

RENAISSANCE HEALING

# AM I IN FUNCTIONAL FREEZE? BECAUSE LIFE FEELS LIKE MAINTENANCE MODE

*Courtney Kramer, LCAW*

I created this guide to help you:

Recognize what's happening in your body.

Understand why functional freeze  
happens.

Know that it's a natural response, not a  
flaw or lack of motivation.





# WHEN YOU ARE FUNCTIONING BUT NOT FULLY ENGAGED

You're not falling apart.

You're not in crisis.

You're not "barely surviving."

You're actually doing... fine.

You show up.

You get things done.

People probably think you're calm, capable, and grounded.

And yet.

You feel kind of flat.

Or stuck.

Or tired in a way sleep doesn't fix.

You keep waiting to feel motivated, inspired, or clear again.

If that's you, there's a name for this that isn't lazy, broken, or burnout.

**IT'S OFTEN CALLED FUNCTIONAL FREEZE.**

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Hello! i'm

# COURTNEY KRAMER

I made this guide because I see people like you every day — high-achieving, driven, getting everything done... and still exhausted, disconnected, or muted.

I know what it's like to push hard, give everything you have, and still feel like life is just moving past you. That tension between functioning on the outside and shutting down on the inside? That's functional freeze and it's real, it's common, and it's not your fault.

I'm a therapist trained in Somatic Experiencing, which means I work with the body, not just the thoughts. But more than that, I'm someone who's endlessly curious about how people move through life, how we survive, and how we come back to ourselves. I've spent years exploring what it means to hold it together while also feeling exhausted, and this guide is a way to share what I've learned in a way that's educational, practical, and human.

This isn't about fixing you. It's about helping you recognize, understand, and start to soften into yourself again — gently, safely, and without judgment.





# WHAT FUNCTIONAL FREEZE CAN FEEL LIKE DAY TO DAY

People often say things like:

“I feel stuck but I don’t know why.”

“I know what I should do — I just can’t do it.”

“I’m tired, but rest doesn’t help.”

“I feel disconnected from myself.”

“I keep scrolling or zoning out.”

“I’m not sad... just kind of numb.”

Other signs can include:

- overthinking small decisions
- procrastinating, then rushing
- living mostly in your head
- feeling heavy or tense in your body
- doing things out of obligation, not desire

A big clue is this:

You’re not overwhelmed in an obvious way.

You’re just... muted.



# WHAT FUNCTIONAL FREEZE ACTUALLY IS

COME AS YOU ARE

Functional freeze is a nervous system state in which the body remains in a freeze (immobilization) response, while cognitive and behavioral systems continue to function.

You are able to perform tasks and appear regulated, but the underlying stress response has not resolved.

In functional freeze:

- The body remains in freeze (shutdown)
- The mind keeps things going

You can think, plan, and complete tasks, even though their body is still in a protective, immobilized state.

Different parts of the brain are doing different jobs:

- Lower brain areas continue sending danger signals
- Thinking brain steps in to manage behavior

This allows functioning, but the stress response underneath does not turn off.



# WHY FUNCTIONAL FREEZE HAPPENS

COME AS YOU ARE

## THE CORE REASON: UNRESOLVED THREAT

The human nervous system is designed to:

1. Detect danger
2. Respond (fight, flight, or freeze)
3. Return to baseline once the danger passes

Normally, when a threat passes, the body relaxes, energy balances, and emotional systems reset.

**FUNCTIONAL FREEZE HAPPENS WHEN STEP 3 DOES NOT OCCUR.**

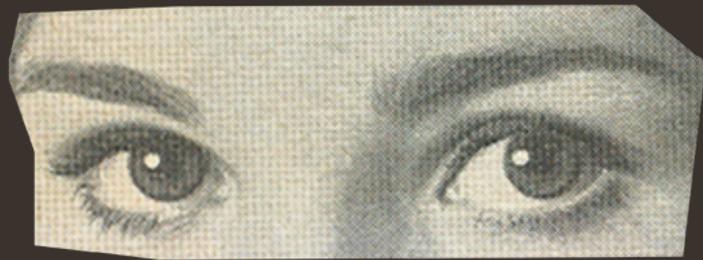
The body remains organized around threat even when the environment looks safe.

