting down (dissociation)
- Overwhelm, agitation, or panic
- Difficulty speaking or organizing thoughts
- Emotional numbing or seeming disconnected from feelings
- A looping or repetitive focus on painful memories

Relational Signs:

- Avoidance of certain topics or resistance to reflection
- A shift in tone, from openness to guardedness
- A sense of "not being present" or seeming far away

What to Do:

If a directee is showing signs of a trauma response, a spiritual director can:

- Slow down and create a sense of safety
- Encourage grounding techniques (deep breathing, noticing surroundings)
- Offer gentle reassurance without forcing the conversation
- Allow space for silence and regulation before continuing
- Refer to a trauma-informed therapist if needed