

What Are Emotions and Where do They Come From?



Feelings and emotions start out as simple sensations in the body, like a clenched jaw. Those sensations increase until our brain finally notices and decides that our pounding heart, dry throat, and butterflies in our stomach means. "I am feeling nervous." Now that we know what we're feeling, we can think about the reasons for why we feel like we do and decide what we can do about it. We might take a deep breath or try to avoid something. If we can **notice** them while they are small, we can catch frustration, boredom, and worries before they are too big to manage on our own. But sometimes we don't notice those sensations until they are much bigger or we don't know what we can do to feel better. It gets harder to pay attention and learning slows down too.

The first step to coping with strong feelings is to notice or become aware of the sensations in our body. Doing short body scans every day can help. As children, it takes a lot of practice, a few times a day. Also, this might feel harder for those of us who learned to cope by trying to ignore how we feel. It can also be hard for people who have had a lot of pain or had to cope with many medical procedures.

What's your body trying to say to you?

A body scan for teens and adults

[Click here](#) for a 13 minute compassionate body scan for teens and adults.

A three minute body scan

[Click here](#) for a 3 minute body scan to cultivate mindfulness.

A body scan for kids

[Click here](#) for an 11 minute body scan for kids.



Comfort Zones and the Window of Tolerance

We all have a window of tolerance for difficulties. This is how much stress we can handle easily, more than what pushes us outside of our comfort zone. We can pay attention and make our best decisions inside the window. Even if we are feeling scared, we also believe that we can be brave or do something to solve our problem or we can take steps to make things easier like taking a break or fighting worries.



Window of Tolerance continued...



But sometimes we don't notice these feelings until they are much bigger. We can't figure out how we feel or we don't know what we can do to feel better. We have moved outside of our tolerance zone. We feel stressed and life suddenly feels hard. Add some more stress and we might find ourselves pushed far outside of our comfort zone. Things may begin to even feel dangerous. We try to get safe and move as far away as possible from the thing that is hurting us. It also gets harder to think and make good decisions. In fact, the part of our brain that helps us to decide what to do during stress gets disconnected from the part that is feeling overwhelmed. It's as if our stressed-out brain has decided that our logical, thinking side is no longer helpful. We get distractible, it's harder to focus and remember what worked the last time we had this problem. It can also be very hard to listen to someone who is giving good advice. We might cry, become very angry, feel that no one can help, or have a meltdown. The problem feels too big.

Knowing where we are helps us decide what to do next.

For when you're just outside your window...

1. It's important to know if we are in or outside of our window of tolerance. It changes all the time. Everyone's window is a different size. Kids' windows are smaller than adults. The sooner you know that you are moving outside the window, the easier it is to find your way back inside. If you are just starting to move outside of your comfort zone, try things to help your body relax, like taking a few deep breaths or talking with someone who cares about you.

Breathing exercises are one of the surest and fastest ways to help bodies relax and slip back into our comfort zone. It also gives our brains a chance to rest for a minute. This makes it easier to pay attention and manage stress. When you breathe to relax, try to pay special attention to your exhales...let each one get longer and slower. Practicing a few times a day, makes these kinds of breaths powerful and over time expands the size of your window.

Some people find it helpful to say a word or phrase to themselves as they exhale... "this too will pass... help me.... peace.... I'm not alone...other people find this hard too..."

[Click here for an introduction to mindful breathing.](#)

[Just Breathe 3 Minute Video](#) (For kids)

2. Too much stress can make us feel alone and isolated, popping us right out of our comfort zone. For children, connecting with a parent or an important adult, is another powerful way back. A 20 second hug, warm glance or a text helps us feel supported again. Sometimes, we can't physically be there for someone who needs us. The Hand over Heart exercise is a good way to virtually connect with someone we love. It's a great tool to use at school or before an exam.

[Click here to try the hand over heart exercise.](#)

Help me feel safe, I'm way outside my window!

3. If stress levels get too high or the problem is very big, we might shutdown or zone out. Things don't feel safe anymore, even a hug could be rejected. Our first steps when this happens is to build feelings of safety and comfort.

