

# Thriving Through Trauma

Week 4: **Triggers/Windows of Tolerance**

Presented by CSUEB Counseling Services



# Safe Person Exercise

Think of an imaginary or real person(s) who is:

**WISE**

**NURTURING**

**PROTECTIVE**

They are well intentioned, know you very well, cannot criticize you and always has something for you.

**EXAMPLES:** family members (not parents), teachers, friend, mentors, public figure, celebrity, literary figures, cartoon characters, religious figure, animals, protector symbols, mythical figures, amalgam of parts of self.

## A Few Zoom Guidelines

- Please mute your audio and type any questions into the chat box
- Your video can be off or on, whatever makes you most comfortable
- Confidentiality and Zoom limitations

## Community Agreements

- Speak to your own experience
- Share headlines, not details
- Step forward, step back
- Ask others before giving them feedback
- Assume positive intent from others
- Take responsibility for your needs
- Commit to all weeks of group
- Any suggestions?



# Weekly Check-In

Name, preferred pronouns, major, favorite tv/ movie/book. **REVIEW: SELF-TALK/COMPASSION**

**How are you (*weather analogy*)? What safe vibing skill did you use this week?**

- ☐ Ask for Help
- ☐ Cry
- ☐ Choose self respect
- ☐ Take good care of your body
- ☐ Compassion
- ☐ Create a new story
- ☐ Structure your day
- ☐ Trust the process
- ☐ Reframe setbacks
- ☐ Focus on now



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# Triggers

What are they & what do they look like?



# About Triggers

## Triggers are:

- Anything that sets off an intense emotional reaction often causing extreme distress or overwhelm (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)
- internal (something that comes from a thought or emotion)
- external (something in the outside world that causes a reaction)

Triggers can be **sudden**.

Triggers can affect your ability to remain **present** in the moment.

It may bring up specific **thought patterns** (eg. from trauma) or **influence** your behavior.

# Reflection: What are your **triggers**?

## **TRIGGERS** LOOK LIKE:

### ☐ **INTERNAL TRIGGERS** (eg)

- ☐ Feelings of anger, anxiety/stress, or sadness
- ☐ Memories
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Feeling out of control
- ☐ Feeling vulnerable
- ☐ Racing heartbeat
- ☐ Physical pain
- ☐ Negative self-talk
- ☐ Intrusive thoughts

### ☐ **EXTERNAL TRIGGERS** (eg)

- ☐ Seeing something on the news or online
- ☐ Watching a movie or television show
- ☐ Certain smells
- ☐ The anniversary of a significant or traumatic event
- ☐ Holidays
- ☐ Visiting a specific place
- ☐ Seeing a certain person
- ☐ Social pressure
- ☐ Relationship conflicts



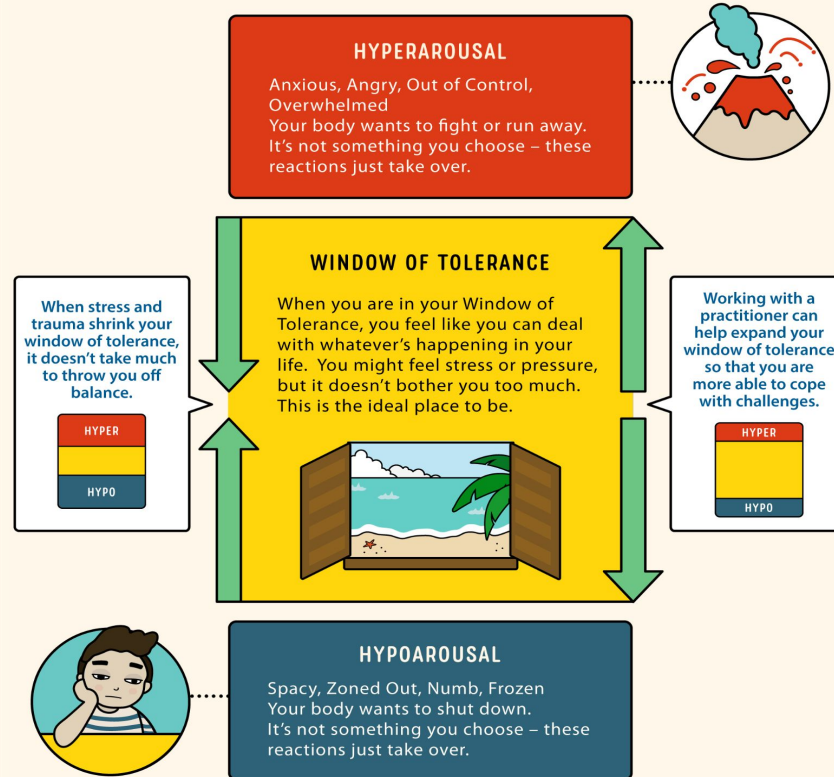
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# Window of Tolerance

Explain



# How Trauma Can Affect Your Window Of Tolerance



# Window of Tolerance

How to get back into our window of tolerance

## Hyperarousal

- Diaphragmatic Breathing
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Drinking water or creating saliva

## Hypoarousal

- Grounding tools (naming, 4 Elements)
- Breathwork
- Physical movement
- Humor
- Scaling

## Widening our Window of Tolerance (eg):

- Regular compassion focused strategies
- Safe visualization/resourcing
- Building social connections
- Practicing mindfulness
- Practicing safe containment
- Processing our trauma

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a hand holding a white feather. Overlaid on the hand is a white circle containing the number 3 in a bold, orange font.

