

We all experience stress in our lives. It is a normal and hard-wired response in our brains. Many thousands of years ago, our bodies needed to know how to react to danger, which engaged our response system (fight, flight, freeze, fawn). There is nothing wrong with this state, the problem is when the stress of the situation exceeds your ability to cope.

We can't change the fact that there are stressors in the world, but we can change our response to them. The first step is understanding what calm and connected may feel like and recognizing the signs that you are stressed and outside your Window of Tolerance. "**Window of Tolerance**," a term coined by Daniel Siegel, describes your emotional bandwidth. Within your Window of Tolerance, you can tolerate life events or intense feelings without overreacting or shutting down. A wide window of tolerance is usually developed as a result of safe, secure attachment, while trauma and stress are associated with a much smaller window.

The second is understanding and widening your Window of Tolerance. Keeping and/or bringing your system back into being regulated starts with "practicing the pause." Taking a moment to pause, check in with your nervous system and become aware of what is happening. That is where the "Self-Witnessing Log" comes in.

Third is finding strategies to help you stay within your Window of Tolerance and how to return back to it when you have become dysregulated.

**Flipping your Lid** is a stress response, and your system has become dysregulated. Our brain has three primary resources, our thinking brain, our emotional brain and our survival brain (breathe, eat). When pushed outside our Window of Tolerance, often our thinking brain goes offline. That is when our emotional brain takes over running the show. It takes strategies to send the correct information to our nervous system to help bring our thinking brain back online. These strategies involved connecting to the body through our senses.

### Steps In Self-Witnessing

1. Recognize you are outside your Window of Tolerance or have flipped your Lid and assume that the distress you are feeling has been triggered by something. You may know what this is, but you may not. Note what was happening when you started feeling stressed and dysregulated.
2. Connect into your body, your thoughts, your feelings. Note what you are feeling and what you were or are thinking.
3. Find a coping skill to help bring you back into your thinking brain. Is it returning to your safe space? Deep breathing? Note what you tried and the results.

On the following few pages, you will find information on stress responses to help you recognize the body's different states.

## Stress and the Window of Tolerance

	General Information	Signs & Feelings	How to Manage
<p><b>HYPERAROUSAL</b></p> <p>Fight, Flight Response</p> <p>Too much arousal</p> <p>Too hot</p> <p>Sympathetic Nervous System</p> <p>Thinking Brain is Offline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your body wants to fight or run away.</li> <li>• This is not something you choose; these are reactions that just take over.</li> </ul> <p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High energy</li> <li>• High focus / Attentive</li> <li>• Out of Control</li> <li>• Overwhelmed</li> <li>• Emotional Outbursts</li> <li>• Anger/ Rage</li> <li>• Unsafe</li> <li>• Impulsive</li> <li>• Visible agitation</li> <li>• Ungrounded</li> <li>• Poor judgement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Dysregulation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncomfortable, not out of control</li> <li>• Agitated / Angry</li> <li>• Heightened anxiety</li> <li>• Scared, feeling unsafe</li> <li>• Hypervigilance</li> <li>• Feeling highly stressed</li> <li>• Ready to move away from danger</li> </ul> <p><b>Distress</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased emotional responsiveness (over reactive, chaotic responses)</li> <li>• Unclear, racing thoughts</li> <li>• Obsessive, cyclical thoughts</li> <li>• Difficulty focusing</li> <li>• Rapid speech</li> <li>• Tension, shaking</li> <li>• Defensiveness</li> <li>• Hyperactivity, unable to relax, impulsive</li> </ul> <p><b>Extreme Distress</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hyper ventilating</li> <li>• Extreme emotion</li> <li>• Panic attack</li> <li>• Wanting to hurt self</li> <li>• Increased heart rate</li> <li>• Increased blood pressure</li> <li>• Intrusive imagery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness</li> <li>• Grounding</li> <li>• Breath work</li> <li>• Talk with someone</li> <li>• Finding a quiet place</li> </ul>

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	General Information	Signs & Feelings	How to Manage
<p><b>WINDOW OF TOLERANCE</b></p> <p>Optimal arousal zone</p> <p>Just Right</p> <p>Parasympathetic Nervous system &amp; Ventral Vagal Nerve</p> <p>Thinking Brain is Online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may feel stress or pressure, but it doesn't bother you too much</li> <li>Stress and trauma will shrink your Window of Tolerance.</li> <li>When your window is smaller it doesn't take much to throw you off balance</li> <li>Expanding your window of tolerance helps you cope when experiencing stress</li> <li>Fear, unconscious thoughts, bodily feelings, lack of control, feeling unsafe, feeling like you do not exist, abandonment, or rejection can move you out of your Window of Tolerance and into a dysregulated state.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to deal with whatever's happening</li> <li>Functioning effectively</li> <li>Engaged and alert</li> <li>Feeling safe</li> <li>Eye contact</li> <li>Smiling</li> <li>Soft tone</li> <li>Balanced and calm mind</li> <li>Relaxed (calm, cool, collected)</li> <li>Connected &amp; Social</li> <li>Able to communicate</li> <li>Able to self-soothe</li> <li>Able to regulate emotional state</li> <li>Feeling &amp; thinking simultaneously</li> <li>Ability to feel empathy</li> <li>Present moment awareness</li> <li>Feel safe (rest &amp; digest)</li> <li>Feel open &amp; curious</li> <li>Access to intuition &amp; insight</li> <li>Awareness of boundaries (yours &amp; others)</li> <li>Ready for learning &amp; problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To stay</li> <li>Mindfulness, being present in here-and-now</li> <li>Grounding techniques</li> <li>Techniques for self-soothing, calming the body &amp; emotional regulation</li> <li>Deep slow breathing</li> <li>Recognize limiting beliefs, counter with positive statements about self</li> <li>New choices</li> <li>Hobbies</li> <li>Meditation</li> </ul>

## Stress and the Window of Tolerance

	General Information	Signs & Feelings	How to Manage
<p><b>HYPOAROUSAL</b></p> <p>Too little arousal</p> <p>Too Cold</p> <p>Sympathetic Nervous System</p> <p>Immobilisation Response</p> <p>Thinking Brain is Offline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freeze Response</li> <li>• Your body wants to shut down.</li> <li>• This is not something you choose. These are reactions that just take over.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disconnection</li> <li>• Heavy zoning</li> <li>• Spacy</li> <li>• Numb</li> <li>• Frozen</li> <li>• Can't think, disorientation</li> <li>• Auto pilot</li> <li>• No display of emotions / Flat affect</li> <li>• Separation from self</li> <li>• No feelings or emotions</li> <li>• Not present</li> <li>• Unavailable / Shut down</li> <li>• Memory loss</li> <li>• No energy</li> <li>• Inability to think clearly</li> <li>• Collapse</li> <li>• Dissociation</li> <li>• Shutdown</li> <li>• Passive</li> <li>• Ashamed</li> <li>• Withdrawn / Isolated</li> <li>• Can't defend oneself</li> <li>• Can't say no</li> <li>• Hopelessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposite to emotion</li> <li>• Move the body</li> <li>• Breathing</li> <li>• Engage your senses</li> <li>• Creative arts</li> <li>• Shake and swipe</li> <li>• Tapping</li> </ul>