

THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Understanding the Three Zones

The Window of Tolerance describes the zone of arousal where we function at our best. When you are within your window, you can manage your emotions, think clearly, and handle life's daily stressors with relative ease. When stress or trauma overwhelms the nervous system, we can get pushed out of this window - either "throwing us through the roof" (Hyper-arousal) or "knocking us flat" (Hypo-arousal).

Zone 1: Hyper-arousal (The "Too Much" Zone)

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling anxious, angry, panicky, racing thoughts, or a strong urge to fight or run.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

Racing heart, shallow breathing, muscle tension, or restlessness.

HOW TO RETURN TO CENTER

Use Grounding Techniques to release extra energy and cue safety.

Try this:

- Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 6.
- Splash cold water on your face
- Hold an ice cube to shock the nervous system back into the present.

Zone 2: The Optimal Zone (The "Just Right" Window)

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling calm, centered, capable, and connected. You can process information and respond to challenges rationally.

HOW TO STAY HERE

Consistent daily maintenance, self-care, and setting firm boundaries.

Zone 3: Hypo-arousal (The "Too Little" Zone)

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

Feeling numb, "zoned out," empty, exhausted, or physically disconnected from your body.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

Low energy, heavy limbs, flat emotions, or staring blankly.

HOW TO RETURN TO CENTER

Use Activation Techniques to gently wake up the nervous system.

Try this:

- Move your body, Stretch, stomp your feet, or go for a brisk walk.
- Stimulate your senses by smelling a strong scent like peppermint or listening to upbeat music.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

My Triggers

What situations, words, or environments tend to push me out of my window? (e.g., loud noises, tight deadlines, conflict)

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MY GLIMMERS

What small moments of safety, comfort, or joy help me stay inside my window? (e.g., a warm cup of tea, stepping outside, a specific playlist)

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MY ACTION PLAN

When I notice myself getting "too high" (Hyper-arousal), I will try:

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When I notice myself getting "too high" (Hyper-arousal), I will try:

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