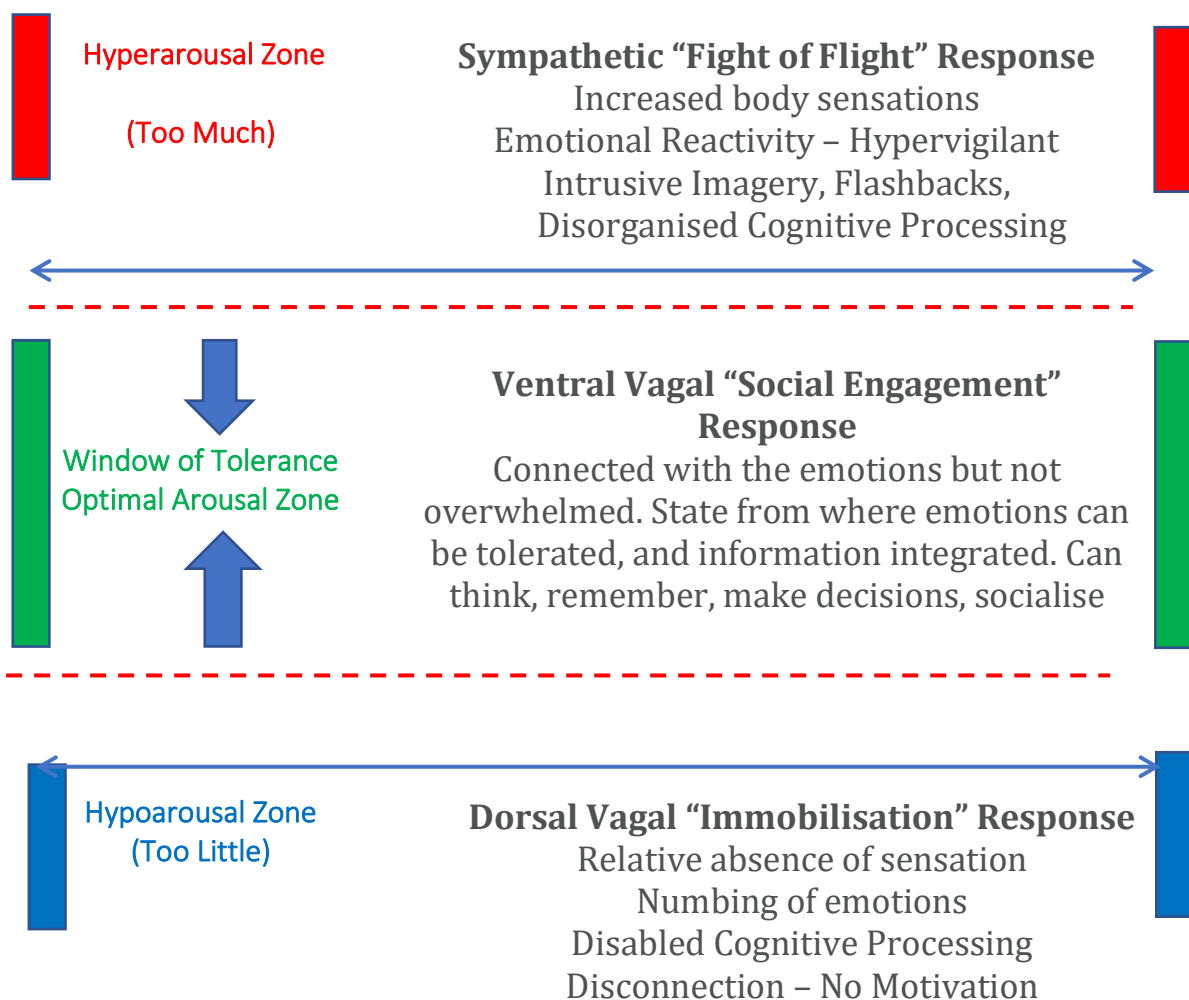


## Window of Tolerance

In any one day, we can experience many different emotions with varying degrees of highs and lows. Some emotions are easy to cope with but often emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt and sadness can be more intense and difficult to deal with. Everyone struggles with their emotions at times and it is completely normal. However, prolonged difficulties at managing emotions, which is called emotional dysregulation, is thought to have a big effect on good mental health and can lead to poor mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, stress disorders.

We are not born knowing how to manage our emotions; this means that we must learn. A useful way to think about how we experience and manage our emotions is through the Window of Tolerance. The Window of Tolerance is a simple idea that says we all have a comfort zone where we can manage our emotions productively, based on how intense the emotion is.

### Window of Tolerance



The central 'Window of Tolerance' section is where emotional intensity is "just right"- not too high and not too low. Being in this zone allows us to become aware of emotions and make thoughtful decisions about how to respond to them. We think clearly, make decisions, remember things, and interact well with others. It is where we tend to feel most like our true selves.

