



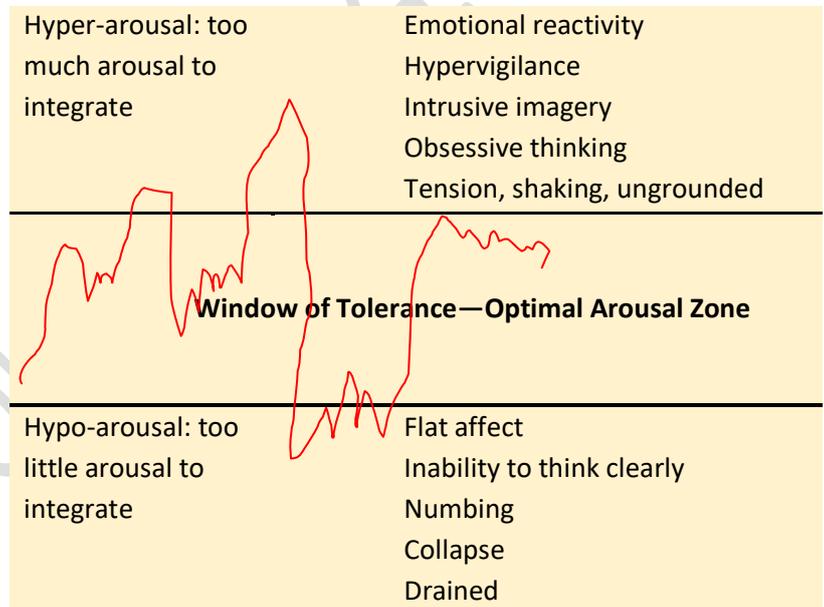
Window of Tolerance

The “Window of Tolerance” (WOT; a concept by Siegel, 1999) describes a state of being whereby one can willingly and easily receive, process, and integrate information and appropriately react to daily living. Within this state, the brain is working at optimal (rational and emotive) levels, absorbing and processing stimuli, which can typically lend to peace, joy, feeling safe, empathy, grounded-ness, “flow”, fulfilment, achievement, rational, cogent thought, better relationships, and/or various other adaptive behaviours.

It is during extremely difficult or stressful experiences that one can “jump” or feel “pushed out” of their WOT. In such situations, effectively, the prefrontal cortex or rational part of the brain works less well or goes “offline” leaving the sub-cortical brain structures (limbic system, and the brain stem, respectively the emotional and basic functions parts of the brain) in charge. This results in the inability to efficiently function or process stimuli and instead resort to confused, angry, disorganised, fearful, or rigid responses which can debilitate our lives and harm relationships. Behaviour outside our WOT come in forms of:

- ❖ Hyper-arousal: e.g., fight/flight response, hypervigilance, anxiety, panic, racing thoughts, or
- ❖ Hypo-arousal: e.g., freeze response, emotional numbness, emptiness, paralysis.

We are all affected differently by environment, people, tasks, events, society, etc.; as such, we all vary in regards to our WOT: whereas some people’s WOT are narrow which reduces the threshold to onset of and ability to manage powerful emotions and difficult situations, other people’s WOT are wider which increases the threshold to onset of and ability to manage powerful emotions and difficult situations. Ultimately, the wider the WOT, the more one can cope with in life; remaining there is helped by feeling safe, supported, and able.



However, although we all can become hyper- or hypo- aroused sometimes, having a history of trauma or extreme stress can hasten the onset of hyper- or hypo- arousal. When compared with those who have not experienced trauma, typically, those who have are more inclined to see the world as unsafe and work from a narrow or rigid WOT and as such react to stressors (major or minor, real or imagined, obvious or subtle) with extreme hyper- or hypo-arousal. Unfortunately, regularly operating outside of one’s own WOT can lead to anxiety and or depression; experiencing hyper-arousal can lead to flashbacks, nightmares, or derealisation; experiencing hypo-arousal can lead to memory problems, depersonalisation, or dissociation.

However, one can return to their WOT. Using personal “resources” (Psychological, Spiritual, Relational, Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Material) like staying present, meditating, focusing on physical sensations, soothing self-talk, maintaining healthy boundaries and friendships, knowing you are not your thoughts, challenging oneself, having hobbies, meaning, and fun, pursuing goals and/or wishes, writing, drawing, walking, running, sleeping, visualising a calm or uplifting image, eating good foods, focusing on breath, being in nature and so much more can be beneficial to self-regulate and to move back towards own WOT. Additionally, one can widen their WOT; exploring one’s past and current experiences, boundaries, current emotions, and life goals, behaviours, etc. can be helpful.



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Zones	Typical Signs		
Hyper-arousal Zone “Fight or Flight” Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Overwhelming • Emotional Reactivity • Tension, Shaking • Defensiveness • Anxiety • Rigidity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrusive Imagery • Obsessive Thoughts • Racing Thoughts • Feeling Unsafe • Chaos • Impulsivity • Addictiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hyper-vigilance • Nightmares • Anger • Rage • Outbursts • Aggressiveness • Binging
Optimal Zone—Window of Tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate Feelings and Thoughts • Self-soothe emotionally, physically, cognitively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptable/Flexible • Adaptive behaviour • Open and curious • Aware of Boundaries, Limiting Beliefs, Now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel Safe • Behave Safe • Empathetic • Cogent • Grounding self • Good Self-Talk
Hypo-arousal Zone “Freeze” Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability defend self, think straight, or Say “No” • “Not there” • Dissociated • Memory Loss • Ashamed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced Physical Movement • Reduced Sensation • No Energy • Disconnected • No Feelings • Auto-pilot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling “Dead”, Flat, Shut Down • Feeling Self-Separated • Passive • Emotional Numbing

Zones	Triggers	Signs in my				Resources
		Body	Behaviour	Thoughts	Emotions	
Hyper-arousal Zone “Fight or Flight” Response						
Optimal Zone—Window of Tolerance						
Hypo-arousal Zone “Freeze” Response						