

The Steady Place

A gentle resource

Understanding Your Window of Tolerance

*A free guide to help you understand your nervous system,
notice your early signs, and find your way back to yourself.*

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Welcome

Hi, I'm really glad this workbook found its way to you.

Whether you're going through something tough right now, trying to understand yourself better, or just curious about how your mind and body work together - this is for you.

This workbook is about something called the Window of Tolerance. It's one of the most useful ideas in therapy, and once you understand it, you'll start recognising it everywhere - in yourself, in stressful moments, in how you react to things.

You don't need any prior knowledge. Just some quiet time, a pen, and a willingness to be a little curious about yourself.

♥ **Take your time with this. There's no rush, no right or wrong answers, and you don't have to share it with anyone. This is just for you.**

What's in this workbook?

This workbook will help you to:

- Understand what the Window of Tolerance is and how it works
- Notice what it feels like when you move outside of it
- Recognise your own early signs and patterns
- Find practical ways to gently bring yourself back to a steadier place



What is the Window of Tolerance?

Our nervous system is always working in the background - scanning for danger, deciding if we're safe, and adjusting our energy levels accordingly. Most of the time, we don't even notice it.

It's a system that's been around for a long time - originally designed to keep us safe from real, physical danger.

The thing is, it still works in the same way today, even when the "threat" is something like stress, pressure, or feeling overwhelmed.

The Window of Tolerance is a way of thinking about the zone where your nervous system feels okay. Inside this window, you can think clearly, feel your feelings without being overwhelmed, and handle what life throws at you.

Think of it like a volume dial. When things are going well, the dial is in a comfortable range - not too loud, not too quiet. But sometimes life turns the volume up or down too far, and we end up outside our window.

↑ HYPERAROUSAL

Too much - overwhelmed, flooded, anxious, reactive

✓ YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Calm enough to think clearly, feel your feelings, and stay connected

↓ HYPOAROUSAL

Too little - shut down, numb, disconnected, flat

Everyone has a window - and everyone's window is a different size.

Some people have a wider window, meaning they can manage a lot before things start to feel overwhelming. Others have a narrower one, especially if they've been through difficult or stressful experiences.

The good news is that your window can grow over time.


And even just understanding it is already a really important first step.




Above the window: Hyper arousal

When we're in hyper arousal, our nervous system has hit the alarm button. It's trying to protect us - but the result is that everything can start to feel too much.

In your body	Heart racing, chest tight, shallow breathing, feeling jittery or shaky, can't sit still
In your mind	Racing thoughts, can't concentrate, everything feels urgent, catastrophising
In how you act	Snapping at people, saying things you don't mean, crying, feeling like you need to escape
You might feel...	Anxious, panicky, angry, overwhelmed, out of control, on edge


 **What are MY signs that I'm moving into hyperarousal? (*think about your body, your thoughts, and your behaviour*)**


 **What situations tend to push me above my window?**

Below the window: Hypo arousal

Hypo arousal is the other end. Instead of feeling too much, the nervous system shifts into a kind of shutdown. It's also a protective response - but it can feel like you've gone a bit blank, or like you're not really there.

In your body	Heavy, slow, exhausted, physically numb, feeling disconnected from your body
In your mind	Brain fog, finding it hard to put thoughts into words, memory gaps, feeling detached - like you're watching yourself
In how you respond	Withdrawing, cancelling plans, zoning out, not replying to people, going very quiet
You might feel...	Numb, flat, empty, not really here, struggling to care, frozen

 **What are MY signs that I'm moving into hypo arousal? (*body sensations, thoughts, behaviours*)**

 **What situations tend to push me below my window?**

Finding your way back

The aim isn't to stay perfectly inside your window all the time - that's not realistic, and it's not what being human looks like.

The aim is to notice when you've moved outside your window, and to have a few go-to strategies that can help you find your way back.

Different things help depending on where you are - some strategies are more helpful when you're feeling too activated (hyper), while others can support you when things feel slowed down or shut down (hypo).

When you're above your window (too activated):

- Box breathing - breathe in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4, and repeat
- The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique - 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear...
- Slow, longer exhales - your out-breath helps your body settle
- Holding something cold (like an ice cube or cold drink) to interrupt the alarm response
- Putting your feet flat on the floor and pressing them down - feeling the ground beneath you
- Splashing cold water on your face or wrists
- Going for a walk - movement can help release some of that built-up energy

When you're below your window (shut down):

- Moving your body - even gently (stretching, shaking out your hands, standing up)
- Engaging your senses with something more stimulating - a strong smell, music, or texture
- Reaching out to someone you trust - even just sending a message
- Splashing warm water on your face
- Naming what you're experiencing (out loud or in writing) - *"I notice I feel..."*
- Doing something small and achievable to rebuild a sense of control
- Going outside and noticing what's around you


 Which strategies feel most like 'me'?


(You can circle or note the ones you'd like to try)

My personal window – bringing it all together

Use this page as your own reference - something you can come back to whenever you need a reminder.


 I know I'm inside my window when I feel or notice...

 My early signs that I'm starting to move above my window are...

 My early signs that I'm starting to move below my window are...

 The things that tend to help me find my way back are...

 One person I could reach out to when things feel too much, or too little is...

Remember: noticing is the first step. You don't have to do it perfectly. The fact that you're paying attention to yourself at all - that matters 

A final word from The Steady Place

I created this workbook because I believe that understanding yourself is one of the most powerful things you can do.

If any of this helped things make a bit more sense, you don't have to figure it all out on your own.

If you'd like to go a little deeper, CBT therapy can help you build on this kind of self-understanding, at your own pace, in a way that feels manageable.

You're very welcome to get in touch:

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