

Window of Tolerance Script

Written for therapists who deliver the window of tolerance out loud rather than handing over a diagram. Eight minutes of plain-language psychoeducation that describes hyperarousal and hypoarousal the way a client would recognise them in themselves, ending by asking them to locate where they are in the window right now — which is what turns the model from an idea into something they can use.

8 min · 6 segments

01. The idea

1 min 15

[Read this at conversational pace, not meditation pace — you are teaching, not guiding. Pause after the second block so the client can look at a diagram if you have one; many people follow the model far better with two lines drawn on paper in front of them.]

I want to describe something to you. It is a way of thinking about how much you can handle at any given moment, and it is called the window of tolerance. The term comes from a psychiatrist called Dan Siegel. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Picture two horizontal lines, one above the other, with a band of space between them. That band is your window. It is the zone where you are awake enough to deal with things and settled enough to think clearly at the same time. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Everyone has one. They are different sizes in different people, and the same person's window is a different size on different days. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

02. Inside the window

1 min

[Ask them to supply their own example rather than offering one of yours. The model only becomes usable when it is populated with their material — take whatever they give you, even if it seems small.]

When you are inside the window, things feel manageable. Not necessarily good. You might be sad, or bored, or irritated. But you can feel it and still function. You can listen to someone. You can change your mind. You can remember what you were doing. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

This is not a state of bliss. It is simply workable, and it is where most ordinary life happens. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Have a think about a time recently when you were in there. *[pause for 25 seconds]*

03. Above the window

1 min 45

[Watch for recognition — it usually shows on the face before it arrives in words. If describing hyperarousal begins to produce some, slow down, invite them to look around the room for a moment, and come back to the teaching afterwards. Naming symptoms can bring them on.]

Now, above the top line. When something is too much, your body can go up and out of the window. This gets called hyperarousal, which is a clumsy word for a very familiar feeling. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Up there, everything speeds up. Heart going. Breathing high in the chest. Muscles ready. Thoughts racing, or looping round the same thing. You might feel panicky, or furious, or wired, or unable to sit still. Sleep gets difficult. Small sounds feel bigger than they are. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

What is happening is that your body has decided something needs dealing with urgently. It is getting you ready to fight or to run. That is what it is for. It is just not always right about when. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

You may recognise some of that. You may have your own name for it. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

04. Below the window

1 min 45

[Go slower here. Hypoarousal is under-recognised, and clients often hear it described for the first time and feel some relief that it has a name — leave room for that. If their eye contact drops or their voice flattens while you speak, they may be moving down as you describe it; pause and get them looking around the room before you continue.]

Below the bottom line is the other direction. This one gets called hypoarousal, and it is talked about far less, which is a shame, because plenty of people spend a lot of time down there. *[pause for 10 seconds]*

Down there, things slow down and go quiet. You might feel numb, or heavy, or far away. Foggy. Flat. Like you are watching yourself from a distance, or sitting behind glass. It can be hard to speak, hard to move, hard to care about anything. Some people describe it as switching off, or going blank. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

From the outside it can look like calm. From the inside it usually does not feel like calm at all. This is your body's other option when something is too much. Shutting down instead of speeding up. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

That one may be familiar too. For some people it is more familiar than the first. *[pause for 30 seconds]*

05. The window is not a fixed size

1 min

[This is the segment that stops the model becoming another way to fail. Say it plainly and do not hurry it, particularly with clients who have already decided that going out of the window is a personal shortcoming.]

Two things worth knowing. The first is that going above or below the window is not a mistake and not a failure. It is a body doing what it learned to do, on information it collected a long time ago. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

The second is that the window is not a fixed size. It narrows when you are tired, unwell, hungry, or carrying a lot. It is wider on some days than others. So the same conversation can be perfectly manageable on Tuesday and far too much on Thursday, and that is not you being inconsistent. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

Part of what we do together is get to know the edges of yours. What takes you up, what takes you down, and what you notice first on the way. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

06. Where you are right now

1 min 15

[Ask, then stay quiet. This is the question the whole script is built to reach, and the first honest answer often arrives after an uncomfortable gap. Take whatever they give you without correcting it — 'I don't know' is a usable answer, and worth saying so out loud.]

So, one last thing. Have a look at where you are right now. In this room, in this conversation, in the last few minutes. *[pause for 20 seconds]*

Are you inside the window? Up in the top part of it, a bit revved? Down towards the bottom, a bit distant? Or outside it altogether, above or below? *[pause for 30 seconds]*

Whatever you find, you do not need to change it today. Noticing where you are is the whole of this exercise. *[pause for 15 seconds]*

And from here on you have somewhere to put it. Not I am a mess, but I am above my window, and I know what that is.

USAGE

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