



WINDOW OF TOLERANCE · FOLLOW-UP

COMING BACK DOWN

Hyperarousal is the too-much state above your window of tolerance: the fight-or-flight gear where the heart races, the chest tightens, and the body braces against a threat. These are body-first skills for discharging that activation and settling back into your window, drawn from Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing.

RECOGNIZING HYPERAROUSAL

SIGNS YOU'RE ABOVE THE WINDOW

- Racing or pounding heart, a tight chest, fast shallow breathing.
- Restlessness, a buzzing urge to move, fight, or get out of the room.
- Racing or looping thoughts, and scanning for what could go wrong.
- A short fuse: irritability and anger that arrive faster than usual.
- Feeling flooded or panicky, like the volume on everything is turned up.

THE IDEA UNDERNEATH

WHY IT STAYS STUCK

- Hyperarousal is survival energy. Your body mobilized to fight or flee a threat, and that takes real fuel.
- When the energy has nowhere to go, it stays stuck and keeps the system on high alert long after the moment has passed.
- Animals in the wild discharge it, a shake or a run, and drop back into calm. Human bodies can do the same with a little help.
- The goal is not to force yourself calm. It is to help the body finish the response and settle, a little at a time.

COMPLETE THE STRESS CYCLE

Emily and Amelia Nagoski's point in *Burnout*: the stressor ending doesn't end the stress; you still have to signal the body that you're safe. Beyond movement and breathing, these help finish the cycle.

FROM NAGOSKI'S BURNOUT

- Laughter, the real belly kind. Even reminiscing about something that cracked you both up counts.
- A good cry, let all the way through instead of cut off halfway.
- Affection: a long hug of about twenty seconds, cuddling, or a few minutes with a pet.
- Creative expression, a few minutes of drawing, music, or writing that moves the feeling into form.
- A warm, ordinary exchange with another person, even a friendly word with a stranger, which tells the body the group is safe.

SKILLS TO COME BACK DOWN

Different from the ones in the Window of Tolerance handout, so you have more to draw on. Use whichever ones help in the moment; you don't need all eight, and not in any order.

- 1 Make the “voo” sound**
On a slow exhale, make a long, low “voooo” you can feel vibrate in your chest and belly. This is Peter Levine’s practice from *Waking the Tiger*: the vibration tones the vagus nerve and settles the gut, which an alarmed body finds hard to ignore.
- 2 Soften and widen your gaze**
Threat pulls your eyes into a narrow, hard focus. Let them go soft and take in the whole room at once, the edges and the space above you included. Wide vision signals to the brain that you are not cornered.
- 3 Slow everything by half**
Deliberately move at half speed: your hands, your steps, your reach for a glass of water. No emergency is made worse by a slower reach, and the slowness itself tells the nervous system the crisis is over.
- 4 Pendulate**
Swing your attention between an activated spot and a calm one, in small doses. For example: your chest is tight and racing, and your feet feel neutral on the floor. Rest on your feet for a slow breath, dip into the tight chest for two or three seconds, then swing back to your feet. After a few rounds the charge in the chest usually eases a notch. Always returning to steadier ground is what lets it discharge without flooding you.
- 5 Add firm, steady pressure**
Deep, even pressure calms an activated system: a firm self-hug with a hand on each opposite shoulder, a weighted blanket, or a pillow held snug against your chest. Steady is the point, not tight.
- 6 Finish the movement**
Hyperarousal often holds a fight-or-flight impulse that never got to finish. Give it a slow, deliberate ending: press your palms outward as if pushing something back, or make a firm “stop” gesture with both hands. Completing the movement tells the body the threat is handled.
- 7 Butterfly hug**
Cross your arms over your chest and tap your shoulders slowly, left, right, left, right, at the pace of an easy heartbeat. The steady side-to-side rhythm is self-soothing and helps an activated system settle.
- 8 Track the sensation**
Rather than fighting the activation, find where it sits most strongly and watch it with curiosity instead of alarm. Notice its size, its edges, whether it moves. A sensation that is met with attention often shifts and eases on its own.

The wave feels like an emergency, but it rises and falls, and it does pass. These skills work best when you practice them calm, so they’re ready when you’re not. Small and often beats waiting for a crisis. If the activation stays high most days, or trauma keeps pulling you above the window, that’s what trauma therapy is for. Adapted from Peter Levine’s *Waking the Tiger* (Somatic Experiencing) and Emily and Amelia Nagoski’s *Burnout*. My Mental Climb is not affiliated with or endorsed by these authors or Somatic Experiencing International.

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