

Window of Tolerance Worksheet

Your nervous system is amazing! It is designed to keep you safe and ensure your survival. Sometimes your responses can become over or under reactive and you may need help/tools to regulate back into your window of tolerance.

Hyperarousal occurs when you are above your window of tolerance. These are those moments when you notice: anxiety, panic, or constant worry; irritability or anger; feeling on edge or jumpy; racing thoughts; difficulty concentrating or sleeping; a sense of urgency or pressure. This is when your system responds with fight or flight.

Fight Response

What helps:

- Movement—walking, stretching, shaking out.
- Strong sensory input—cold water on hands, firm pressure.
- Clear boundaries— “I need a pause”.
- Exhaling longer than you inhale.
- Validation before problem-solving.

Flight Response

What helps:

- Gentle grounding—feet on the floor, noticing the room.
- Rhythmic movement—walking, rocking, slow pacing.
- Predictability—routines, simple plans.
- Slowing the breath without forcing calm.
- Reducing stimulation when possible.

Freeze Response

What helps:

- Small, gentle movements—wiggling toes, opening hands.
- Warmth—tea, blanket, warm shower.
- Soft sensory input—music, texture, gentle light.
- Being with someone safe.
- Time—without pressure to “snap out of it”.

Fawn Response

What helps:

- Practicing noticing your own needs.
- Pausing before saying yes.
- Safe relationships where saying no is allowed.
- Grounding into your body before responding.
- Compassion for how this pattern developed.

Hypoarousal occurs when you are below your window of tolerance. These are those moments when you notice: numbness or emptiness; disconnection or dissociation; low energy or collapse; feeling shut down or “blank”; difficulty thinking, speaking, or making decisions; wanting to withdraw or disappear. This is when your system responds with freeze or fawn.