WORKSHEET · SENSORIMOTOR PSYCHOTHERAPY

Your window of tolerance

Getting to know your own signs of being overwhelmed, shut down, or just right, and what helps you come back

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The psychiatrist Daniel Siegel (1999) described a “window of tolerance”: a zone in which we can feel our feelings and still think clearly. Pat Ogden and colleagues placed this idea at the heart of Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, as a way of noticing when our nervous system is in a manageable range, and when it has moved above or below it (Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006).

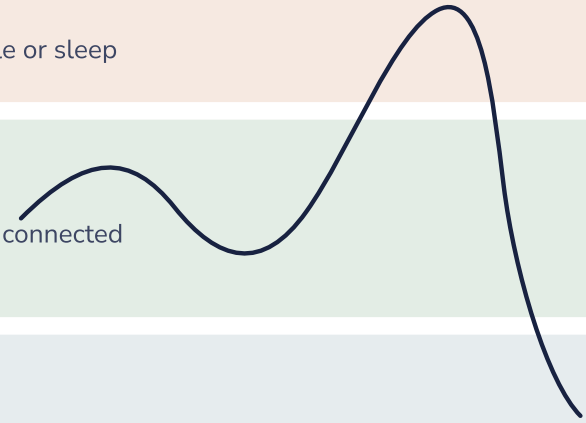
Above the window: too much

Anxious, panicky, racing heart, angry, on edge, can’t settle or sleep

Inside the window: just right

Present, able to feel and think at the same time, curious, connected

Feelings can be strong here, and still manageable



Below the window: too little

Numb, flat, foggy, far away, exhausted, hard to move or speak

Everyone moves in and out of their window, many times a day. Stress, difficult experiences and trauma can make the window narrower, so that we are pushed out of it more easily. With support and practice, it can gradually widen. There is no failure in leaving the window: your body is trying to protect you.

Your signs

Think of a time you were in each zone. What did you notice in your body, your thoughts and what you did? There is no need to fill every line.

When I am above my window, I notice...

When I am inside my window, I notice...

When I am below my window, I notice...

What tends to push me out of my window? (People, places, times of day, memories, tiredness...)

Coming back into the window

Different things help in each zone. Try a few of the ideas below, notice what happens in your body, and keep a list of what works for you.

When I am above my window, what helps me settle?

Ideas: a long, slow breath out; feeling your feet on the floor; pressing your palms together; cool water on your wrists; a weighted blanket; naming five things you can see.

When I am below my window, what helps me come back up?

Ideas: standing up and stretching; a short walk; noticing colours around you; a strong taste or smell; gentle music; texting or calling someone you trust.

What helps to widen my window over time? (Sleep, movement, time outdoors, connection, therapy…)

Go gently. This worksheet is for self-reflection and is not a substitute for therapy. If you often find yourself far outside your window, or difficult memories come up, it can help to explore this with a therapist.

If you are struggling right now: Samaritans 116 123 (free, any time) · Pieta 1800 247 247 or text HELP to 51444 · text HELLO to 50808 · emergency 112 or 999.

Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the Body: A Sensorimotor Approach to Psychotherapy.* W. W. Norton.

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are.* Guilford Press.

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