

The Window of Tolerance: Signs and Strategies

Window of Tolerance

The "window of tolerance" is a way to understand our personal comfort zone – the space where we feel steady, focused, and in control. Within this zone, it's easier to think clearly, make decisions, and stay connected with what's happening around us. Our emotions are regulated, our executive function is working, decisions are easier to make and we can even do transitions.

When we're pushed outside this window, (or it starts to shrink), we can either experience hyperarousal (feelings of anxiety, overwhelm, or sensory overload) or hypoarousal (feelings of numbness, disconnection, or shut down).

Everyone's window is different, especially for neurodivergent individuals (ND) as we often experience unique sensory sensitivities or heightened responses to daily stressors. Recognising when you're starting to go outside your window can be key to finding techniques that feel safe and supportive. It does require you to be tuned into your body a bit more.

Below are some signs you may be moving outside your comfort zone, experiencing either hyperarousal or hypoarousal:

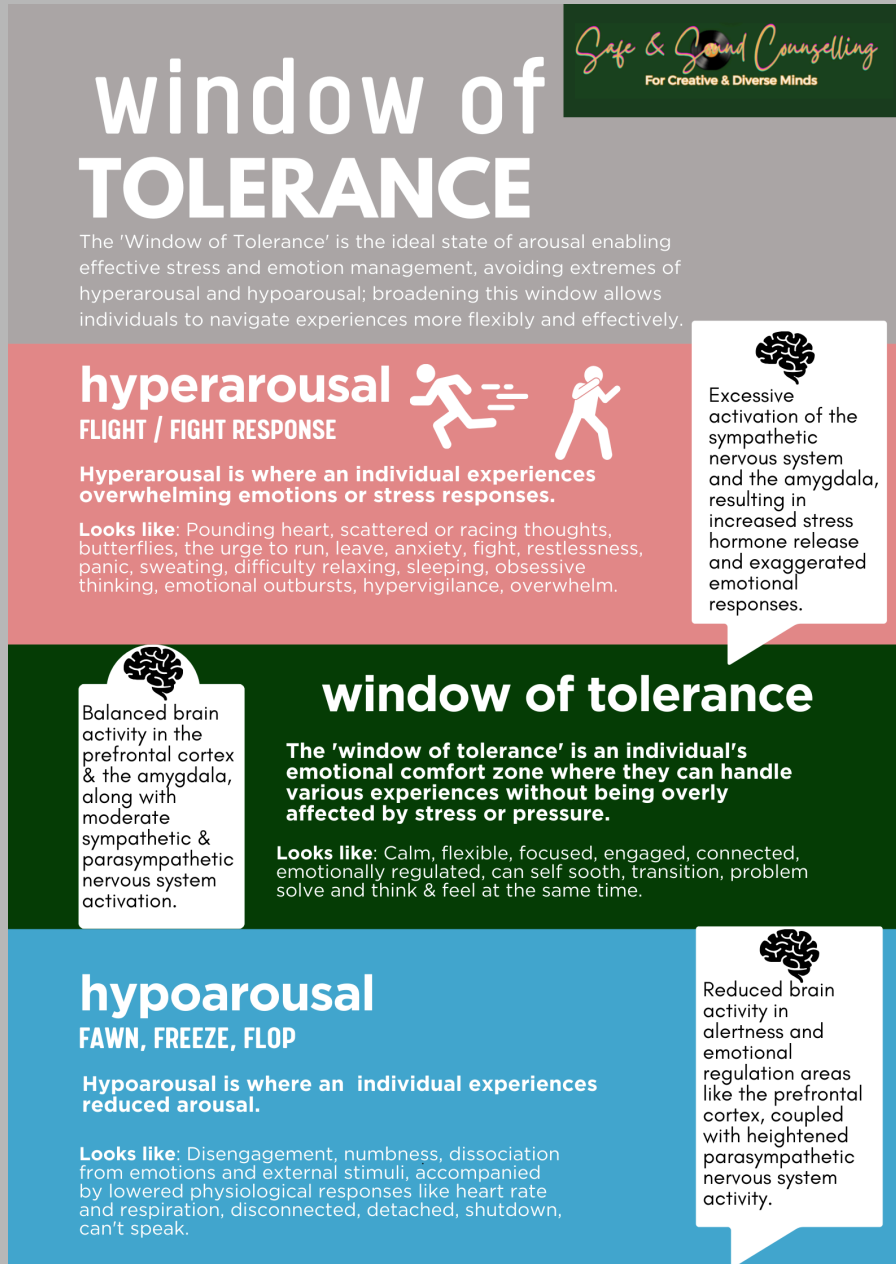
Hyperarousal (Feeling Overwhelmed or Anxious)

- Muscles are tense, or you feel "on edge"
- Rapid, shallow breathing or a racing heart
- Excessive sweating or sudden heat
- Intense emotions, like anxiety or feeling overly alert
- Racing or intrusive thoughts, often hard to "turn "

Hyperarousal

- Keep your eyes open and orient yourself to your surroundings, noticing colors, shapes, and textures around you.
- Take active breaks that feel right for your energy level, like walking, stretching, or gently shaking out your limbs.

- Practice slow, deep breathing, focusing on longer exhales to gently calm your system. If focusing on breathing feels difficult, try humming as you exhale.
- Use grounding tools that feel comforting, like a textured object, soft fabric, or familiar sounds to focus on.



Hypoarousal (Feeling Shut Down or Disconnected)

- Muscles feel limp or heavy, as though energy is drained
- Vision feels blurry, or you experience a “zoned out” sensation
- Feeling numb, disconnected, or “checked out”
- Low energy or motivation; it may feel difficult to engage with what’s around you
- Techniques to Regain Balance

For Hypoarousal

- Stimulate your senses with something that feels energising, like a scent you enjoy (peppermint or citrus), or hold a textured item to bring awareness back to your body.
- Engage in energising movements, like bouncing, light stretching, or shaking out your arms to feel more present and connected to your body.
- Try tactile grounding by rubbing your hands together, pressing your feet firmly into the floor, or even using a weighted item if it feels soothing.
- Use colors, sounds, or music that are energising and engaging to help reconnect with the present, selecting options that feel safe and comfortable.
- Take quick breaths rather than slow ones, to reorient you to the present.

For neurodivergent individuals, it’s essential to use techniques **that honor your unique sensory preferences**. We will go through this in depth in therapy. Depending on whether you’re feeling hyper aroused or hypoaroused, different approaches can help bring you back into a comfortable, balanced space.

These strategies are flexible and ND friendly, allowing for adjustments based on your personal sensory and emotional needs. They can support you in maintaining a sense of balance and comfort throughout the day, empowering you to stay connected to your environment and feel more in control.



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