Every individual has a unique window of tolerance. When they are within their window of tolerance they feel regulated, calm and able to learn, love and play to the best of their ability.

When something triggers them, making them feel worried or scared, they are pushed outside of their window of tolerance. A child can be pushed just outside of their window, or way outside out of their window, leading to either mild or extreme distress.

A child who has experienced trauma and loss has a narrower window of tolerance compared with children who have had a secure, stable and safe early childhood. In other words, small ‘every day’ triggers can be intolerable and unbearable for traumatised children.

Triggers are unique to each child. When triggered, a child may swing into hyper-arousal and therefore go into fight or flight mode. On the outside they may appear anxious, aggressive, agitated or controlling. On the inside they may feel unsafe, frightened and confused.

The child may also swing into hypo-arousal which means they go into freeze or collapse mode. On the outside they may appear withdrawn, quiet, hard to reach, emotionless, inactive, unproductive and unable to learn, relate or engage. On the inside they may feel flat, disconnected, dead, shut down or numb.

Traumatised children often swing between hyper and hypo arousal. To others, they can appear disorganised and unpredictable but children are adaptive. Their fight/flight/freeze behaviours are organized around reducing their feeling of fear.

Children will need to either be calmed or alerted back into their window of tolerance.
REGULATING BACK INTO THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Here is a range of ideas that our OT’s recommend which may help to calm or alert a child back into their window of tolerance. The key is that they are offered regularly and repetitively at home and at school:

**Fight/Flight** does the child become aggressive, hostile, non-compliant or do they avoid and run away from threatening things?

**Freeze/Collapse** does the child shut down, become withdrawn and disconnected or even paralysed with fear?

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### TRY REGULATING WITH ONE OR A COMBINATION OF THE BELOW

**Fight/Flight**
- SLOW AND RHYTHMIC SEE SAW, SWING OR ROCKING CHAIR
- LEANING OVER/SITTING ON A GYM BALL - GENTLE TO AND FRO MOVEMENTS
- PUSH UPS
- WALL PUSH UPS
- CHAIR PUSH UPS
- WHEELBARROWS
- LYCRA BODY SOCKS/LYCRA TUNNEL/TIGHT CLOTHING
- PLAYING WITH PUTTY AND PRESSING IT INTO A SHAPE
- DEEP HUGS
- SOFT FABRICS
- RUBBING WITH A WARM TOWEL AFTER A BATH
- SLOW CLASSICAL OR INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC
- DIMMED LIGHT
- FAVOURITE FOOD
- VIBRATING TOYS (CAN BE CALMING OR ALERTING)
- VARIOUS TEXTURES OF FABRIC
- VARIED WARM/COLD TEMPERATURES
- CRUNCHY FOODS SUCH AS PRETZELS
- SUCKING THROUGH A STRAW

**Freeze/Collapse**
- SPINNING- (TAKE CARE NOT TO OVER-ALERT)
- FAST RUNNING/SKIPPING /GALLOPING
- ROUGH PLAY
- SPACE HOPPER
- JUMPING ON A TRAMPOLINE
- DANCING TO FAST PACE MUSIC
- CLIMBING
- MONKEY BARS
- LIGHT TOUCH/ BRUSHING
- VIBRATING TOYS (CAN BE CALMING OR ALERTING)
- VIBRATING TOYS (CAN BE CALMING OR ALERTING)
- COOL SHOWER
- LOUD QUICK TEMPO MUSIC
- HIGHER PITCHED NOISES ELICIT ATTENTION SUCH AS FLUTES, CYMBALS, SINGING
- BRIGHT COLOURS
- DAYLIGHT
- BRIGHT MOVING LIGHTS
- CRUNCHY FOODS SUCH AS PRETZELS
- VIBRATING TOYS (CAN BE CALMING OR ALERTING)
- WEIGHT – BEARING THROUGH ARMS (CAN BE CALMING OR ALERTING)

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### HAS THE CHILD RETURNED TO THEIR WINDOW OF TOLERANCE?

**YES**

Brilliant! Make a note of what has worked this time. Remember that you may need to be ready to use an alternative tool, the same tool may not work every time.

**NO**

Try an alternative regulatory tool. Not every tool will work for every child and it will be trial and error in working out what they find regulating.

Relationship is the key to regulation, what is the quality of the adult and child relationship? Does it need developing before regulation can occur?

Does the adult need regulating too? If the adult is outside their own window of tolerance it will be much harder to regulate the child.

If the child can’t regulate easily despite your strategies – it’s okay. Staying with them, being there for them and letting them know you care is the most important strategy of all.

If the child consistently can’t regulate easily despite your strategies, it may be that the child has some specific sensitivities and it may be appropriate to consult an OT for more specific sensory advice.