

Window of Tolerance

What is it?

First described by Professor Dan Siegel at the UCLA School of Medicine.

- The Window of Tolerance is a helpful way to describe the best **emotional** 'zone' for us to be in to function well.
- When we are within our window of tolerance we are emotionally regulated and have the capacity to cope with everyday things.
- Internal or external stressors can cause us to move outside of our window of tolerance.
- Outside our window of tolerance when we are **hyper**-aroused, we can appear angry, panicky, irritable, anxious, overly excited or vigilant, overwhelmed, ready to fight or escape.
- Outside our window of tolerance when we are **hypo**-aroused, we can look withdrawn, flat, shut down, depressed, or disconnected.
- We all have different windows of tolerance depending on factors such as our temperament, personality, background (including any [trauma](#)), our social supports and our physiology.
- People who have experienced trauma may have smaller windows of tolerance.
- With support, our window of tolerance can be expanded.

Why do I need to know it?

- To function well in everyday life and build healthy relationships we need to exist, for most of the time, within our window of tolerance.
- Inside our window of tolerance, we use the 'thinking' part of our brain and we can access (executive functioning) skills which allow us to work, relate to others, and to problem solve.
- These (executive functioning) skills include the ability to organise, plan and prioritise tasks, stay focused, regulate emotions, practice self-control, and manage our time.
- When we are outside our window of tolerance, we generally stop using the thinking part of our brain and lose access to the executive skills we need to function well. This is when we are more likely to make poor choices, display behaviours that aren't helpful to us, or do/say things that harm our relationships with others.
- We will all move outside our window of tolerance at times.
- Being aware of this concept can help us understand our emotions and behaviours and that of others.

How do we expand our window of tolerance?

- Manage our physical environment: create or organise our living and/or working environments to reduce stressors (think about lighting, sound levels, clutter, etc.)
- Practice good self-care: get enough sleep and exercise, eat well, and address any health issues.
- Be kind to our mind: engage in activities that mentally stimulate us and help us to focus, find time to play, and allow our minds to rest. Do things that soothe our senses- calming music, scented candle, getting into comfortable clothes.. whatever works for you!
- Make connections: try to build and maintain some healthy relationships and find a purpose (for example, exploring your spiritual self or taking time to enjoy nature).
- Develop helpful strategies or habits: to help us soothe ourselves, regulate our emotions, and redirect our minds away from unhelpful or harmful thoughts. Try writing things down, challenge negative thoughts with positive ones, practice deep breathing, etc.

Information Note

Things to try when we move outside our window of tolerance

- **Practice mindfulness** to be more aware, open, accepting, present
- **Increase our happiness** by being creative, socialising, getting outdoors, laughing..
- **Reduce SHAME** by showing more self-compassion, reframing our thoughts
- **Build resilience** through connections, wellness, having purpose
- **Learn to self-regulate more effectively.** We may initially need help with this

Remember ALL these things take PRACTICE!

Helping others stay within their window of tolerance

We can help others (colleagues or learners) to stay within their Window of Tolerance by:

- sharing information about, or teaching them about, the Window of Tolerance
- sharing information, or teaching, strategies that will help us stay within, or even expand, our Window of Tolerance
- use of Posters on the walls of staffrooms or classrooms may be useful prompts or reminders

Additional helpful resources and information

Related Modules: The Brain and Emotional Regulation, RRRR, Self-Regulation, and Co-Regulation & De-escalation

Trauma: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/basics/trauma>

Downloadable infographics and useful information: www.mindmypeelings.com (example below)

