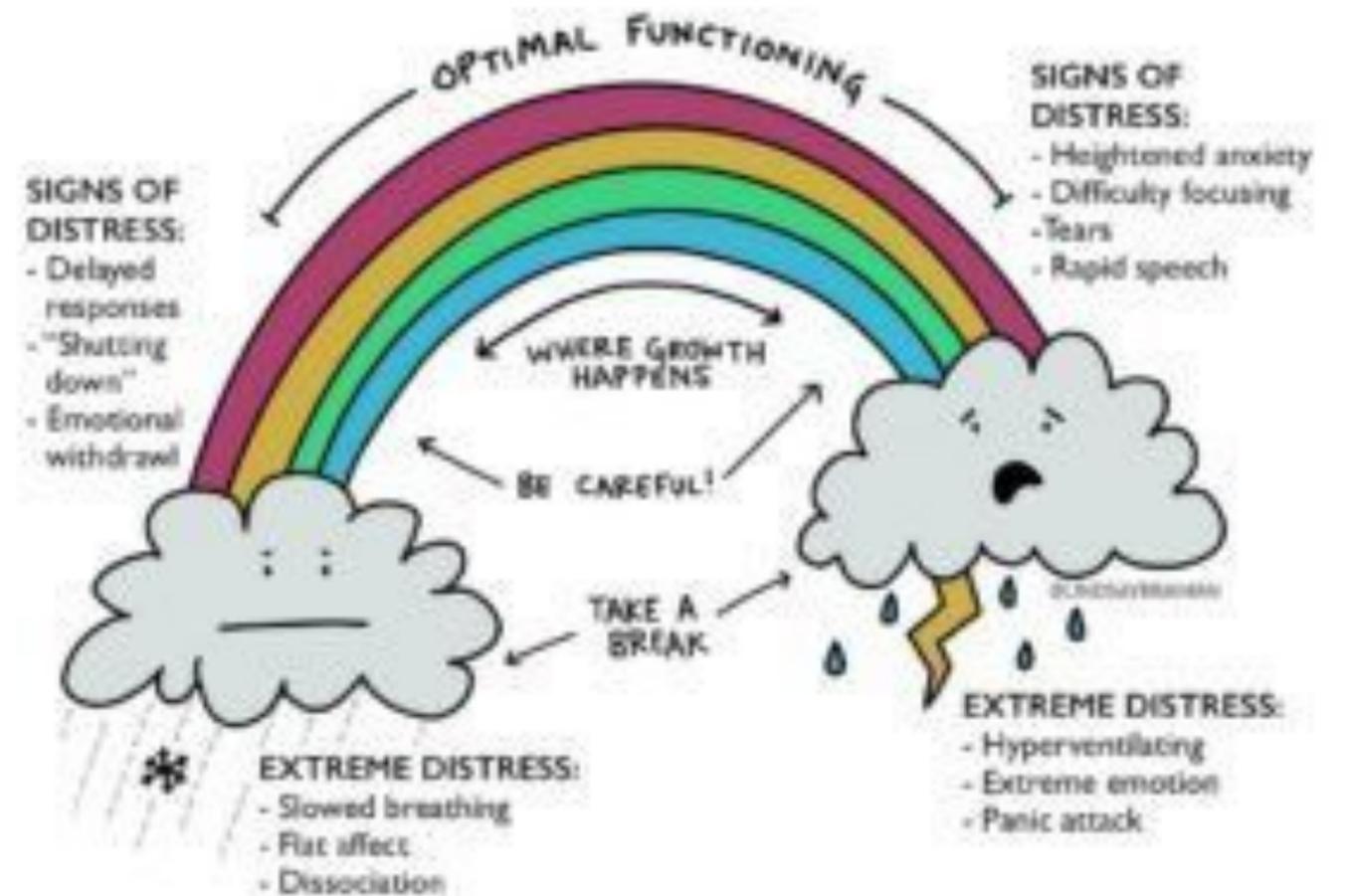


Window of Tolerance

WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

(IN RAINBOW FORM!)



