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Announcements

- ❖ RC Recertification: Sept. 10 & October 8 (10 am–5 pm EST)
- ❖ RC Webinar – Building Connections Using the Risking Connection Framework, 9/30, (Group cohesion, culture of trust...)
- ❖ RC Webinar – “And How Are the Children?” Wounds of Racial Trauma on Youth and Our Role as Treators, Oct. 16
- ❖ RC Webinar – “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Immigrant experiences of trauma. Nov. 13
- ❖ RC Webinar – The Ripple Effect: 25 Years of Risking Connection, 12/2, 1-5 pm EST, Keynote by Noel Casiano, Rooted in Connection: Fostering Resilience Amid Uncertainty
- ❖ Monthly RC Mindfulness, first Wednesday 12:00-12:30 EST, see Trainer’s Corner



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Widening the Window of Tolerance: Strategies for Individual and Collective Healing

**Risking Connection Trainer
Webinar**

John Engel
Associate Director
Traumatic Stress Institute



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Noticing Exercise



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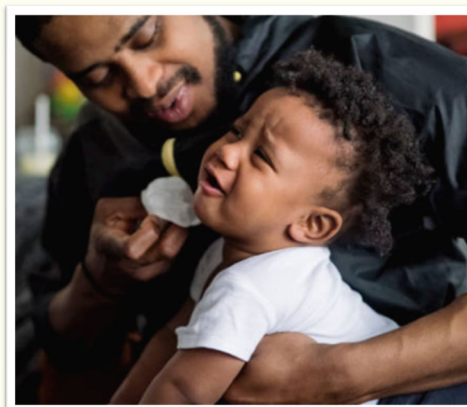
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Window of Tolerance

“The window of tolerance represents the amount of stress one can manage without losing connection to others.”

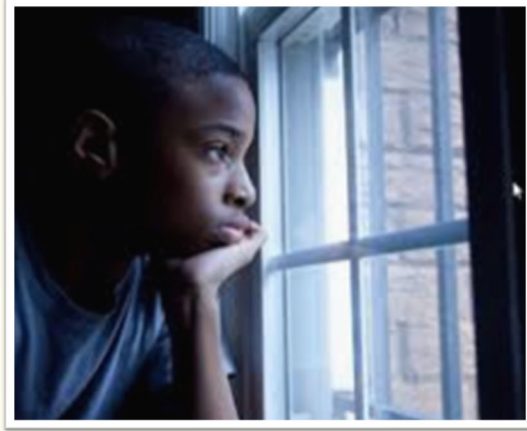


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Poll #1

Window of Tolerance (WOT) – True or False?

- a. The WOT describes the level of stress activation that we can tolerate without moving into a hyper-aroused state OR a hypo-aroused state.
- b. With a healthy WOT, there is a constant but relatively smooth rise and fall in one's stress activation within the window.
- c. With a dysregulated nervous system, the window itself is much narrower, so it doesn't take as much stress or activation to go out of the window.
- d. With a dysregulated nervous system, current stressors can cause abrupt rises and falls outside the window of tolerance.



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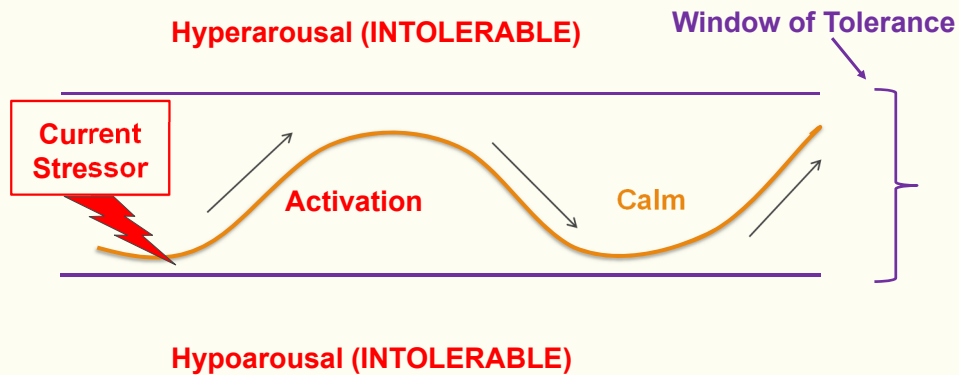