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# Me & My Triggers

Exploring your relationship with your  
triggers

# Evaluate Your Triggers

- It is okay to **sometimes avoid** external triggers
  - as long as this avoidance doesn't negatively interfere with your day-to-day quality of life
- Try to continually **evaluate your triggers** and to **practice good coping strategies** (**widen your window of tolerance**)
- **Strive for Balance:** you may feel too much at times, (hyperarousal) and too little at other times (hypoarousal). To best fight triggers, the goal is balance; practice active awareness, be conscious, and in touch with reality so that triggers do not control you



# Evaluate Your Triggers

**When you find yourself faced with a trigger, do your best to ask yourself the following questions:**

- What type of situation are you in? Are you safe?
- What is happening around you?
- What kind of emotions are you feeling?
- What thoughts are you having?
- What does your body feel like?

Remember, **R**ecognize, **A**cknowledge, **I**nvestigate, **N**urture (**RAIN**)

**What are some ways you can nurture yourself when triggered?**

# 13 Steps to Managing Flashbacks (Pete Walker)

1. **Say** to yourself: "I am having a flashback".
2. **Remind** yourself: "I feel afraid but I am not in danger! I am safe now, here in the present."  
**Remember** you are now in the safety of the present, far from the danger of the past.
3. **Own** your right/need to have boundaries.
4. **Speak** reassuringly to the Inner Child.
5. **Deconstruct** eternity thinking.
6. **Remind** yourself that you are in an adult body with allies, skills and resources to protect you that you never had as a child.
7. **Ease** back into your body. Fear launches us into 'heady' worrying, or numbing and spacing out.
  - [a] Gently ask your body to **relax**: feel each of your major muscle groups and softly encourage them to relax.
  - [b] **Breathe** deeply and slowly. (Holding the breath also signals danger).
  - [c] **Slow down**: rushing presses the psyche's panic button.
  - [d] Find a safe place to unwind and **soothe** yourself
  - [e] Feel the fear in your body **without reacting** to it.

# 13 Steps to Managing Flashbacks (Continued)

8. **Resist** the Inner Critic's Drasticizing and Catastrophizing:

- a. Use **thought-stopping** to halt its endless exaggeration of danger and constant planning to control the uncontrollable.
- b. Use **thought-substitution** to replace negative thinking with a memorized list of your qualities and accomplishments

9. **Allow yourself to grieve**. Healthy grieving can turn our tears into self-compassion and our anger into self-protection.

10. **Cultivate** safe relationships and seek support.

11. Learn to **identify the types of triggers** that lead to flashbacks. Avoid unsafe people, places, activities and triggering mental processes. **Practice** preventive maintenance with these steps when triggering situations are unavoidable.

12. **Figure out** what you are flashing back to. Flashbacks are opportunities to discover, validate and heal our wounds from past abuse and abandonment. They also point to our still unmet developmental needs and can provide motivation to get them met.

13. **Be patient** with a slow recovery process: it takes time in the present to become un-adrenalized, and considerable time in the future to gradually decrease the intensity, duration and frequency of flashbacks.



# Reflect & Debrief





## Reflect & Debrief

### Reflect/ Debrief

Any thoughts? Questions?  
Reflections? Reactions?

### Check Out Question

**1 thing** you are taking away from  
the group and **1 technique** you  
are committing to do for yourself  
this week

# Additional Resources

- **Mental Health apps:** Wysa, Clarity (CBT), Mindshift, MoodTools, Calm, Shine, Happify, Headspace, Days since, IAmSober, Worry Watch, PTSD Coach, DBT Coach
- **Counseling groups** throughout every week
- **Pioneers for HOPE** - support with food and housing @pioneersforhope
- Follow us on **Instagram** - @eastbayshcs
- **Downloadable slides and group handouts**



A top-down view of a person kneeling on a light-colored wooden floor. They are wearing dark pants and a grey shirt. Their hands are placed on a rolled-up green yoga mat, which they are in the process of unrolling. The mat is positioned horizontally in front of them. The background is the wooden floor, which has a light, natural wood grain pattern.

# Next Week: DBT/Mindfulness





# Thanks for Joining!

**See you next week!**

With appreciation to the Allies Program (Sacramento, CA) for formatting this Safe Coping List. © Guilford Press, New York. From: Najavits, L.M. *Seeking Safety: A Treatment Manual for PTSD and Substance Abuse* (2002). Only for personal use with clients.