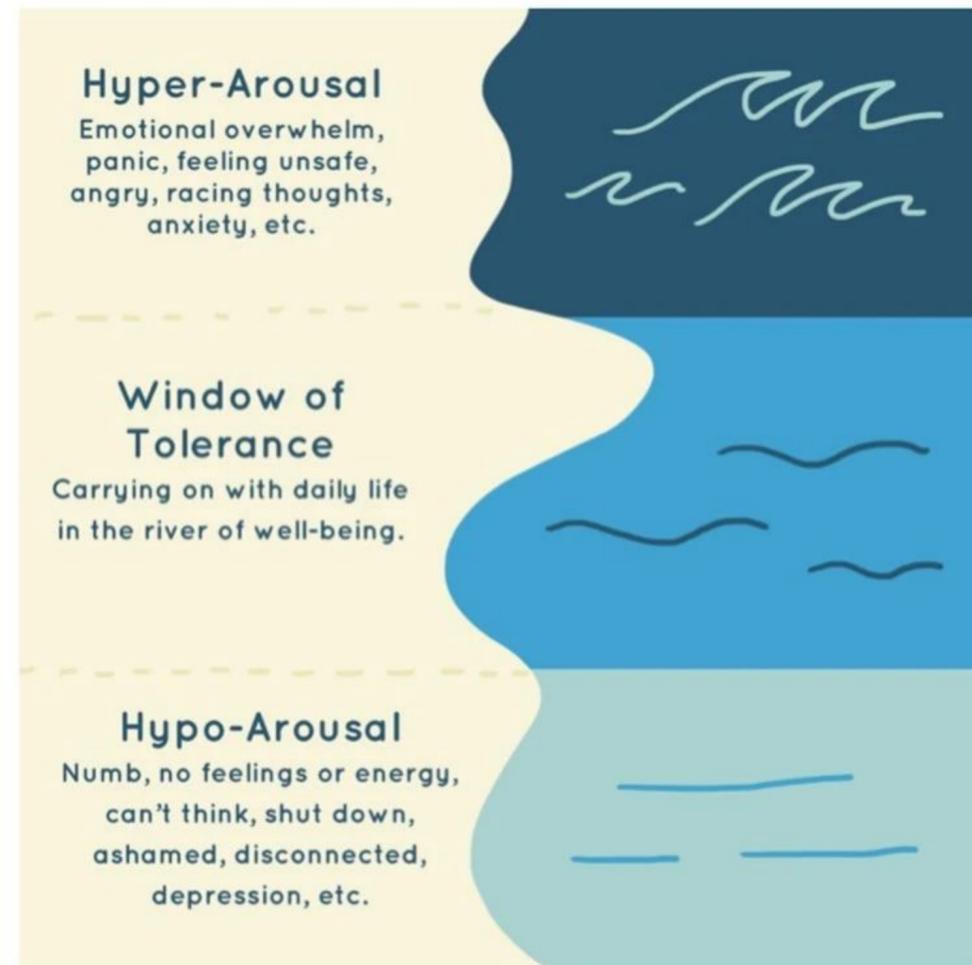
Window Of Tolerance was first coined by Dan Siegel. It is a term used to describe the zone of arousal in which a person is able to function most effectively. When people are within this zone, they are typically able to readily receive, process, and integrate information and otherwise respond to the demands of everyday life without much difficulty.

When a person is within their window of tolerance, it is generally the case that the brain is functioning well and can effectively process stimuli. That person is likely to be able to reflect, think rationally, and make decisions calmly without feeling either overwhelmed or withdrawn.

