Window of Tolerance

Trauma: Knowing When You Are Out of Your Zone

Your window of tolerance is the zone where you can feel stress and still think clearly. Psychiatrist Dan Siegel coined the term. When stress pushes you above the window, your body speeds up. When it pushes you below, your body shuts down. This worksheet helps you learn your own signs and what brings you back.

1 The three zones

Hyperarousal Above the window	Too much energy. You might feel anxious, angry, panicky, or on edge. Your heart races, your thoughts spin, and it is hard to sit still.
Window of tolerance Your zone	You can feel upset and still cope. You can think, listen, make choices, and stay connected to the people around you.
Hypoarousal Below the window	Too little energy. You might feel numb, foggy, flat, or far away. It is hard to move, speak, or care about what is happening.

Why does this work? *Stress moves the nervous system up into fight or flight, or down into shutdown. Both are your body trying to protect you. Noticing which way you are moving is the first step back, because the tools that help are different for each direction.*

2 Know your signs

Think about a recent stressful day. What did you notice in your body, your thoughts, and your behavior?

When I am above my window, I notice:

Example: My jaw is tight and I snap at people

When I am below my window, I notice:

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 What brings you back

List what helps you return to your window from each direction. Try a few ideas and keep the ones that work for you.

When I am above: what calms me

When I am below: what wakes me up

Calming ideas: slow breathing with a long exhale, cold water on your face, pressing your feet into the floor. Waking ideas: standing up and moving, a strong taste or smell, naming five things you can see.

4 What widens your window

Your window is not fixed. Sleep, food, movement, and time with people you trust can make it wider. Poor sleep, ongoing stress, and reminders of hard experiences can make it narrower.

One thing I could add to my week to widen my window:

If you often find yourself far outside your window, a trauma-informed therapist can help you widen it safely.

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