

A person with long, wavy hair is seen from the side, looking out a window. The window has a dark frame and a handle. The background outside the window is blurred, showing some greenery and a building. The overall tone is somber and contemplative.

SAFELINE

THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Information for young survivors of
Sexual Abuse

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SAFE

WHAT IS THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE?

The Window of Tolerance is a tool to help us to understand our response to overwhelm, stress and trauma (Siegel, D 1999). It helps us to make sense of why our mind and body responds the way it does, which helps us to make sense of our behaviour.

When our senses perceive threat or danger, they send a message to our nervous system (the part of our body which connects our brain to our body) the nervous system will then react by alerting and preparing our body for danger by releasing hormones which enables our heart to beat faster, our lungs to breathe deeper and react with a 'fight/flight/freeze' response.

Feeling safe

Able to
communicate
needs.



Feeling calm
and in control.

Feelings are
manageable.

Responsive
not reactive.

THE THREE MINDSETS

The goal of implementing healthy and consistent coping mechanisms into your daily life is to help you maintain your mindset in the 'Window of Tolerance'. However, to understand what this mindset looks like, it's useful to understand what other mindsets you can become trapped in. Either side the Window of Tolerance is 'Hyperarousal' and 'Hypo Arousal'. The following table explores what these mindsets look like.

Hyperarousal	Window of Tolerance	Hypo arousal
Hypervigilant	Feeling calm and in control	Numb
Panic Attacks	Feelings are manageable	Depressed
Anger	Able to communicate needs	Low mood
Anxiety	Responsive not reactive.	Feeling isolated/Self-isolating
Overwhelm	Feeling safe	Disconnected
Feeling unsafe		Shut Down

HYPERAROUSAL

Hyperarousal can often feel like...

- Our mind is racing with worries and thoughts we cannot control or block out (intrusive thoughts).
- We can often feel overwhelmed and panicked.
- We can feel like we are 'looking for the danger'.

So how can we manage these feelings?

Things that may help:

- Space for calm breathing
- Grounding exercise
- Music that soothes
- Talking to someone who feels safe
- Having timeout
- Yoga or gentle movement
- Shower/bath

THE SAFE ZONE

Our window of tolerance is our 'safe zone'. This is when we feel most able to cope with life, we feel more in control and able to understand what we are thinking and feeling in our mind and our body.

Repeated trauma and stress can shrink our window of tolerance. Using the window of tolerance helps us to understand how we individually react to stress and overwhelm. Sometimes our window (safe zone) can hold more, and we are able to navigate situations easier.

Spend some time reflecting on what might make your window feel smaller, maybe changes, or transitions? What might help the window feel bigger, maybe routines, structure?



Loved

Understood

Trust

Boundaries

Respected

Has choices

Seen

What does

Valued

safety feel like?

Liked

Routines

Nurture

Warmth

Heard

Structure

HYPO AROUSAL

Hypo arousal can often feel...

- Isolated and disconnected. Some people refer to this as 'dissociated' from feeling or 'numb'.
- Like we are in a cave switched off from the world.

Hypo arousal or dissociation is a survival response which can block out overwhelming experiences. However, living in this state can also block out positive feelings and we can feel disconnected to our bodily sensations and people around us.

So how can we manage these feelings?

Things that may help:

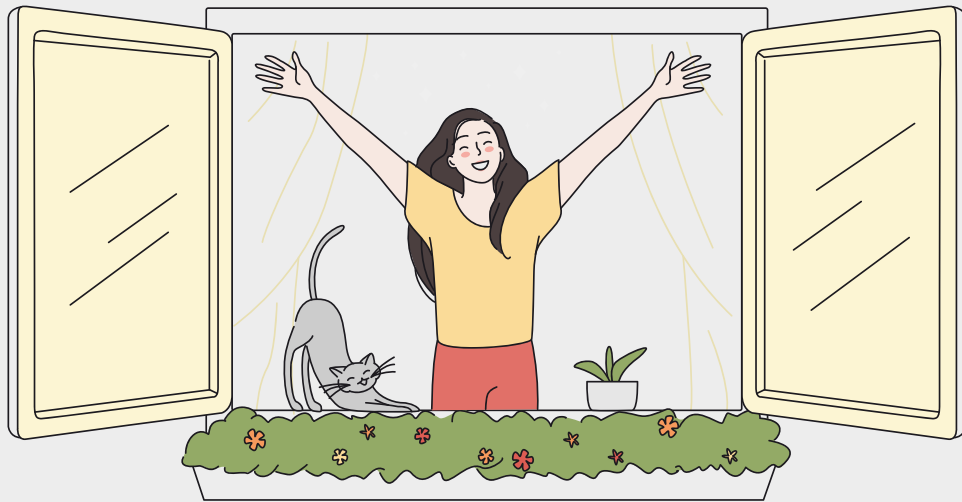
- Connecting and talking to people who feel safe.
- Exercise
- Grounding/engaging senses
- Creative activity
- Engaging music
- Time with pets/animals



HOW DO YOU FEEL?

Take some time to reflect on how you are feeling. Do you recognise any of your thoughts or emotions in these pages? How can you find ways to manage them and enter your own 'Window of Tolerance'?

How do I feel?	What can help?



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Head to our website to access more resources that can support you on your recovery journey. Or contact us today for support.



National Male Survivor Helpline:
0808 800 5005

Safeline Office Number:
01926 402 498

**National Telephone & Online
Counselling Service for survivors aged
16+ of child sexual abuse:**
01926 402 498

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