

Living Within The Window of Tolerance: The Different Zones of Arousal

HYPERAROUSAL ZONE



Sympathetic “Fight or Flight Response”
(Too much arousal)

SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:

- Tension, shaking
- Emotional reactivity
- Defensiveness
- Racing thoughts
- Intrusive imagery
- Emotional overwhelm
- Feeling unsafe
- Obsessive/ cyclical cognitive processing
- Hypervigilance
- Impulsivity
- Anger/ Rage

OPTIMAL AROUSAL ZONE

Ventral Vagal “Window of Tolerance”

SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:

- Feel and think simultaneously
- Experience empathy
- Feelings are tolerable
- Present moment awareness - “Right here, right now”
- Feel open and curious versus judgmental and defensive
- Awareness of boundaries (yours & others)
- Reactions adapt to fit the situation
- Feel safe

HYPOAROUSAL ZONE



Parasympathetic “Immobilization Response”
(Too little arousal)

SIGNS YOU ARE HERE:

- Relative absence of sensation
- Feeling ‘dead’
- No energy
- “Not there”
- Can’t defend oneself
- Disabled cognitive processing/ “can’t think”
- Numbing of emotions
- No feelings
- Disconnected
- Ashamed
- Flat affect
- Reduced physical movement
- Passive
- Shut down
- Can’t say no