

The Window of Tolerance

Understanding and working with your emotional regulation system

What Is the Window of Tolerance?

Your Window of Tolerance is the emotional “zone” where your brain and body feel safe and regulated. In this window, you can think clearly, connect with others, and respond to life’s challenges with flexibility.

When you're outside the window, your nervous system becomes dysregulated—either hyperaroused (too much energy) or hypoaroused (not enough energy).

Inside the Window

When you're in your window, you might feel:

- Present and grounded
 - Calm but alert
 - Able to think and speak clearly
 - Emotionally balanced
 - Capable of making choices instead of reacting impulsively
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Hyperarousal

(Over-activation / Fight-or-Flight Mode)

You may feel:

- Anxious or panicked

- Angry or irritable
- Restless or keyed up
- Racing thoughts
- Out of control or unsafe

Examples of behavior: yelling, pacing, shutting down communication, reacting impulsively

▼ Hypoarousal

(Under-activation / Freeze or Shutdown Mode)

You may feel:

- Numb or detached
- Exhausted or spaced out
- Depressed or hopeless
- Unable to focus or speak
- Frozen or "checked out"

Examples of behavior: withdrawal, difficulty speaking or moving, loss of motivation

🎯 Why It Matters

Understanding your window helps you:

- Recognize when you're dysregulated
- Use skills to return to your window
- Build a life that supports emotional regulation

This is especially important for people who've experienced trauma, emotional invalidation, or chronic stress—your window may be narrower, but it can be expanded with support and practice.

Reflection Questions

 1. What does it feel like when I'm *in* my window?

(What do I notice in my thoughts, body, and emotions?)

 2. What are my signs of hyperarousal?

(What does it look like when I'm in fight/flight?)

 3. What are my signs of hypoarousal?

(What does it look like when I'm in freeze/shut down?)

 4. What helps me stay in my window?

(List skills, routines, boundaries, and support that help regulate you)

 5. What helps me come back *into* my window when I've left it?

(List grounding techniques, self-talk, tools, or support)

Examples of Tools to Return to Your Window

Use these when you notice you're outside the window of tolerance.

Hyperarousal (Too much)

Hypoarousal (Too little)

Paced breathing

Stretching or light movement

Cold water or TIPP skill

Uplifting music or scent

Journaling or venting

Hug a pet or textured object

Mindful distraction

Name 5 things around you

Taking a break

Self-talk: "I'm safe. I'm here."