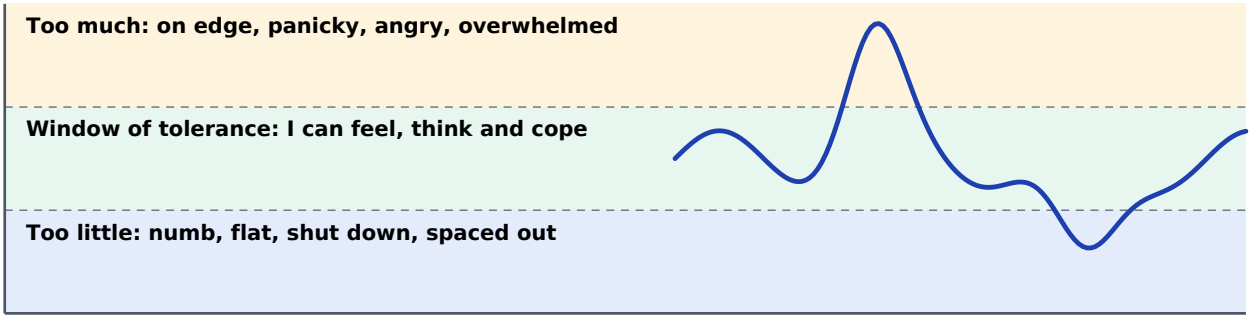
The window of tolerance

What the window of tolerance is, and what happens above and below it.

Everyone has a zone of arousal in which they function well. Inside it you can think clearly, feel your feelings without being swamped, and respond to what is in front of you. This is called the window of tolerance.



Stress pushes us towards the edges. Past the top edge the body goes into fight or flight. Past the bottom edge it shuts down. Both are automatic survival responses that you do not choose.

	Above the window	Below the window
Feels like	Panicky, enraged, overwhelmed, racing	Numb, empty, foggy, far away
Body	Heart pounding, tense, shaky, hot	Heavy, slow, cold, hard to move
Mind	Racing thoughts, cannot think straight	Blank, cannot find words
Helps	Slow out-breath, cold water, grounding, movement to burn it off	Gentle movement, strong tastes or smells, naming what you see, contact with someone

What affects the window

- Trauma, stress, tiredness, hunger and illness all make the window narrower.
- Everyone's window is a different size, and it changes from day to day.
- The window can be widened: through rest and routine, safe relationships, and practising skills that bring you back from the edges.

In therapy

We aim to work inside your window. If you notice yourself heading out of it, say so, and we will pause until you are back.

The window of tolerance was described by Daniel Siegel (1999).

My notes and questions

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