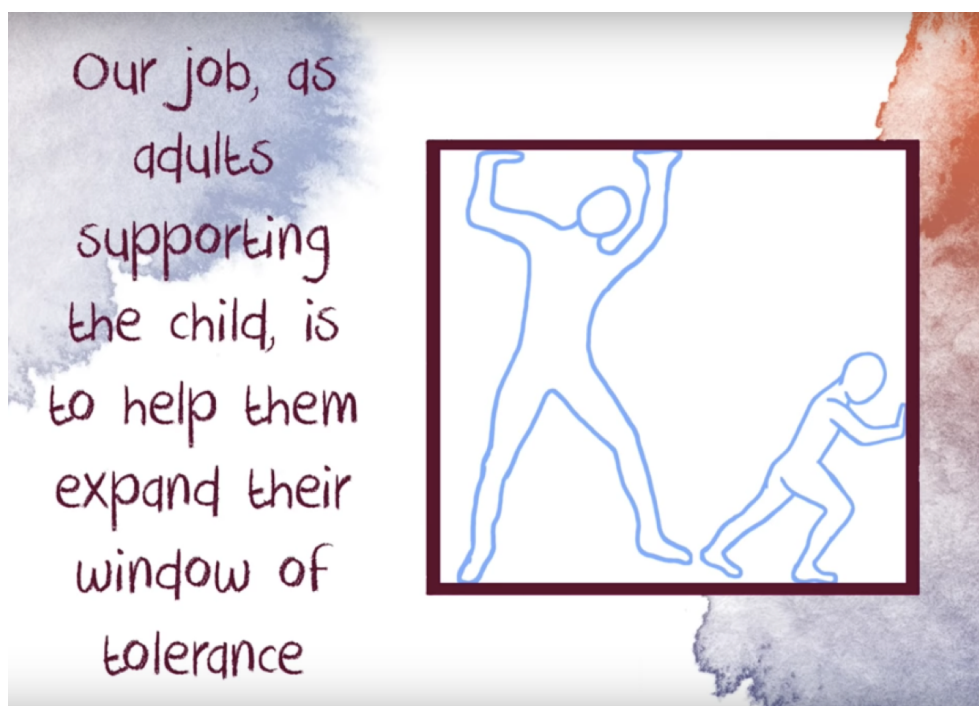
Grounding helps us pay attention to calming body sensations (sight, touch, sound, taste and smell). We might sing a song, rub on some hand lotion or eat a sour piece of candy. We start noticing other more calming body feelings and it helps bring us back to the "here and now", - into the present and away from a scary memory or future worry. It all depends on what we like. Different things work for different people.

The "54321 game" is a common exercise that helps you shift your focus to more comfortable body sensation or feelings. The more you use it, the better it works. You can follow up this exercise with some breathing exercises or do something to help you connect with others (see tips 1 and 2)



[Click here for 54321 Grounding instructions.](#)

4. Try something repetitive and soothing. Rhythm is calming and builds feelings of safety. This includes singing or listening to songs and physical activities like rocking in a chair, playing on a swing or being patted on the back. Free style dancing to favourite songs, martial arts and colouring are also good. These are good short breaks to take when schoolwork is overwhelming too. Zen Tangles, used regularly help with fine motor and visual perceptual skills. Here's a link to some more information: [Zen Tangle Method](#)



[Click here](#) to watch this 6 minute animation from Beacon Hill explaining how parents can help bring their child back into their window of tolerance.

Useful Links:

Just for kids: A comic exploring the new coronavirus

How to encourage good sleep habits for your children during the COVID-19 crisis

Ten pieces of advice for better sleep for our children during this time.