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Threat Response of Regulated Brain



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Siegel, 1999
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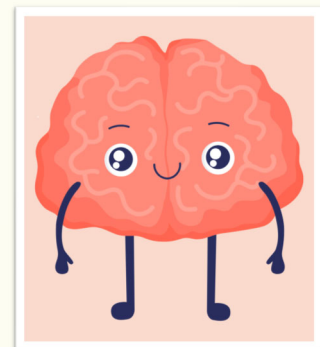


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When Inside the Window of Tolerance

The Thinking Brain and Survival Brain Cooperate

- Assess safety and danger accurately
- Respond to challenges flexibly and appropriately
- Stay connected to others
- Support recovery completely & efficiently



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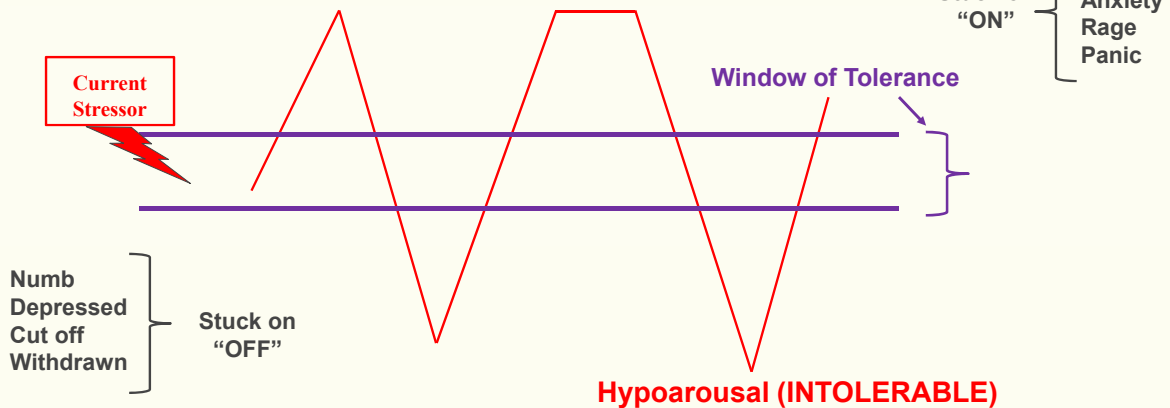
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Threat Response of Dysregulated Brain

Hyperarousal (INTOLERABLE)



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Siegel, 1999

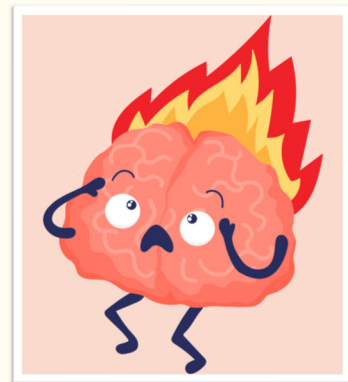


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When outside the window of tolerance

The Thinking Brain and Survival Brain are in Conflict

- Assess safety and danger inaccurately
- Respond to challenges rigidly and inappropriately
- Isolate for protection
- Recovery feels difficult or impossible



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Conditions that narrow the window of tolerance

- Childhood adversity (ACEs)
- Developmental trauma (childhood family)
- Shock trauma (war, wildfire, earthquake)
- Relational trauma (interpersonal violence)
- Chronic stress (racism, pandemic, poverty)
- **Allostatic (cumulative stress) load...**
- **Thinking brain override...**



