

Trauma: Window of Tolerance

Recognizing hyperarousal, shutdown, and the zone where learning and connection are easier.

The window

The “window of tolerance” is a useful model for describing the range of arousal in which a person can stay present, think flexibly, feel emotion, and remain connected.

Above the window - hyperarousal

- Panic, racing thoughts, anger, restlessness, hypervigilance, impulsive urges.

Below the window - hypoarousal

- Numbness, exhaustion, disconnection, collapse, slowed thinking, feeling unreal or far away.

Return strategies

- For hyperarousal: reduce stimulation, orient, lengthen the exhale, use paced movement, or take structured space.
- For hypoarousal: increase safe sensory input, stand or move, use light, music, cold water, or connection.
- Track early signs so regulation begins before the nervous system reaches an extreme.

Try this reflection

What are your earliest signs that you are moving above or below your workable range?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.