



Window of Tolerance

A practical guide for noticing your nervous system state and choosing one regulating step.

In the moment

- Notice the zone.
- Name what is happening.
- Choose one small next step.

The goal is not to stay calm all the time. The goal is to notice your state and come back to choice.

Hyper-arousal

OVERACTIVATED

Fight, flight, or urgency response

MAY FEEL LIKE

- Anger, panic, overwhelm
- Impulsive, rigid, or out of control
- Hypervigilant or on edge

TRY

- Slow exhale or paced breathing
- Cold water or ice pack on neck
- Progressive relaxation or brisk movement

At the edge: agitation, irritation, frustration, anxious discomfort.

Window of Tolerance

OPTIMAL ZONE

A steadier zone for connection, flexibility, and choice

WHAT IT CAN FEEL LIKE

- Calm, safe, present, and flexible
- Able to feel emotions without being flooded
- More compassionate, connected, and social

WHAT EXPANDS YOUR WINDOW

- Sleep, food, movement, and basic care
- Grounding, breathing, and self-compassion
- Safe connection, boundaries, and support

What can shrink the window: trauma, ongoing stress, poor sleep, illness, grief or loss, and ignored boundaries.

Hypo-arousal

UNDERACTIVATED

Freeze, shutdown, or collapse response

MAY FEEL LIKE

- Numb, empty, detached
- Withdrawn or isolated
- Dissociated, low energy, shut down

TRY

- Gentle movement: walking, stretching, shaking
- Upbeat music or one small pleasant task
- Name five things you see, then reach for support

At the edge: depressed, lethargic, zoned out.

Educational resource only. This handout is not a substitute for therapy, diagnosis, or emergency care. If you are in immediate danger or crisis, call 911 or 988.