The Neuroscience of Worry During Quarantine

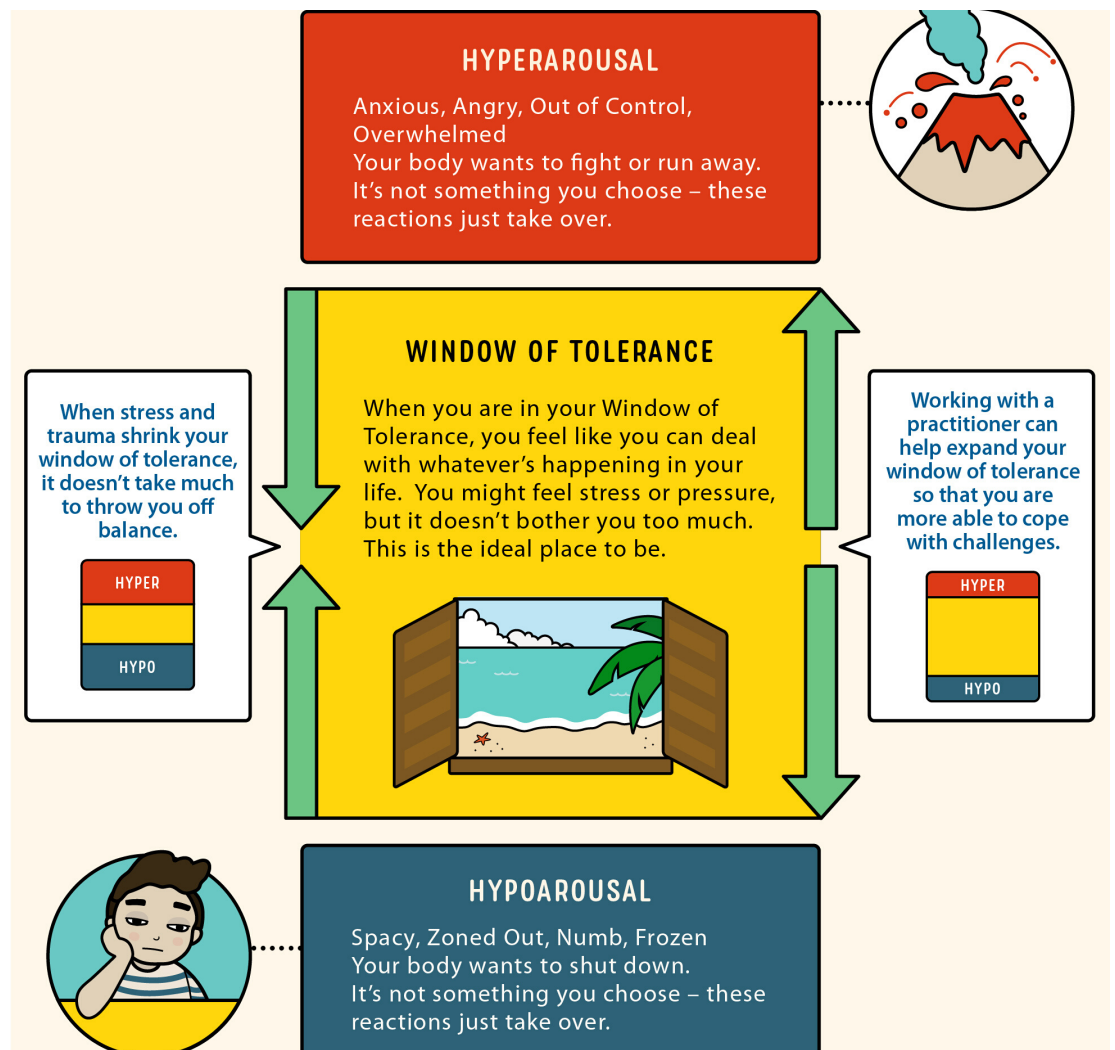
Don't let the long title scare you, Dr. Brewer has some good ideas on how to help with common Covid-19 worries.

How to Make Friends with Your Nervous System and tune into what you need During Quarantine. (7 minutes.)

Some days are more stressful than others... sometimes we need more connection with others, other times we need solitude. The trick is knowing what kind of day we are having before our bodies get stressed out. According to Deb Dana there's no one-size-fits-all answer here... she teaches a simple strategy to help you decide what to do when it feels like you just might only have one nerve left.

A Note For Parents

Sometimes, a picture is a much better way to understand stress, comfort zones, and your window of tolerance. (Image from nicabm.com)



Need more information or help customizing this for your child? Please call 780-652-2414 or email info@kwcsbrainworks.com