

# Window of Tolerance Quick Reference

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| Zone                | Nervous System                    | Key Signs                                                            | Goal       |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Hyperarousal        | Sympathetic (Fight/Flight)        | Racing heart, anxiety, hypervigilance, racing thoughts, irritability | Bring DOWN |
| Window of Tolerance | Ventral Vagal (Social Engagement) | Clear thinking, emotional regulation, social connection, flexibility | WIDEN      |
| Hypoarousal         | Dorsal Vagal (Freeze/Collapse)    | Numbness, dissociation, foggy thinking, fatigue, disconnection       | Bring UP   |

## Interventions

**\*\*HYPERAROUSAL → Bring Down\*\*** | Immediate | Long-term | |-----|-----| | Grounding (5-4-3-2-1 senses) | Regular aerobic exercise | | Long slow exhales (4-7-8) | Daily mindfulness practice | | Cold water on face/wrists | Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong | | Bilateral stimulation | Nervous system education | | Progressive muscle relaxation | Consistent sleep routine |

**\*\*HYPOAROUSAL → Bring Up\*\*** | Immediate | Long-term | |-----|-----| | Movement (stand, walk, stretch) | Regular physical activity | | Strong sensory input (ice, sour) | Body-based therapies | | Eye movements, orienting | Social engagement practice | | Vocal activation (hum, sing) | DBR/SE trauma processing | | Rhythmic activities | Polyvagal exercises |

**⚠ CRITICAL:** Do NOT use release breathing (long exhales) for hypoarousal—it deepens shutdown. Use activating interventions instead.

## Session Language

**\*\*Assessment:\*\*** - "Where do you notice that in your body?" - "On a scale of 1-10, how activated do you feel?" - "Do you feel more revved up or shut down?"  
**\*\*For Hyperarousal:\*\*** - "Let's slow down and take a breath together." - "Can you feel your feet on the floor?" - "Name 5 things you can see right now."

**\*\*For Hypoarousal:\*\*** - "Can you wiggle your fingers and toes?" - "Let's stand up and move a little." - "Look around the room—what colors do you see?" **\*\*Psychoeducation:\*\*** - "Your nervous system is doing its job protecting you." - "These responses aren't weakness—they're survival." - "We're working to widen your window over time."

## Polyvagal Foundation

| Polyvagal State | Window Zone         | Primary Function                       | Therapeutic Goal                |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ventral Vagal   | Window of Tolerance | Safety, social engagement, connection  | Expand access and flexibility   |
| Sympathetic     | Hyperarousal        | Mobilization for threat (fight/flight) | Regulate when activated         |
| Dorsal Vagal    | Hypoarousal         | Immobilization, conservation (freeze)  | Safely mobilize out of shutdown |

**References:** Siegel (1999) *The Developing Mind* • Porges (2011) *The Polyvagal Theory* • Ogden et al. (2006) *Trauma and the Body*