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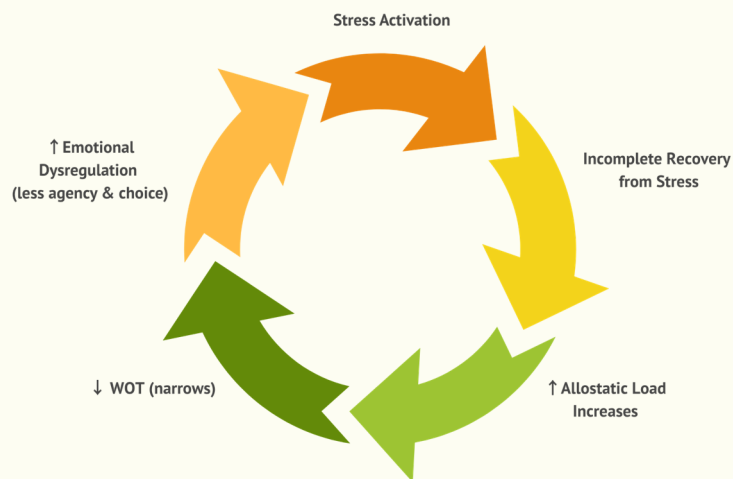


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Allostatic Load Cycle



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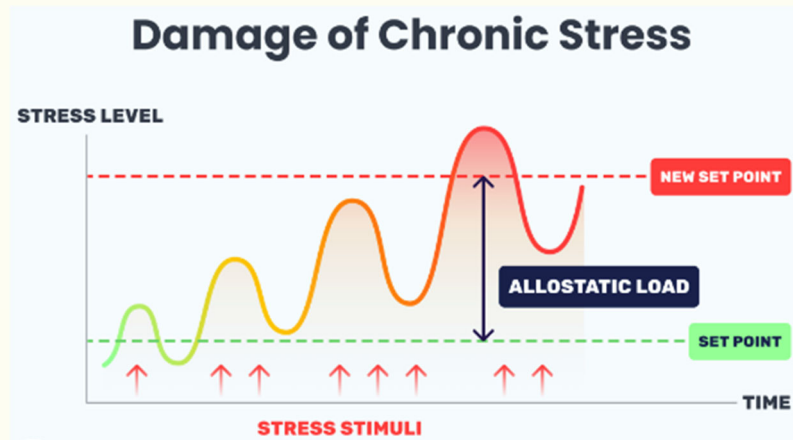


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Allostatic Load



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Noticing Exercise



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Poll #2

Regarding the window of tolerance, in your opinion:

- a. How often do staff and clients at your agency suppress or compartmentalize difficult emotions?
- b. How often do staff and clients at your agency “suck it up” or “power through” when faced with difficult circumstances?
- c. How often do staff and clients at your agency become emotionally dysregulated and temporarily lose access to their thinking brain?



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Thinking Brain Override

- Suppression
- Mindfulness practice
- Compartmentalization
- Spiritual bypass
- “Suck it up”
- Talk therapy (some)
- Goal-setting
- Physical exercise



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Thinking Brain Override Cycle



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Allostatic load

Thinking Brain Override



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Strategies for Widening the Window



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Strategies for Widening the Window

**Strengthening
Inner
Capacities**



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Noticing signs of stress activation

- Faster breathing
- Difficulty breathing
- Faster heart rate
- Nausea/Butterflies in stomach
- Dry mouth
- Clenched jaw
- Racing thoughts
- Rumination
- Anxiety/panic
- Sadness
- Impatience, irritation
- Shame
- Overwhelm
- Restlessness
- Fidgeting
- Sweating



