

Embrace the Mess

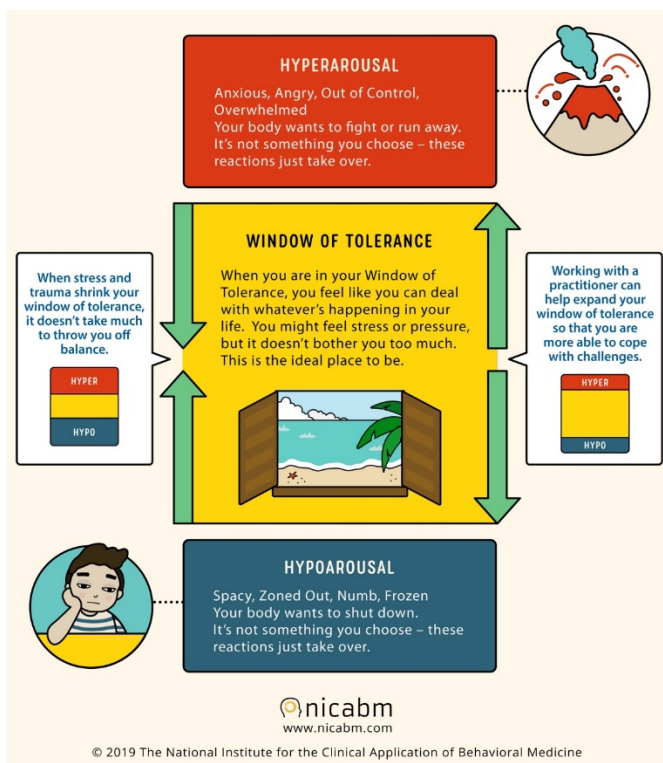


When we are emotionally elevated (or emotionally shut down) our nervous systems are elevated (or repressed). As a result, we move out of our emotional window of tolerance. Making good decisions when we are out of the window of tolerance is impossible. During such times, having a knowledge of coping skills can jump start our brains to do something other than act on our impulsivity.

An emotional crisis engages our autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS is the biological system that controls unconscious actions such as heart rate, digestion, breathing, sweating, pupil size, etc. When the ANS is elevated, we can get out of our window of tolerance.

The Window of Tolerance concept was developed by Daniel Siegal, MD to describe the optimal zone of “arousal” for a person to function in everyday life. When we are within our window of tolerance, we can manage and cope with our emotions. However, for a myriad of reasons, we can leave the window of tolerance in one of two ways – into *hyperarousal* or into *hypo-arousal*. When we are in flight, flight, or freeze, we are in a *hyperarousal* state. *Hypo-arousal* is a shutdown or collapse response. Both *hyperarousal* and *hypo-arousal* can be triggered by feeling threatened, recounting traumatic memories, or feeling emotions associated with past trauma. Many times, outbursts happen in this state.

Window of Tolerance



Therefore, knowing and practicing coping skills *before* you are in crisis or out of your window of tolerance is imperative.

On the back of this sheet, you will find simple tasks to refer to when you sense you are moving towards the outer edges of the window of tolerance. You will also find an information sheet for breathing exercises as well as how to practice progressive muscle relaxation.

We encourage you to talk with your provider to create a customized plan for emotion regulation (including coping skills) that best fits you and your life experience.

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Coping Skills		
Learn and practice mindful breathing	Practice yoga	Exercise
Listen to music	Meditate	Journal
Use aromatherapy	Cook or bake	Go for a drive
Stretch	Garden	Volunteer
Create a to-do list	Go for a walk	Play with an animal
Perform a random act of kindness	Make a list of short-term and long-term goals	Clean a small or large area
Read a book	Make a gratitude list	Call a friend
Get a massage	Pray	Count to ten
Take a bath	Watch funny videos	Read inspirational quotes
Color	Play a card game	Notice 5 things you can see, hear, smell, touch, or taste
Make a list for the future	Practice relaxation (Jacobson's ladder of relaxation)	Doodle
Put a puzzle together	Count to 100	List ten positive things about yourself
Listen to nature sounds	Organize something	Identify your positive thoughts