

The Vagus Nerve & Healing Trauma

Video Worksheet



Window of Tolerance Awareness Checklist

What exactly is dysregulation, and why is it important to develop greater awareness around your “window of tolerance” patterns?

Dysregulation manifests when you begin to exceed your window of tolerance and move into hyperarousal or hypoarousal. When you move to the edges of your window of tolerance (into the “dysregulation zone”), your body's defences kick in, triggering symptoms like heightened agitation, feeling uncomfortable, poor concentration, or the urge to shut down. These symptoms mark the onset of the fight, flight, or freeze responses.

Window of Tolerance

Hyperarousal ~ High Sympathetic Influence

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Fear
- Hypervigilance
- Defensive
- Angry
- Overwhelmed
- Body wants to run or fight
- Faster breathing, heart rate increases

Dysregulation Zone: Irritable, anxious, agitated, uncomfortable

Window of Tolerance - Enough Ventral Vagal Influence

- Calm, but not tired
- Feeling present and in control
- Able to function & communicate effectively
- Intense emotional arousal can be processed in a healthy way
- Have the ability to self-soothe and self-regulate

Dysregulation Zone: Start shutting down, uncomfortable, poor concentration

Hypoarousal ~ High Dorsal Vagal Influence

- Numbness
- No feelings
- Lack of energy
- Feeling frozen
- Spacey
- Body wants to shut down
- Inability to think or respond
- Reduced physical movement
- Ashamed

How does Hyperarousal Occur?

Threats to our physical or emotional well-being, such as the fear of embarrassment or a disagreement with a loved one, can trigger the fight-or-flight response.

Everyone will experience the fight-or-flight response at times, to varying degrees. Usually, it's natural, healthy, and not a problem. However, if our nervous system struggles to return to the window of tolerance, chronic or prolonged sympathetic arousal leads to excessive anger, anxiety, prolonged stress, or health problems.

Common Hyperarousal Symptoms – In addition to what is listed above, below are common signs of hyperarousal. Enter a 1-10 next to the symptoms you experience to indicate their severity:

• Increased heart rate	• Dizzy or lightheadedness	• Shaking or sweating
• Racing or obsessive thoughts	• Nausea or “butterflies” in the stomach	• Over-eating
• Difficulty concentrating	• Rapid, shallow breathing	• Tensed muscles
• Intense reactions	• Can't relax	• Addictions

List any other symptoms you recognize as part of your “dysregulation zone” or signs that you are in hyperarousal:

How does Hypoarousal occur?

Hypoarousal, identified as our freeze response, manifests as a shutdown mechanism in the face of notable stress, adversity, or trauma. In hypoarousal, arousal levels drop below the window of tolerance, potentially resulting in emotional numbness, limited functioning, social withdrawal, and a disconnection between the body and emotions.

Common Hypoarousal Symptoms – In addition to what is listed above, below are common signs of hypoarousal. Enter a 1-10 next to the symptoms you experience to indicate their severity:

• Feeling disconnected	• Memory loss	• Poor digestion
• Shame or Embarrassment	• Fatigue	• Difficulty saying “no”
• Depression	• Flat affect	• Inability to take action
• Feeling empty	• Dissociation	• Rigid

List any other symptoms you recognize as part of your “dysregulation zone” or signs that you are in hypoarousal:

You may not always immediately recognize your symptoms, but with consistent practice, it will become more intuitive. Familiarizing yourself with the symptoms listed on the worksheet can aid in identifying your indicators.

This awareness represents the crucial initial stage in learning to handle and regulate the stress or anxiety you encounter. Without acknowledging what you're experiencing, effective management is not possible.

Ranking the severity will help you understand which symptoms will occur when you are just starting to experience dysregulation and which are so severe that you are no longer in control of your emotions and body.

Managing Your Window of Tolerance

Learning to work with your window of tolerance empowers you to cope with life's challenges effectively. There are two key strategies for staying within your optimal zone:

Expand Your Window of Tolerance: Broadening your window of tolerance prolongs your ability to remain within the optimal zone, reducing the likelihood of dysregulation when facing stress or anxiety. Healing the effects of trauma will reduce the load that your nervous system is carrying and will expand your window

of tolerance. In addition, certain breathwork modalities such as BioDynamic Breathwork and Trauma Release (BBTRS) are specifically designed to decrease traumatic stress, increase interoception, foster greater embodiment, and increase your capacity to process trauma due to its unique combination of specific breath patterns, movement, touch, and conscious emotional expression.

Practice Self-Regulation: Self-regulation aids in processing stress and anxiety, enabling you to more quickly return to the window of tolerance and handle life's demands. Tools and practices that strengthen vagal tone support your ability to self-regulate in stressful times. Pick a few I outlined in part 3 of the video series and practice them regularly. Remember, mastering this process requires ongoing dedication. There are no quick fixes, and performing these exercises once or twice won't yield lasting improvements in your mental well-being.

By being here and absorbing this crucial knowledge:

- You are now more aware of the role of the Vagus nerve in expanding your window of tolerance and increasing self-regulation.
- You have reflected on how you experience the different zones within and outside your window of tolerance.
- The Window of Tolerance Awareness Checklist is one of the first steps in increasing awareness and tracking skills, which supports more accurate interoception and nervous system regulation.

Knowledge is power. I've observed that when individuals become conscious of the biological aspects of their stress reactions, they have an opportunity to be proactive rather than reactive. Moreover, when appropriate tools are incorporated, this facilitates the ability to manage these reactions and gradually alleviate them over time. This leads to real healing and lasting change.

Be well,

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