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Contact Points Exercise



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Mindfulness Practices



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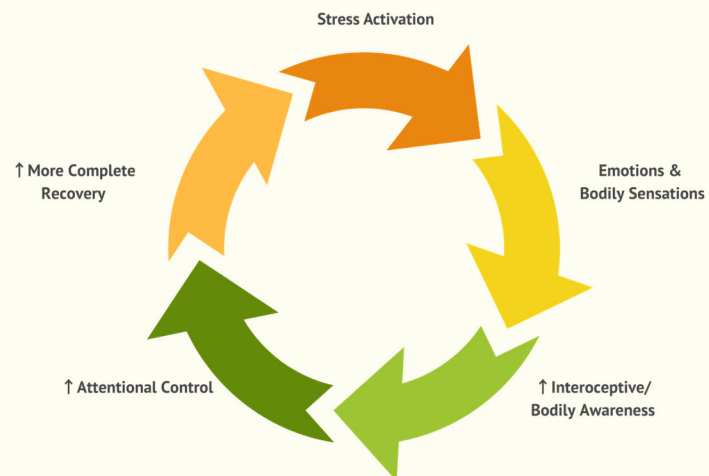


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Widening the Window Cycle



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Completing Recovery from Stress Activation

- Increase capacity for attentional control (**focusing**)
- Increase interoceptive (**bodily sensations**) awareness
- **Noticing signs of stress activation discharge**
- **Practicing discharge of stress activation**



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Signs of Nervous System Discharge/Recovery

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| ▪ Shaking/trembling | ▪ Crying |
| ▪ Twitching | ▪ Laughing, giggling |
| ▪ Slower, deeper breathing | ▪ Yawning |
| ▪ Slower heart rate | ▪ Sighing |
| ▪ Relaxation in the chest or belly | ▪ Stomach gurgling |
| | ▪ Coughing |
| | ▪ Itching |



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Ground and Release Exercise

- A practice for facilitating full recovery from stress activation
- External environment must be safe for full recovery to be possible
- To be used when inside the WOT (not when experiencing stress activation)



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Poll #3

Assessing Sources of Allostatic Load

- a. How often do you feel stress at work in response to the stress of your coworkers and clients?
- b. How often do you feel emotionally drained from empathizing - feeling the emotions of your clients and coworkers?
- c. How often does the volume and pace of work in your agency prevent you from having adequate time to reflect, connect with others, and recover from stressful events?
- d. How often do leaders and supervisors in your agency model plentiful self-care (on and off the job)?



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Stressors Narrowing Our Collective WOT

- **Political Climate** (e.g., disruption, conflict, division)
- **Destructive cultural norms** (e.g., norms that marginalize individuals and classes of people based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc.)
- **Racism** (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, structural, historical, intergenerational)
- **Destructive work and economic conditions**
- **Others?**



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Widening Our Collective WOT

- Structural changes
- Foster healthy workplace relationships (psychological safety)
- Champion practices that build resiliency
- Make self-care (in and out of work) the norm
- **Reduce habitual thinking brain override**
- **Support complete nervous system recovery**
- **Increase attentional control**
- **Increase interoceptive awareness**



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Big Ideas

A wide WOT enhances:

- Decision-making
- Connection
- Self-regulation
- Agency
- Well-being
- Healing



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Big Ideas

We can widen our individual and collective WOT by:

1. Maximizing healthy daily habits
2. Reduce allostatic load and promote complete recovery from stress by:
 - Limiting Thinking-Brain Override
 - Building attentional control and interoceptive awareness through mindfulness practices



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Narrow Window: Dysregulated Stress Response



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Wider Window: Regulated Stress Response



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Resources

Monthly RC Mindfulness: Learn more and register at
<https://traumaticstressinstitute.org/monthly-rc-mindfulness/>

RC Mindfulness Blogs: Visit <https://blog.traumaticstressinstitute.com/blog/tag/mindfulness>

Dr. Dan Siegel at <https://drdansiegel.com/>

Widen the Window: Training Your Brain and Body to Thrive During Stress and Recover from Trauma, Elizabeth A. Stanley, PhD.

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing, David A. Treleaven.

The Window of Tolerance video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZnJMyNT620>



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