



# Trauma, the Body & Healing Through Yoga

Grounded & Embodied Sexual Assault Awareness Event

Colorado State University

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Today, we're exploring how trauma can affect our bodies and how movement, like yoga, can be a tool for healing and regulation. This is a space of safety, choice, and care—there's no 'right' way to participate. Listen to your body and take what feels useful to you.

You are in control of your experience today. If anything doesn't feel right, you are always welcome to adjust, pause, or opt out.

## Understanding Trauma & the Body

### Trauma Lives in the Body

Trauma isn't just a memory, it lives in our bodies. When we experience something overwhelming, our nervous system activates to protect us. Sometimes, our body holds onto that stress long after the event has passed, leading to physical and emotional symptoms.

### Common Signs Trauma is Stored in the Body:

- Muscle tension (tight jaw, clenched fists, stiff shoulders)
- Anxiety or restlessness
- Feeling disconnected from your body
- Difficulty relaxing or sleeping
- Numbness or emotional detachment

**Try This:** **Quick Body Scan** Take a moment to check in with your body. Notice any areas of tension or discomfort. Are your shoulders raised? Is your breathing shallow? Simply observe without judgment.

## The Nervous System & Trauma Responses

Our nervous system responds to stress in different ways:

- **Fight/Flight** (Hyperarousal – feeling anxious, on edge, or restless)
- **Freeze** (Hypoarousal – feeling shut down, numb, or stuck)
- **Fawn** (People-pleasing, over-accommodating to avoid conflict or distress)

Yoga and breath work help by offering tools to regulate these states and return to balance.

### A Few Steps Toward Healing

1. **Self-Compassion** – Trauma responses are biological, not a personal failure. Acknowledge your survival instincts with kindness.
2. **Somatic Awareness** – Learn to recognize signs of stress in your body. Early awareness helps prevent overwhelm.
3. **Attentional Control** – Focus on cues that signal safety, like a deep breath, a comforting texture, or a calming sound.

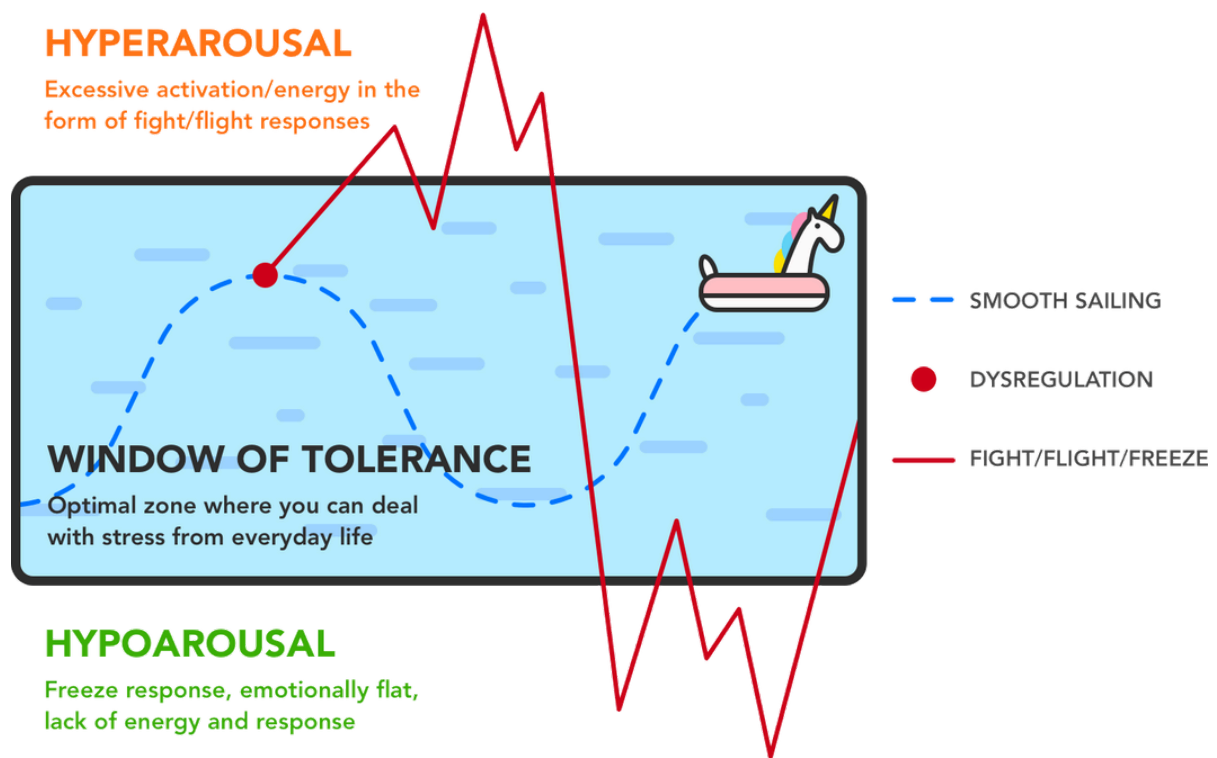
## Understanding the Window of Tolerance

The **Window of Tolerance** (developed by Dr. Dan Siegel) describes the optimal state where we can process emotions and experiences effectively. When we stay within this window, we feel present and engaged. Trauma can shrink this window, making regulation more difficult.

