

# Educational Psychology Overview Guide

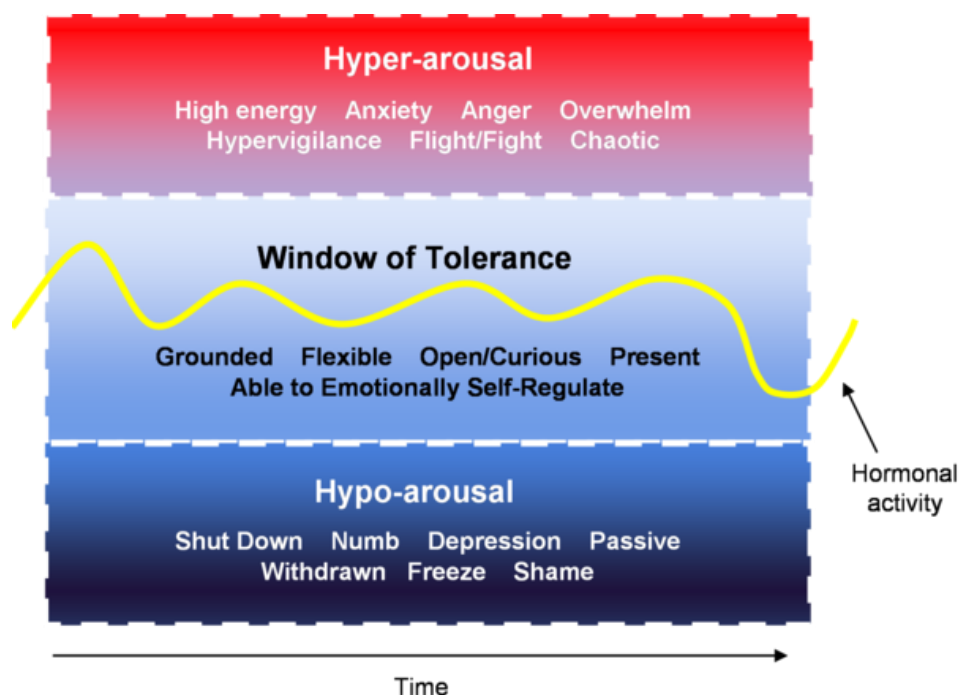
## Window of Tolerance

### What is the Window of Tolerance?

A useful psychological model for understanding the day-to-day experiences of children and young people (CYP), especially those who have experienced trauma, is the Window of Tolerance. This model is evidence-based, grounded in neuroscience theory (e.g., Porges, 2011). Keeping this model in mind when working with CYP will allow staff to reflect upon their experiences with curiosity and empathy.

We all have a different window of tolerance, which can also fluctuate each day, depending on our experiences. A narrow window of tolerance may mean we experience intense emotions which we find difficult to manage. Those with a wider window of tolerance can regulate intense emotions without too much detrimental impact upon their functioning.

When we are within our window of tolerance, we tend to feel regulated, with our brain able to access higher order executive functioning skills i.e., those responsible for making rational and reasoned decisions. As shown on the diagram attached, if we encounter extreme stress, we may experience hyper- or hypo- arousal. Many CYP may experience both of these arousal levels whilst in school. Settings can work with CYP to develop strategies to encourage them to return to their window of tolerance.



### **Supporting the move from hyper-arousal back into the window of tolerance**

In these periods of heightened state, we need to regulate the lower parts of the brain through patterned, repetitive, rhythmic and / or somatosensory activities such as heavy work (e.g., wall pushes), deep touch pressure activities (e.g., weighted blanket or massage), running, jumping or proprioceptive activities (e.g., animal yoga). Other examples include walking, trampolining, singing, swinging, spinning, tug of war, bouncing on a fit ball, walking along a balance beam, playing with play dough or kinetic sand, glitter jars, etc.

Once the brain is integrated we can provide calming, soothing and grounding activities such as:

- Breathing techniques
- Progressive muscular relaxation
- Visualisation tools
- Weighted blankets
- Music to sooth
- 542321 Grounding (i.e., 5 things they can see, 4 things they can feel, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste)
- Going outside into a green space
- Watching clouds out of the window

### **Supporting the move from hypo-arousal back into the window of tolerance**

In these periods of 'disassociation', children require activities that stimulate the senses, particularly the sense of smell, as this is the fastest way to integrate the top half (i.e., thinking part) of the brain with the lower regions (i.e., the emotional and sensory centres). Strategies could include:

- Sensory trays containing lavender, soap, basil, handwash, etc.
- Providing chewy, crunchy food (e.g., dry cereal or oats).
- Sand play.
- Stress balls.
- Calm down glitter jars.
- Putting soles of the feet on the floor.
- Bouncing on a therapy ball.
- Dance or music.
- Rocking on a chair.
- Finger tracing activities.

Please note, it would be best practice to timetable these activities into the school day as preventative measures (i.e., to avoid, where possible, high levels of hyper- or hypo-arousal). It may also benefit some children to have access to a calm down kit, containing items that soothe them (e.g., eye mask, sensory toys, gum, colouring books). CYP may need access to a personalised sensory bag containing items that suit their sensory preferences and / or access to a regulation station placed within or just outside the classroom, or in a specific room in a high school setting.

For more Window of Tolerance guidance:

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/video/window-of-tolerance/>

<https://beaconhouse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Developmental-Trauma-Close-Up-Revised-Jan-2020.pdf> (pages 16-17)