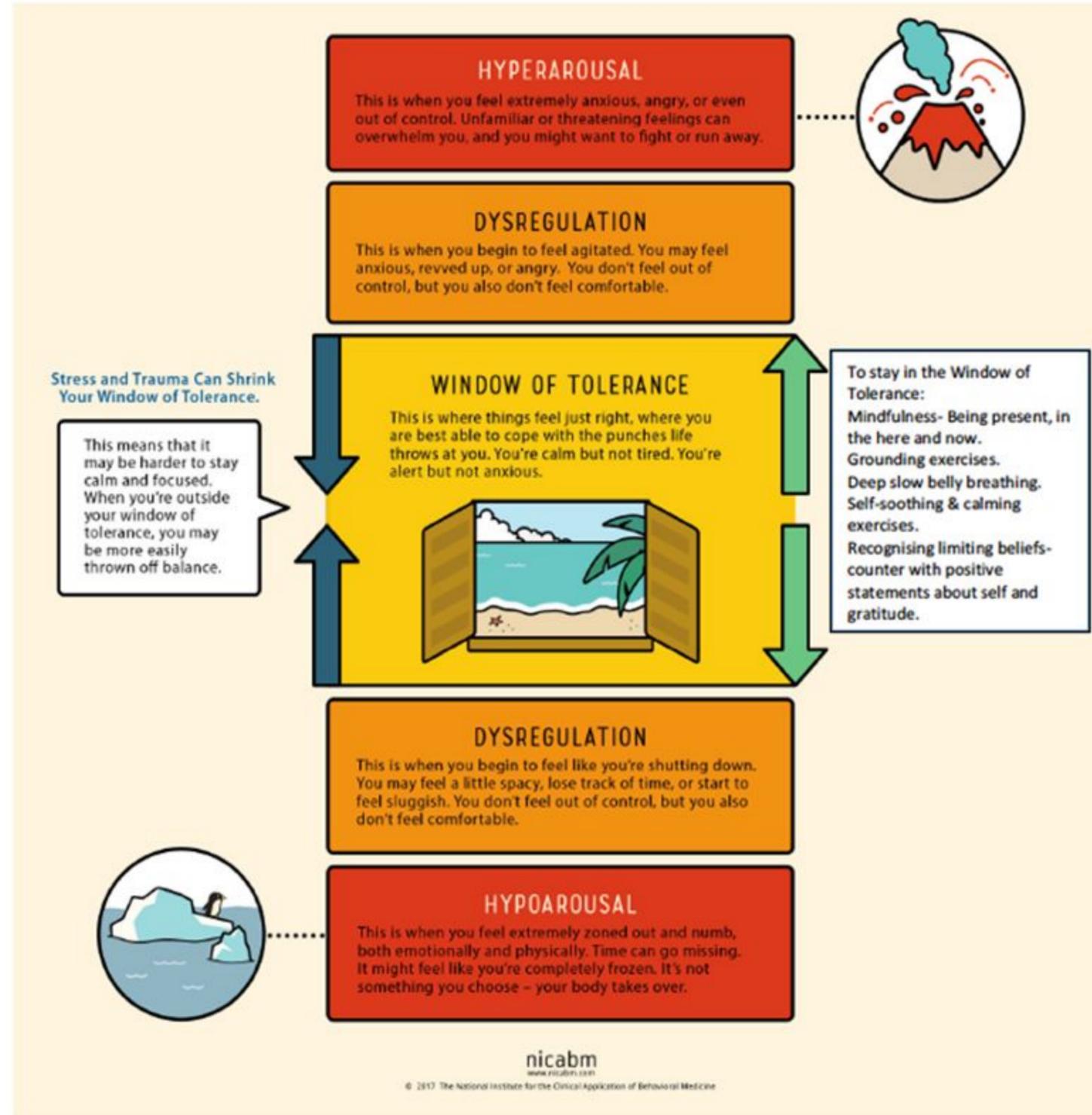
During times of extreme stress, people often experience periods of either hyper- or hypo-arousal.

- **Hyper-Arousal**, otherwise known as the fight/flight response, is often characterized by hypervigilance, feelings of anxiety and/or panic, and racing thoughts.
- **Hypo-Arousal**, or freeze response, may cause feelings of emotional numbness, emptiness, or paralysis.

In either of these states, an individual may become unable to process stimuli effectively. The prefrontal cortex region of the brain shuts down, in a manner of speaking, affecting the ability to think rationally and often leading to the development of feelings of dysregulation, which may take the form of chaotic responses or overly rigid ones. In these periods, a person can be said to be outside the window of tolerance.



The Window of Tolerance



Each individual's window of tolerance is different. Those who have a **Narrow Window of Tolerance** may often feel as if their emotions are intense and difficult to manage. Others with a **Wider Window of Tolerance** may be able to handle intense emotions or situations without feeling like their ability to function has been significantly impacted.

The window of tolerance can also be affected by the environment; people are generally more able to remain within the window when they feel safe and supported. Most people move between these varying states of arousal from time to time. Trauma and/or extreme stress often make it more likely a person will become either hyper- or hypo-aroused.