When we are at the edge of our zone, we are emotionally vulnerable (the red dotted line on the diagram above) and very slight things can put us out. If we have trouble staying in the zone, then managing simple things in life can become very difficult.

When our emotions are too intense (sometimes called hyperarousal; the red area on the diagram above) then we may feel anxious, panicked, distraught, "hyper" or overwhelmed. When in this state it is very difficult to slow down, take stock of what we are feeling, and to act on those emotions in healthy ways. So, we tend to react impulsively, without thinking about the consequences. Often, when we experience emotional highs like this, it can be common for an emotional low to follow.

When our emotions are not intense enough (sometimes called hypoarousal) then we may feel depressed, numb, disconnected or empty. We may also experience a kind of zoning-out, or detachment from ourselves and the world (dissociation). When our emotional energy is too low it becomes very difficult to motivate ourselves, and at the extreme we may be unable to feel anything.

Ideally, we need to learn methods to regulate our emotions so that we are managing our emotions from a healthy 'Window of Tolerance'. Fortunately, we can learn to regulate our emotions by identifying what we are feeling and using methods, which are simple yet effective, to helping us manage our emotions from our 'Window of Tolerance'.

## **Tips to Regulate the Emotions and take us into the 'Window of Tolerance'**

### **Breathe Deeply**

When we feel stressed our heart rate increases resulting in faster breathing and increased blood pressure. When we breathe deeply the brain instructs the body to calm down and relax. Deep breathing is one of the easiest methods to reduce stress in the body and can be done immediately without any special tools. One of the most popular methods of deep breathing is called...

### **Belly Breathing.**

1. Sit or lie flat in a comfortable position and relax.

2. Place one hand on your belly just below the ribs and the other hand on your chest.
3. Take a deep breath through your nose, and let your stomach push your hand away. The chest should not move.
4. Breath out through pursed lips and feel the hand on your belly go in and use it to push out the air.
5. Repeat 3 – 10 times taking your time with each breath.
6. Repeat throughout the week to strengthen your diaphragm and to develop a more efficient way of breathing.

### **Yoga & Meditation**

We know that Yoga is beneficial in increasing flexibility and muscle strength, but Yoga is beneficial for both good physical and mental health. Some benefits include...

- Boosting the Immune System
- Decreased Blood Pressure
- Lowers Cortisol Levels (High levels can compromise the immune system)
- Lower Blood Sugar Levels
- Encourages relaxation and Deep Breathing.
- Maintains the Nervous System
- Helps prevent IBS and other digestive problems
- Helps lower Depression.
- Promotes deep relaxation
- Promotes deep sleep.

### **Connect with the skin –**

- Be it Massage, Self-Massage, Foot Massage. Connecting with the skin can...
- Boost Sleep

- Promote Relaxation
- Reduce Skin Toxins
- Boost the Immune System
- Nourishes the Skin

### **Use Grounding Techniques to reconnect.**

These are useful for dealing with anxiety, creating a calmness in the present moment from where we can look at alternative ways of dealing with an overwhelming situation.

- Walk
- Scrunch the hands and feet
- Stomp the feet
- A simple grounding technique is to sit in a chair with both feet flat to the floor. Lean back into the chair noticing the feeling of the chair under you and against your back. Hug yourself by crossing your arms over your chest. Gently tap your shoulders, alternating one side at a time

### **Find time for fun in your life.**

**“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”** is a well-known proverb highlighting the importance of play and having fun. Often work takes up too many of our limited time and often takes over the importance of fun. But fun is the waking equivalent of sleep and vitally important for our physical and mental well-being.

Fun is doing something without necessarily an end gain or purpose, but time spent joyful either doing something individually or with others. Think back to your childhood and the activities spent having fun and make time to include in your schedule.

It's time we spend without necessarily an end purpose, but just for the sheer joy of it. Think of snowballing, sledging, running in the park, board games, building something, baking, swimming, diving, horse riding, playing team sports,

### **Connect with...**

- Other people – Meet up with friends. Join local social groups.
- Spend time with people / children who make you laugh.
- Nature...focus on the present - what can you hear, smell, see, touch or taste.
- Animals

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a practice that can help reduce anxiety and stress and research has shown that intruding mindfulness into your life can have positive effects on the whole-person health, including the mind, the brain and the body.

### **Be Creative...**

- Draw, Journal, Paint or play an instrument.
- Sing /Dance – Engage with music you love and dance like no-ones watching!

### **Create a Coping Skills Toolbox...**

Create a box full of item that can help provide calming and self-relaxation techniques at times of high stress levels or anxiety. Some suggestions on what to put in your coping box ...

- Candles, essential oils, perfume, body lotion
- Soft Toy / Soft Blanket
- Puzzle Books / Reading Books
- Paper, Pens and Crayons
- Favourite DVDs
- Stress Ball /Rubik Cube
- Book of favourite poems
- Creative material -knitting etc