Window of Tolerance Worksheet

Part 1. My window and my three zones

Item	Entry
Name	
Date	

My window of tolerance is the zone where I can feel my feelings and still think clearly. Above my window my body speeds up, and below it my body slows down and shuts off. With practice, my window can grow wider.

Inside my window

Include: how my body, breathing, thoughts and feelings are when I feel present and can still think.

Above my window: too much (hyperarousal)

Include: what I notice when I speed up, such as a racing heart, tight muscles or feeling on guard.

Below my window: too little (hypoarousal)

Include: what I notice when I shut down, such as feeling numb, far away, foggy or unable to move.

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Part 2. My early warning signs

Early warning signs are the first small changes I notice as I start to leave my window. Noticing them gives me a chance to use what helps me before I go further.

What was happening	The first thing I noticed	Up or down?

Things that make my window narrower

Include: things that make it more likely that I leave my window, such as poor sleep, hunger, stress or reminders of what happened.

Things that make my window wider

Include: things that help me stay in my window, such as good sleep, regular meals, or time with people I feel safe with.

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Part 3. What helps me come back

When I am above my window, these help me slow down

Include: what helps me calm my body, such as feeling my feet on the floor, breathing out longer than I breathe in, or standing up and walking.

When I am below my window, these help me wake up

Include: what helps me come back into my body, such as standing up and moving, turning my head to look around the room, naming things I can see, or music with energy.

People and places that help me

Include: people I feel safe with and places where I can settle, and how each one helps.

Person or place	How they help

If I am in crisis

If I am in danger or thinking about suicide, I call or text 988 in the United States or Canada. Elsewhere, I call my local crisis line or emergency number. The numbers I will use:

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Part 4. My practice log

Each time I notice that I am leaving my window, I write down what happened, which way I went, what I did and how much it helped.

Date	What happened	Up or down?	What I did	How much it helped (0 to 10)

Coming back into my window

How sure am I that I can bring myself back into my window? Circle a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all sure										*Completely sure*

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Clinician guide: using the window of tolerance worksheet

- **When it fits.** Use the worksheet early in trauma therapy, before memory work. In sensorimotor psychotherapy, memory work begins once the client's window of tolerance is wide enough for the client to recall traumatic memories and stay regulated (Ogden et al., 2006).
- **Explain the zones in plain words.** The window of tolerance is the range of emotional arousal a person can handle while functioning well (Siegel, 2020). Hyperarousal, or too much activation, lies above it, and hypoarousal, or too little, lies below it (Ogden et al., 2006).
- **Map the client's own signs.** Ask what the client notices first in the body as arousal rises or falls, such as tight shoulders, short breath or a faster heart, and write it in the client's words. Signs of hypoarousal are often read as depression or resistance (Ogden et al., 2006), so ask about numbness and fog directly.
- **Practice what helps in session.** Try each resource with the client before the client uses it alone. Standing, walking and naming objects in the room help a client who goes numb, and grounding through the legs and feet helps a client who speeds up (Ogden et al., 2006). Use breathing exercises with care, since they can unsettle some trauma clients, and keep the resources that work for this client (Ogden et al., 2006).
- **Review the log and watch for risk.** Read the practice log at the start of each session, and add new signs and resources as they appear. Ask about thoughts of suicide as part of your usual assessment, and follow your setting's crisis protocol whenever a situation involves risk.

Based on the window of tolerance as described by Siegel (2020) and by Ogden, Minton and Pain (2006). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Marcus (a fictional client)

Marcus, 29, is a delivery driver in outpatient therapy for posttraumatic stress after a fire in his apartment building last year. He filled in this worksheet with his counselor, J.A., over his second and third sessions, starting on December 3, 2026. Marcus, his counselor and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. My window and my three zones

Item	Entry
Name	Marcus
Date	December 3, 2026

Inside my window

My breathing is slow and my shoulders are loose. I can feel sad or tired and still talk about it. I can laugh with my sister and follow a conversation.

Above my window: too much (hyperarousal)

My heart pounds and my jaw gets tight. I can’t sit still, I keep checking the doors and I snap at people. My thoughts race and I want to get out of the room.

Below my window: too little (hypoarousal)

I go numb and foggy and feel far away. My arms feel heavy. I stare at the TV for hours and can’t make myself get up or answer texts.

Part 2. My early warning signs

What was happening	The first thing I noticed	Up or down?
Smoke from a neighbor’s grill	My jaw tightened and I held my breath.	Up
Sirens at night	My heart sped up before I was fully awake.	Up
An argument with my roommate	His voice started to sound far away.	Down
A long day of deliveries with no lunch	Everything felt heavy and slow.	Down

Things that make my window narrower

Less than six hours of sleep, skipping lunch, arguments at home and the weeks before the anniversary of the fire.

Things that make my window wider

Basketball on Saturdays, dinner at my sister’s place and going to bed at the same time each night.

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Part 3. What helps me come back

When I am above my window, these help me slow down

Press my feet into the floor. Breathe out slower than I breathe in. Push my hands against a wall. Walk around the block.

When I am below my window, these help me wake up

Stand up and stretch. Sit up straight and name five things I can see. Put on music I like.

People and places that help me

Person or place	How they help
My sister, Dana	I can call or text her, and she helps me slow down.
The rec center	Basketball helps me feel my body again.

If I am in crisis

Call or text 988. Dana is my emergency contact.

Part 4. My practice log

Date	What happened	Up or down?	What I did	How much it helped (0 to 10)
Dec 5	Smoke from a grill on my route	Up	Pressed my feet into the floor of the van and breathed out slowly.	6
Dec 7	Argument with my roommate	Down	Stood up, stretched and named things in the room.	4
Dec 9	A siren at 2 a.m.	Up	Walked to the kitchen and felt my feet on the cold floor.	7

Coming back into my window

How sure am I that I can bring myself back into my window? Circle a number.

0	1	2	3	4	5	**6**	7	8	9	10
Not at all sure										*Completely sure*

J.A. read the log with Marcus at his fourth session. Pressing his feet into the floor helped most when he sped up, and standing helped less when he went numb, so they practiced sitting up straight and naming what he could see. They agreed to start memory work once Marcus could come back from both directions.

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References and further reading

Books for clinicians

Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. W. W. Norton & Company. ISBN 978-0-393-70457-0.

Siegel, D. J. (2020). *The developing mind: How relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. ISBN 978-1-4625-4275-8.

Research

Ogden, P., & Minton, K. (2000). Sensorimotor psychotherapy: One method for processing traumatic memory. *Traumatology, 6*(3), 149–173.

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