Freeze responses are most likely to become long-term when:

- Escape or resistance was not possible
- The threat was ongoing or unpredictable
- Expression of distress was unsafe or ineffective
- The person still had to function (go to school, work, care for others)

In these conditions, the nervous system learns:  
“Shut down what you can — but keep going.”





# WHO THIS TENDS TO SHOW UP IN

Functional freeze often develops in individuals who experienced:

- Chronic stress rather than single-event trauma
- Situations where stopping was not an option
- Long-term pressure without relief or resolution
- Expectations to perform despite internal distress

The nervous system adapts to persistence, not recovery.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS**

Functional freeze frequently appears in people who, earlier in life:

- Had to mature quickly
- Took on responsibility for others
- Learned to suppress emotional responses
- Were rewarded for compliance, calmness, or reliability
- Could not safely express fear, anger, or exhaustion

The body learns to prioritize stability over expression.

## **HIGH-FUNCTIONING ENVIRONMENTS**

Functional freeze is common in settings that value performance and endurance, such as:

- Academic or professional high-achievement environments
- Caregiving roles
- Medical, educational, or service professions
- Families with high expectations or limited emotional support

## **PERSONALITY AND TEMPERAMENT FACTORS**

Certain traits can make functional freeze more likely:

- High conscientiousness
- Sensitivity to stress
- Strong sense of responsibility
- Attunement to others' needs

These traits are not causes, but they shape how the nervous system responds.

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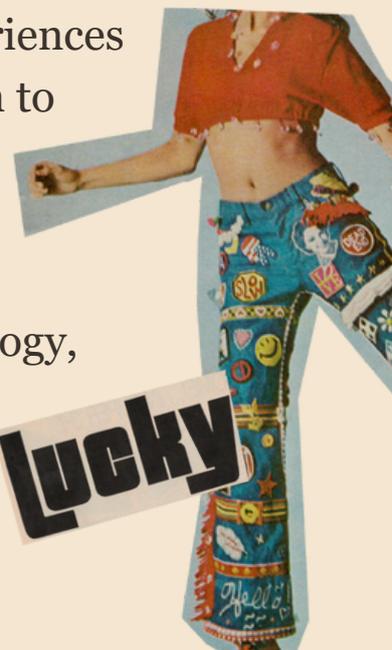
# WHY UNDERSTANDING ISN'T ENOUGH

Functional freeze exists at the level of the nervous system, not just the mind. Even if you intellectually understand what is happening, that knowledge alone cannot immediately reset the body's protective response.

The body and brain have learned a pattern: the nervous system remains in a freeze state, while higher brain functions continue to manage tasks, planning, and behavior. This pattern is automatic and deeply ingrained. It was adaptive when you needed to function under stress, but it does not respond instantly to insight.

Understanding functional freeze helps you recognize and label the pattern, which is important. Awareness can reduce self-blame and increase clarity about why you feel flat, stuck, or drained. However, the nervous system itself requires experiences of safety, regulation, and gradual release of immobilization to change.

In other words, knowing is not the same as shifting the physiological state. Functional freeze is maintained by biology, not belief. Recovery or recalibration is a process, not a conclusion reached by thought alone.



# STAY IN TOUCH

If what you've read here resonates with you, know that you're not alone. Functional freeze is a common nervous system response, and understanding it is an important first step.

I am in the process of creating resources, including guided meditations, practical exercises, and other tools to help people better understand and support their nervous system. While there isn't a set timeline for when these will be available, I encourage you to stay connected and keep an eye out for updates.

In the meantime, simply noticing and learning about this pattern is a meaningful step. You are not broken, lazy, or failing — your body is responding in the way it learned to survive.

If you want to be notified when these resources become available, or to learn more as they are released, please feel free to reach out.

**FIND ME INSTAGRAM OR  
ON MY WEBSITE**

