



Window of Tolerance

Understanding shifts in your nervous system

The window of tolerance is a practical way of describing the range of activation in which we can stay present, think flexibly, feel our emotions, connect with others, and choose how to respond.

Everyone moves in and out of this window, and it can change across situations and over time.



Being inside your window does not mean feeling calm. Emotions may still be strong; the difference is that you can remain present, think, connect, and choose a response. This model is a useful map, not a diagnosis or a precise measure.



Hyperarousal

fight / flight / high alert

Above the upper threshold, the alarm system is highly active. You may feel overwhelmed, activated, or driven to respond quickly.



Common signs

- anxious or panicky
- irritable or angry
- racing thoughts
- restless or tense
- watchful for danger
- overwhelmed



What may help

- orient to the present
- lengthen the exhale, if comfortable
- reduce stimulation
- slow rhythmic movement
- ground through the senses
- safe, supportive connection

UPPER THRESHOLD



Window of Tolerance

regulated / present / flexible

Emotions can still be uncomfortable or intense. In this zone, you can stay present, think flexibly, connect, and choose how to respond.



Common signs

- present and steady
- able to think
- able to feel without being overwhelmed
- connected
- flexible
- able to respond



What supports this zone

- maintain routines
- pace demands
- use skills early
- balanced activity and rest
- connection
- self-compassion

LOWER THRESHOLD



Hypoarousal

shutdown / collapse / disconnection

Below the lower threshold, energy, awareness, or connection may drop. You may feel numb, distant, slowed, or shut down.



Common signs

- numb or disconnected
- flat or distant
- foggy or blank
- heavy or slowed
- exhausted
- unreal or detached



What may help

- warmth and comfort
- gentle movement
- rhythm or music
- stronger sensory input
- orient to the room
- safe connection and one small step

What can narrow the window?

- poor sleep
- ongoing stress
- illness or pain
- conflict
- trauma reminders
- overload
- substance use
- isolation



What can widen it over time?

- regular sleep and routine
- supportive relationships
- therapy
- gradual skills practice
- movement
- grounding
- self-compassion
- pacing and recovery time



Personal reflection

When I move above my window, I notice...

When I move below my window, I notice...

When I am within my window, I notice...

What helps me return toward my window is...



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