

Window of Tolerance Checklist

What is dysregulation, and why does understanding your window of tolerance matter?

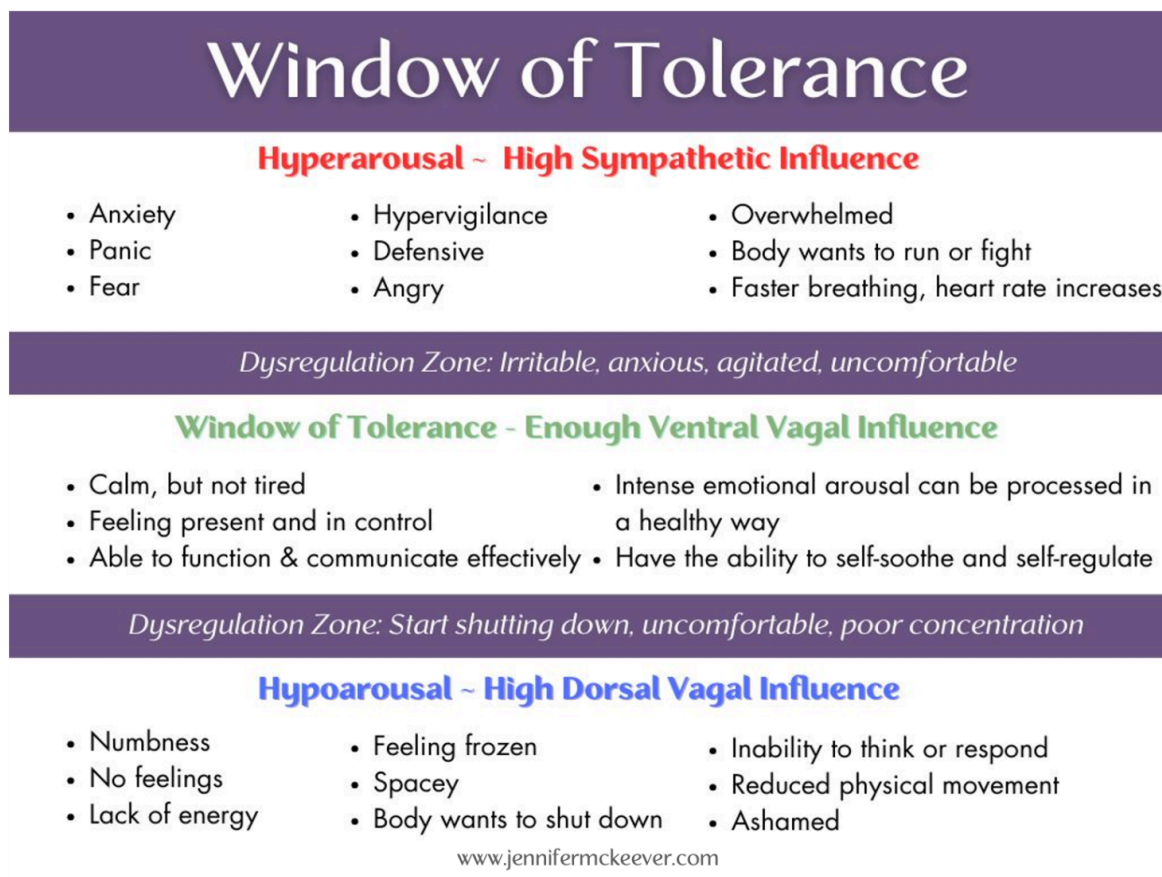
Your *window of tolerance* is the range of arousal where you feel balanced, present, and able to respond to life without becoming overwhelmed.

Dysregulation begins when your nervous system is pushed outside that range, into states of hyperarousal (anxiety, agitation) or hypoarousal (numbness, shutdown).

There are signs that your body's survival responses - fight, flight, or freeze - are activating. You might notice:

- Feeling restless, irritated, or on edge
- Trouble focusing or staying present
- A sense of emotional flooding or collapse
- The urge to withdraw or shut down completely

Building awareness of these signs is the first step in learning how to *track, regulate, and gently expand* your window of tolerance, so you can return to a place of greater safety, connection, and choice.



How Does Hyperarousal Happen?

Even everyday challenges, such as a disagreement with a loved one or the fear of embarrassment, can trigger the body’s fight-or-flight response.

This response is natural. It’s your nervous system’s built-in way of protecting you from perceived threat. And to some degree, everyone experiences it.

The key is what happens afterward.

In a healthy, regulated system, we return to baseline once the threat has passed. But if your system struggles to come back into balance - if it gets stuck in sympathetic arousal - it can lead to chronic tension, anxiety, irritability, or even long-term health issues.

Over time, your body starts to feel like it's always “on.” And that takes a toll.

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	• Difficulty relaxing	• Addictions or numbing patterns

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

How Does Hypoarousal Happen?

Hypoarousal is the body’s *freeze* or *shutdown* response. This is an automatic survival strategy that kicks in when we face overwhelming stress, trauma, or a sense of helplessness.

When our nervous system drops below the window of tolerance, everything slows down.

Energy shuts down to conserve resources. We may feel emotionally numb, disconnected from our body, withdrawn from others, or unable to think clearly or take action.

This state isn’t a personal failure. It’s a sign that the nervous system is doing its best to protect you from what feels like too much, too fast, or too intense.

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 might not recognize your symptoms right away, and that’s okay. With regular practice, tuning into your nervous system becomes more intuitive.

The checklist included in this worksheet can help you get familiar with the early signs of dysregulation in your body and mind. This kind of awareness is the *first and most important step* in learning how to work with stress and anxiety.

Without knowing what you're feeling, you can't respond in a way that supports regulation.

By ranking the severity of your symptoms, you'll start to see which signals show up when you're just beginning to leave your window of tolerance, and which ones mean your system is in full survival mode. This gives you more choice, more clarity, and a path back to balance.

Managing Your Window of Tolerance

Learning to work with your window of tolerance is one of the most empowering ways to navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and presence. There are two key approaches that support this:

1. Expand Your Window of Tolerance

A wider window means more capacity. You can stay grounded and connected in the face of stress or activation, rather than being overwhelmed.

Healing the impacts of trauma helps reduce the load your nervous system is carrying, naturally increasing your capacity to stay within your window.

Somatic modalities like **BioDynamic Breathwork & Trauma Release (BBTRS)** are designed for exactly this. They combine conscious breath with movement, touch, and emotional expression to:

- Decrease traumatic stress,
- Improve interoception (your ability to feel your body),
- Support deeper embodiment,
- And create the space needed to process trauma safely.

2. Practice Self-Regulation

When stress pushes you toward the edge, regulatory tools help bring you back. Practices that strengthen **vagal tone**, such as diaphragmatic breathing, and those shared in Part 3 of this series, support your ability to settle and self-soothe in the moment.

Choose a few and practice them regularly. This isn't about quick fixes. It's about building new pathways over time, with consistency and care.

By being here, learning, and exploring your own responses:

- You're beginning to understand how the **vagus nerve** supports both self-regulation and emotional resilience.

- You've reflected on what it feels like to be *inside* and *outside* your window of tolerance.
- You've started to build awareness using the **Window of Tolerance Awareness Checklist**. This is a foundational step in improving nervous system tracking and interoceptive awareness.

Remember:

Awareness creates choice. Choice creates change.

When you understand how your body responds to stress, you gain the ability to respond consciously, not just react.

And with the right tools and support, those responses can shift. Over time, this leads to real healing and lasting transformation.

With care & respect,

Jennifer



Jennifer McKeever

From Trauma to Trust