

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

### WHAT IS THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE?

THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE (DAN SIEGEL) IS THE ZONE WHERE WE FEEL CALM, PRESENT AND ABLE TO COPE.

### WITHIN THIS WINDOW WE CAN:

- THINK CLEARLY
- RESPOND RATHER THAN REACT
- FEEL IN CONTROL OF OUR EMOTIONS

### WHEN WE MOVE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW, WE MAY EXPERIENCE:

- **HYPERAROUSAL:** ANXIETY, SPIRALLING THOUGHTS, RACING HEART AND EMOTIONAL OVERWHELM
- **HYPOAROUSAL:** NUMBNESS, DISCONNECTION, SHUTDOWN AND FATIGUE

HORMONAL CHANGES, STRESS AND OVERWHELM CAN NARROW THE WINDOW, MAKING IT HARDER TO REGULATE EMOTIONS. BUT WITH PRACTICE, WE CAN WIDEN THE WINDOW AND COME BACK INTO BALANCE MORE EASILY.

### WHY BREATHWORK HELPS:

WHEN EMOTIONS ARE HIGH, THE BODY ACTIVATES THE FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE RESPONSE.

#### **DEEP BELLY BREATHING:**

- STIMULATES THE VAGUS NERVE → SIGNALS SAFETY TO THE NERVOUS SYSTEM
- ACTIVATES THE PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM ("REST AND DIGEST")
- SLOWS THE HEART RATE AND REDUCES SPIRALLING

#### **TRY THIS:**

- INHALE THROUGH YOUR NOSE INTO YOUR BELLY FOR 4 COUNTS
  - HOLD FOR 2 COUNTS
  - EXHALE SLOWLY THROUGH YOUR MOUTH FOR 6 COUNTS
- REPEAT 4-6 TIMES

**HYPERAROUSAL:** ANXIETY, SPIRALLING THOUGHTS, RACING HEART AND EMOTIONAL OVERWHELM



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### TOOLS FOR STAYING IN THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

#### **1. ORIENTING PRACTICE**

GENTLY LOOK AROUND THE ROOM AND NAME WHAT YOU SEE. THIS REMINDS THE BRAIN: "I AM SAFE RIGHT NOW."

#### **2. PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION**

TENSE AND RELEASE ONE MUSCLE GROUP AT A TIME. THIS HELPS THE BODY LET GO OF HIDDEN TENSION.

#### **3. 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING**

- 5 THINGS YOU SEE
- 4 THINGS YOU FEEL
- 3 THINGS YOU HEAR
- 2 THINGS YOU SMELL
- 1 THING YOU TASTE (OR CAN IMAGINE TASTING)

BRINGS YOU BACK INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT WHEN ANXIETY SPIRALS.

#### **4. MOVEMENT**

GENTLE WALKING, STRETCHING OR SHAKING THE ARMS/LEGS HELPS RELEASE "STUCK" EMOTIONAL ENERGY.

#### **5. SAFE PLACE VISUALIZATION**

PICTURE A CALM, COMFORTING PLACE. ENGAGE ALL YOUR SENSES; WHAT DO YOU SEE, HEAR, FEEL? PRACTICING REGULARLY MAKES IT EASIER TO ACCESS WHEN OVERWHELMED.

#### **6. LOGIC JOURNAL**

WRITE DOWN:

- TRIGGER
- THOUGHT
- FEELING
- WHAT'S TRUE?
- WHAT DO I NEED RIGHT NOW?

THIS HELPS BALANCE EMOTION WITH RATIONAL REFLECTION.

### EVERYDAY PRACTICES TO WIDEN YOUR WINDOW

- PRIORITISE SLEEP AND REST
- KEEP BLOOD SUGAR BALANCED (REGULAR MEALS, PROTEIN-RICH SNACKS)
- MOVE YOUR BODY DAILY
- PRACTICE BREATHING/GROUNDING WHEN CALM (NOT JUST IN CRISIS)
- REDUCE STIMULANTS (E.G. CAFFEINE) IF ANXIETY IS HEIGHTENED

### ★ REMEMBER:

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS PREVENT EMOTIONAL HIGHS AND LOWS, BUT YOU CAN TRAIN YOUR BODY AND MIND TO RETURN TO BALANCE MORE QUICKLY. WITH PRACTICE, YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE WILL WIDEN, MAKING LIFE FEEL MORE MANAGEABLE.



## *THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE*

### **WHY PRACTICE CALMING TECHNIQUES IN MOMENTS OF CALM?**

YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM HAS TWO MAIN SETTINGS:

- REGULATED STATE (WITHIN THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE): YOU FEEL STEADY, PRESENT AND ABLE TO COPE.
- DYSREGULATED STATE (OUTSIDE THE WINDOW): YOUR BRAIN AND BODY ARE IN SURVIVAL MODE (FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE).

WHEN YOU'RE ALREADY OVERWHELMED, IT'S VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE BRAIN TO LEARN NEW SKILLS. THIS IS WHY TRYING A BREATHING EXERCISE OR GROUNDING TECHNIQUE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN CRISIS CAN FEEL FRUSTRATING OR "LIKE IT DOESN'T WORK."

### **EVERYDAY PRACTICE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE**

THINK OF THESE TOOLS LIKE FIRE DRILLS: YOU DON'T WAIT FOR A FIRE TO PRACTICE, YOU REHEARSE IN SAFE MOMENTS SO YOUR BODY KNOWS WHAT TO DO WHEN STRESS HITS.

EXAMPLES:

- DOING A 2-MINUTE BREATHING PRACTICE BEFORE SLEEP.
- USING 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING WHILE MAKING A CUP OF TEA.
- STRETCHING OR PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION DURING A WORK BREAK.
- VISUALISING YOUR SAFE PLACE FOR A FEW MINUTES EACH MORNING.

### **THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT:**

- NEURAL PATHWAYS STRENGTHEN WITH REPETITION. PRACTICING WHEN YOU'RE CALM "WIRES IN" THE TECHNIQUES SO THEY BECOME AUTOMATIC.
- THE VAGUS NERVE AND PARASYMPATHETIC SYSTEM RESPOND MORE QUICKLY IF THEY'RE REGULARLY ACTIVATED IN LOW-STRESS MOMENTS.

MUSCLE MEMORY: JUST LIKE LEARNING TO RIDE A BIKE, YOUR BODY REMEMBERS HOW TO SHIFT INTO CALM IF YOU'VE REHEARSED IT.

### **THE GOAL**

NOT TO PREVENT STRESS OR EMOTIONAL HIGHS AND LOWS (THOSE ARE PART OF BEING HUMAN), BUT TO TRAIN YOUR SYSTEM TO RETURN TO BALANCE MORE QUICKLY. OVER TIME, THIS WIDENS YOUR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE, MAKING LIFE FEEL MORE MANAGEABLE.

### **✦ TAKEAWAY MESSAGE:**

PRACTICE WHEN CALM ➤ STRENGTHENS THE SKILL ➤  
BECOMES YOUR DEFAULT IN STRESS.