- **Hyperarousal (Above the Window)** – Symptoms include anxiety, panic, hypervigilance, anger, and racing thoughts.
- **Hypoarousal (Below the Window)** – Symptoms include numbness, exhaustion, dissociation, and feeling shut down.

**How Yoga & Mindfulness Help:** Practices like breathwork, grounding techniques, and mindful movement help expand the window of tolerance, making it easier to stay balanced during stress.

**Try This: Reflection:** Think about times when you felt overwhelmed or disconnected. What helped you return to balance? (Pause for personal reflection.)



## Expanding Your Window of Tolerance

Expanding your window of tolerance means increasing your ability to stay regulated during stress. Here are some ways to do this:

- **Mindful Movement (Yoga, Tai Chi, Walking)** – Engaging in gentle movement helps regulate your nervous system and reconnect with your body.
- **Therapy & Support** – Working with a therapist can help process trauma, identify triggers, and develop coping strategies.
- **Breathwork & Meditation** – Deep breathing and mindfulness practices can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation.
- **Healthy Routines** – Prioritizing sleep, nutrition, and hydration supports overall nervous system health.
- **Safe Social Connections** – Engaging with supportive relationships can create a sense of security and belonging.

**Try This:** Identify one practice you'd like to explore to help expand your window of tolerance. Commit to trying it for a few minutes each day.

# WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

The window of tolerance and different states that affect you



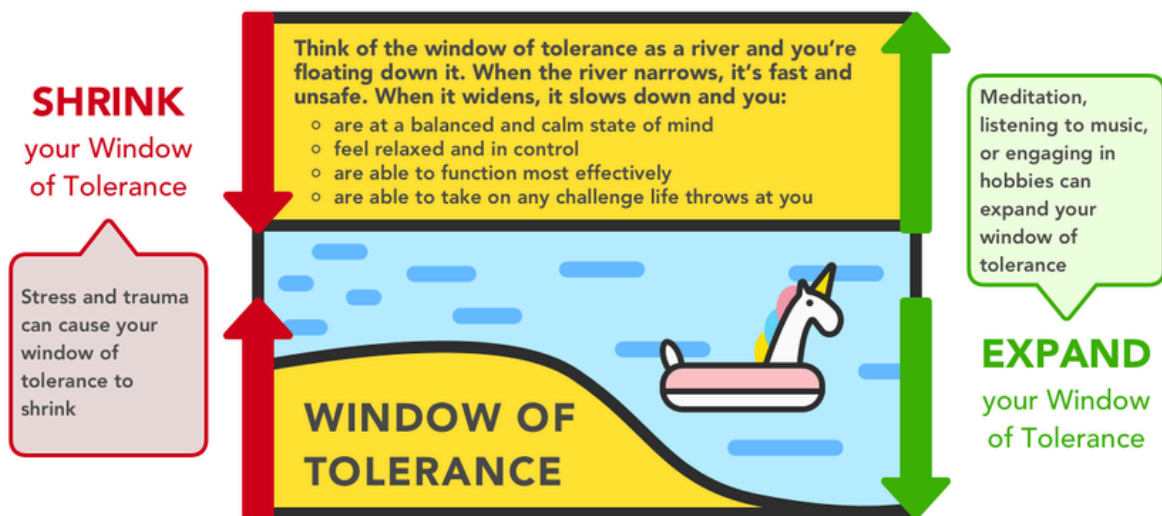
## HYPERAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of increased responsiveness
- Feeling anxious, angry and out of control
- You may experience wanting to fight or run away



## DYSREGULATION

- When you start to deviate outside your window of tolerance you start to feel agitated, anxious, or angry
- You do not feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet



## DYSREGULATION

- You start to feel overwhelmed, your body might start shutting down and you could lose track of time
- You don't feel comfortable but you are not out of control yet



## HYPOAROUSAL

- Abnormal state of decreased responsiveness
- Feeling emotional numbness, exhaustion, and depression
- You may experience your body shutting down or freeze

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## Try This: Grounding with Self-Compassion: "Hand on Heart" (5 min)

Before we begin our movement practice, let's take a moment to connect with ourselves with kindness. We often judge or criticize ourselves, especially in stressful moments. Instead, we can learn to offer care and support to ourselves, just as we would for a friend.

Find Your Base

Sit or stand comfortably. If it feels right, place one hand over your heart and the other on your belly or another grounding surface. Notice the warmth and pressure of your hands.

#### Breathe with Awareness

Take a slow inhale through your nose... and a long exhale through your mouth. (Pause for a few breaths, guiding awareness to the breath.)

#### Offer Yourself Kindness

Silently or aloud, say to yourself: 'I am here. I am safe. I am enough.' Or choose a phrase that resonates with you—perhaps something a loved one would say to comfort you. (Pause to allow repetition.)

#### Acknowledge Your Strength

Whatever you are carrying today, know that you are doing the best you can. If it feels right, take a moment to express gratitude for yourself.

Take one last deep breath in... and sigh it out. Gently release your hands, knowing that this gesture of self-compassion is always available to you. When you're ready, we'll transition into movement, carrying this sense of kindness with us.

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