

PTSD – Window of Tolerance

The Window of Tolerance is a way of understanding how trauma affects the nervous system. When inside the window, we feel stable enough to think, feel, and cope. Outside the window, PTSD symptoms often appear.

Hyperarousal (Fight / Flight)

- Racing heart, panic, anger, intrusive memories
- Feeling on edge or unsafe, difficulty sleeping
- Strategies: slow breathing, grounding, safe movement, supportive contact

Optimal Zone (Window of Tolerance)

- Able to connect, reflect, and respond
- Emotions feel manageable, body steady
- Strategies: routines, self-care, therapy, balanced activity

Hypoarousal (Freeze / Shutdown)

- Numb, empty, disconnected, fatigued
- Feeling detached, 'spaced out', unable to act
- Strategies: sensory input (touch, smell, sound), gentle activity, structured support

Hyperarousal ↑	Window of Tolerance	Hypoarousal ↓
Panic, anger, flashbacks	Balance, coping, safety	Numb, shut down, spaced out

Tip: Notice where you are in the window. Use grounding if hyperaroused, sensory input if shut down, and routines to stay balanced.