

Our Window of Tolerance During Covid -19

This situation we find ourselves in is a first for all of us. Understanding our built-in physical and emotional reactions can give us context to what we are experiencing and how to mind ourselves and others in this difficult time.

One insight is from Daniel Siegel's the window of tolerance. This explores how most of the time we stay within a window where we can tolerate emotions, challenges and stress. We are able to think, choose and behave in ways that are useful.

If this window gets smaller or we experience situations that we find extremely difficult to tolerate, we bounce out of this window of tolerance and into a fight or flight response. This means we can be in high alert and read cues from around us that we perceive as threats or unsafe.

Our body and mind react to these cues and we go into survival mode.



Adapted from - Siegel, D. (2009). Mindsight - The New Science of Personal Transformation. NSW, Australia: Scribe Publications.

In survival mode, our body and mind change from being welcoming and social to feeling defensive (Fight mode) or wanting to flee potential threats (Flight mode or Hyperarousal).

When we can't do these things to feel safe, the body can shut down (Freeze or hypoarousal). We can become numb and withdrawn or disconnected. Our thoughts, behaviour and feelings can be on a more reactive level.

Steve Porges talks about how we self-regulate and co-regulate to stay in or get back into the window of tolerance.

A challenge at the moment with the Covid-19 Virus is that we can receive an overwhelming amount of fear related information. Messages of threat are continuously streaming to us through a variety of mediums, closures of places of work and study as well as conversations with each, can result in feeling anxious and stressed.

If in fight mode, we can misperceive interactions with others as also being a threat and we can become defensive. Our angry reaction can then trigger defensiveness or anger in others and they become reactive to us.

Once aware of this we can start to check in with people, clarify the emotion, identify the need, supports each other and feel safe within ourselves.

A second challenge as we socially isolate in order to stay safe, is that the body and mind miss social interactions and cues like a smile, eye contact, tone of voice, a hug that help us regulate ourselves and stay in the window of tolerance.

We are built for social interaction. Do what you can to re-connect with others. Spend time with a pet, smile as you pass people by when out walking or use video technology to talk to friends or family.

By being aware and making small changes, we can calm our body and mind through our interactions.