

Window Of Tolerance/staying in your lane.



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The window of tolerance concept proposes that everyone has a range of intensities of emotional experience which they can comfortably experience, process, and integrate in a healthy way. This is their 'window of tolerance' or zone of 'optimum arousal'. Some people's window of tolerance is relatively wide: they can feel comfortable despite relatively high degrees of emotional intensity, and a broad range of emotions from pleasant emotions such as excitement and happiness, to unpleasant emotions such as guilt or anger.

In therapy, the window of tolerance is important when working with survivors of trauma, particularly with clients who experience numbing/dissociation episodes or conversely feel surges of high anxiety or anger arousal.

Therapists will work with clients to stay within their window of tolerance when working with their trauma memories and beliefs. Research suggests that when clients are outside their window of tolerance, therapists in some cases may, with consent, use techniques such as increasing the intensity of reliving, focusing on emotions and body sensations. If clients are too hyperaroused /above their window of tolerance, therapists may, with

permission, use techniques to enable the therapy in a connected but less stimulated way.

- Working on ‘widening the window of tolerance’ so that clients can achieve more space in which to tolerate and process their experiences is important. The window of tolerance can be ‘widened’ through a process of education about different arousal states, their role in the clients’ experiences, and the practice of new behaviours to regulate autonomic states. Research proposes that breathing techniques and other soothing strategies such as exercise, yoga, and physical activities requiring focused attention is extremely beneficial for high arousal. For states of low arousal, general activity, movement, music and humour can be helpful.
- Outside of therapy we can all benefit from ‘taking a minute’ to check in with ourselves to see if we are swimming in our lane; and if not to recentre using slow deep breathing focusing first on our heart (doing its amazing job inside us), and then on a positive feeling or memory we can bring into the mind...so that our heart and brain reconnects with calm and positivity.
- It only needs to take a minute or two ...but the benefits can last a lifetime

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