

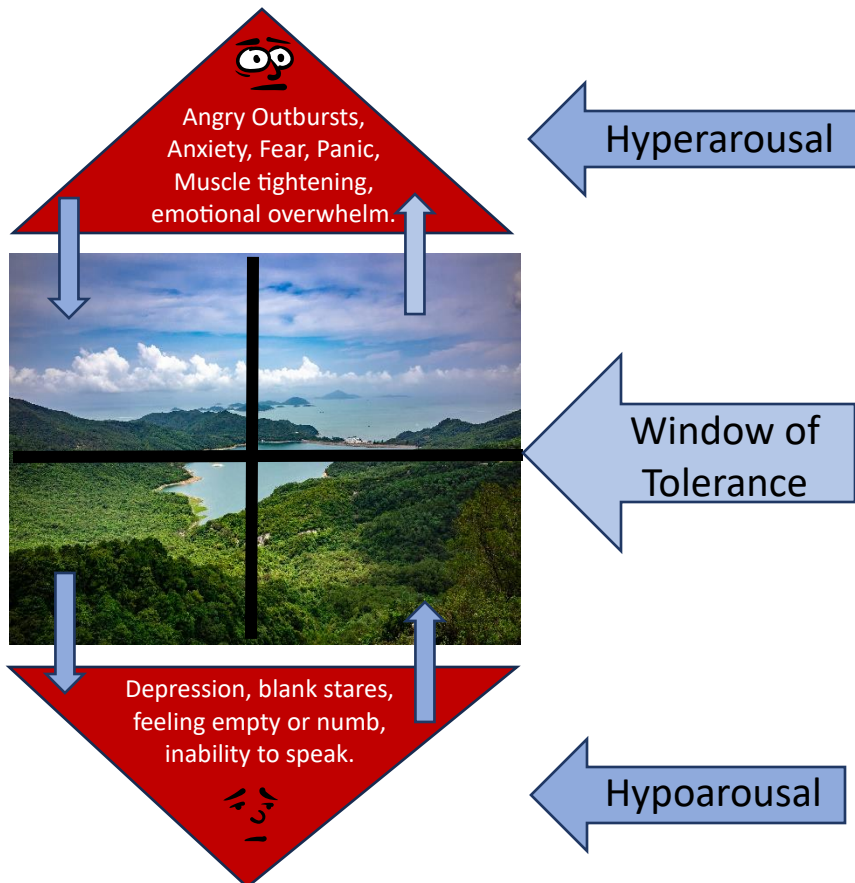
OCYF Trauma Tip Sheet

September 2024

Dr. Dan Siegel developed the window of tolerance to illustrate a person's ability to regulate their emotions and not become overwhelmed. When someone experiences trauma, their brain may become more attuned to detecting threats quickly as a survival mechanism. This heightened state of alertness can persist, reducing their window of tolerance and making them more prone to anticipating further harm.

Hyperarousal can be understood as the body's "fight, flight, or freeze" response to trauma, where it enters a heightened state of energy and alertness. This response can be triggered even in the absence of a physical threat, simply due to the perception of danger.

Hypoarousal can be seen as a state of shutdown or disconnection from reality. This response may occur when reminders of trauma or feelings of threat, whether real or perceived, are experienced.



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Ways to Increase Your Window of Tolerance

Expanding one's window of tolerance involves developing greater emotional resilience and the ability to stay calm and composed under stress. Here are some strategies that can help:

- Recognize and Increase Awareness: Understand your window of tolerance and become more aware of the symptoms that indicate you are outside of it.
- Widen the Window: Work on expanding your range of tolerable emotions through practices like mindfulness, therapy, and self-compassion.
- Learn Re-regulation Techniques: Develop and use techniques to re-regulate your emotions when experiencing hypo arousal or hyper arousal, such as deep breathing, grounding exercises, and physical activity.

Specific activities to help reengage when experiencing hyper arousal:

- Use [diaphragmatic breathing](#)
- Take a drink using a straw (this slows the breath and may restore presence).
- Complete a short meditation to help restore calm.
- Reconnect with the present moment through mindful observation.
- Perform a body scan for muscle tension.
- Healthy ways that anger may be released.

Specific activities to help reengage when experiencing hypo arousal:

- Physical movement
- Orient oneself to the present moment by naming three items around you.
- Insert appropriate humor into the experience.
- Offering a cold glass of water.

Planning ahead can be a great way to manage dysregulation. For instance, keeping a frozen lime, orange, or lemon in your freezer can be helpful. When you feel overwhelmed, hold the frozen fruit in your hand, feel the cold texture against your skin, and smell the zest as it begins to melt. If you prefer, you can use other items like a stress ball, textured fabric, or a scented candle to help ground yourself in the present moment.