The Window of Tolerance charts the relationship between stress/ anxiety (hyperarousal, hypervigilance) and hypo arousal (low motivation, depression, dissociation). We ideally want to be in **The Yellow Zone- The 'Creative Calm' Zone.** *It is a place where things feel right. We are calm, but not tired. Alert but not anxious.*

The Size of Our Window

The sizes of our windows adjust in parallel to internal and external influences. When feeling stressed, sad, or lacking sleep or self-regulation skills, our window of what we're able to tolerate shrinks.

Having a small window means that we are less able to tolerate things and are more likely to be triggered into shooting out of our window. With repetition, routes of shooting out of our window entrench, become more easily accessible, and increase the triggering of false alarms.

WIDENING THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

It is possible for individuals who have become dysregulated to use techniques to return to their window of tolerance. **Grounding and mindfulness skills, techniques** considered beneficial by many mental health experts, can often help people remain in the present moment. By focusing on the physical sensations currently being experienced, for example, people are often able to remain in the present, calming and soothing themselves enough to effectively manage extreme arousal.

Many individuals are able to **Widen Their Window Of Tolerance** and, by doing so, increase their sense of calm and become able to deal with stress in more adaptive ways. Therapy, which provides a safe space for people to process painful memories and emotions, can be a helpful step for many. With the help of a mental health professional, individuals are often able to make contact with their emotions without becoming so dysregulated that they cannot integrate them. Increasing emotional regulation capabilities in this way can lead to a wider window of tolerance and prevent dysregulation.



HOW TO ALLOW THE WINDOW TO EXPAND

Remember, the **most powerful antidote** to self-doubt is **self-compassion**.

Resist verbal and non-verbal negative reactions (this can come from efforts to expand your own window of what you're able to tolerate).

Allow yourself time to **explore, listen actively and empathetically**, being **curious about your own experiences** rather than others' interpretations of their experience.

Normalize good/bad experiences to open yourself to explore.

Balance guilt with healthy pride, **promoting self-compassion and self-acceptance**.

Focus on resilience-building in order to prevent the damaging impact of negative events in life.

Building Resilience to Strengthen Your Ability to Cope:

Affirm to yourself: The world is pretty safe, people are pretty safe; I can cope with most things; I have some control over things that happen to me, and I can accept things that can't be changed.

Mistakes are OK; they are lessons teaching us what could be different next time.

Set **realistic goals** and maintain a hopeful outlook.

Praise your effort even if the desired result isn't met.

Appreciation exercises—at the end of the day (or when applicable), talk about three things that you appreciate about your day.

Reflection on the window of tolerance will enable us to be more mindful and recognize how we're feeling against our windows. This will help in developing self-regulation skills to get us back inside the window, and to handle the situation more appropriately.

Do it yourself

FOLLOW THE BOUNCING BALL

Find a ball that bounces to perform this activity;

Try “dribbling” the ball with the palm of your hand. I like to start by dribbling one time — one bounce — and then catching the ball. Then two bounces, then catch. Then three, etc. Keep going until you feel comfortably challenged and then dribble the ball until it gets away from you. Then switch hands. If self-regulation is your goal, starting with something easy (one bounce) and working up to what feels like a manageable max is going to be more effective than just going in and trying to dribble the ball for as long as you can.



ORIENT

When you’re feeling anxious or overwhelmed, stop and orient to your surroundings. You can do this in a number of ways: Look around and notice features of the space you’re in — objects, textures, colors, etc. You might look around and try to spot, say, 5 red things or 3 things that are yellow.

Some people prefer to orient through sensation. You can do this by sensing the contact of your feet on the floor or your bum and the backs of your legs on a chair. Whether orienting through sight or sensation, see if you can feel the movement of the breath in your body.

Anything available to the senses can serve as a touchstone: textures, colours, sounds, scents, etc. Experiment and see what provides the greatest sense of grounding for you.

The idea here is that orienting to the environment can help us disengage from unpleasant or overactive thoughts or sensations occurring internally. Getting just a little bit of distance from our internal experience can help us become less reactive and choose behaviours that are in line with our values and goals.

