

Window of tolerance map

There is a band of arousal in which a person can stay present and think clearly. Trauma can narrow it.

This band is often called the window of tolerance. Above it sits hyperarousal, the felt sense of too much. Below it sits hypoarousal, the felt sense of not here. **Inside it, the body can stay present with what is happening.** Mapping your own edges can make them easier to recognise.

i This is a mapping tool, not a test. There is no right number of entries and no correct answer. The responses described here are the nervous system protecting you, not a personal failing. You do not have to share this with anyone.

HOW THE WINDOW WORKS

HYPERAROUSAL

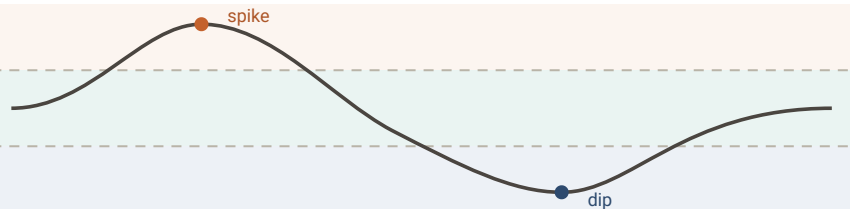
too much: racing, fight or flight

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

present, able to think and feel

HYPOAROUSAL

not here: numb, shutdown, far away



INSIDE THE WINDOW

What being present looks like

- You can think and feel **at the same time**
- You can stay with a difficult topic for a while
- The body's signals get noticed early
- Choices feel available, rather than automatic

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW

What protection looks like

- The system shifts into fight, flight, or shutdown
- Staying present with hard material is **not possible**
- The response is automatic, not chosen
- The room can be safe and the body can still read danger

WHAT PAGE 2 MAPS

The map has four parts. **The point is recognition, not control.** Knowing your own signs can make them easier to catch early, when more options may still be available.

1 HYPERAROUSAL

Signs of too much

What being above the window looks like for you. Racing, restless, on guard.

2 HYPOAROUSAL

Signs of not here

What being below the window looks like for you. Numb, heavy, far away.

3 EARLY WARNING

Leaving the window

The first small signals, before the state takes over. Sometimes easier to act on.

4 COMING BACK

What brings you back

What has helped the system settle before. A sensation, a movement, a person, a place.

WHAT ONE ENTRY MIGHT LOOK LIKE

WHAT BRINGS ME BACK

What helps the system settle

Cold water on my face. Naming five things I can see. A slow walk around the block. A message to one specific person.

REMEMBER Leaving the window is not a failure of will. It is the system protecting you. **The aim is not to stay inside the window at all times,** which is not possible for anyone. It is to notice where you are sooner, and to know what helps you find your way back.

Name your signs while things are settled. They are harder to read later, when they are not. There is no right way to do this.

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are*. Guilford Press. · Coventry, P. A., et al. (2020). Psychological and pharmacological interventions for PTSD and comorbid mental health problems following complex traumatic events: Systematic review and component network meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*, 17(8), e1003262. · Tran, T. T. T., et al. (2026). Phase-based versus non-phase-based psychological interventions for complex PTSD: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 17(1), 2644112.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT

If you are in immediate danger, call 000. For support at any time: Lifeline 13 11 14 · Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 · 1800RESPECT 1800 737 732.

Window of tolerance map

This map has four parts: your signs of too much, your signs of not here, your early warning signs, and what helps you come back.

Fill in what you can. There is no right answer, and you can add to it over time.

i Map this while you are feeling settled, if you can. **The signs are easier to name when you are not in the middle of them.** Use your own words. Leave any part blank if nothing comes; that is information too.

1 SIGNS OF HYPERAROUSAL What too much looks like for me

Racing thoughts, pounding heart, restlessness, irritability, feeling on guard.

2 SIGNS OF HYPOAROUSAL What not here looks like for me

Numbness, heaviness, foggiess, feeling far away or shut down.

3 MY EARLY WARNING SIGNS How I notice I am leaving the window

The first small signals, before the state takes over. Sometimes easier for others to see at first.

4 WHAT BRINGS ME BACK What helps the system settle, toward the window

Grounding, movement, a person, a place, a sensation. What has helped before.

A NOTE ON USING THIS

The map is not a performance. Some parts will fill easily; others will stay blank for now. **If mapping this brings up more than feels manageable, that is worth bringing to a GP or to someone like us.** You do not have to do this alone.

WHEN YOU HAVE MAPPED WHAT YOU CAN

Bring it into a session, or share it with someone you trust.

This map is useful information whether or not you are currently in therapy. If you would like to talk it through, the Meet and Greet is a short call to see if we are the right fit.

MEET AND GREET

Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation

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