

The Parenting Pandas Guide to Understanding the Window of Tolerance



SUPPORT • NAVIGATE • THRIVE

Parenting
PANDAS



Welcome I'm Becky



I am the founder of Parenting
Pandas UK.

These guides were created to help
families understand the psychology
behind behaviour, reduce
overwhelm and build connection
through compassionate, evidence-
informed support.
I'm so glad you're here.



You are not alone in this

Small changes, made with understanding
and consistency, can make a big difference



Understanding your child's nervous system and learning practical ways to support emotional regulation.



Have you ever wondered why your child can seem calm one moment, then suddenly become overwhelmed by something that appears quite small?

Many parents tell us:

"It feels like everything changes so quickly."

Understanding your child's nervous system can help make sense of these moments.

The **Window of Tolerance** is a simple way of understanding how our brains and bodies respond to stress. It reminds us that behaviour is often a reflection of what is happening inside the nervous system—not simply a choice.

When we understand this, we can begin responding with greater confidence, compassion and connection.



What is the Window of Tolerance?



The Window of Tolerance is the zone where your child feels calm enough to think, learn and connect.

Children naturally move in and out of this window throughout the day.

The goal isn't to keep them calm—it's to recognise when they need support to feel safe again.



Hyperarousal

Fight Flight Panic Anger Anxiety
"I don't feel safe."



Window of Tolerance

Calm Curious Connected Leaning
Thinking Problem Solving Regulating



Hypoarousal

Shutdown Freeze Withdrawn Exhaustion
"My nervous system is protecting me"

Everyone's window is different.

A child's Window of Tolerance can become wider over time through repeated experiences of safety, connection and co-regulation.

Stress, illness, change and overwhelm can temporarily narrow that window, making it harder to cope with everyday demands.

Recognising the Signs



Every child is different.

These examples aren't a checklist or a progression that every child follows.

They're simply common signs that a child may be moving towards or beyond their **Window of Tolerance**.

Connected



Curious

Chatty

Playing

Flexible

Learning

Connected

Stretched



Becoming anxious

Covering ears

Pacing

Saying "No"

Irritable

Finding transitions difficult

Overwhelmed



Meltdown

Shutdown

Running away

Hiding

Explosive behaviour

Frozen or withdrawn

Instead of asking...

"How do I stop this
behaviour?"

Try asking...

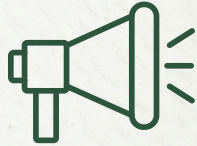
"What might my child's
nervous system need right
now?"

When the Window Becomes Too Full



Sometimes the nervous system moves into a state of high alert.

This is often called **hyperarousal**.



A child may appear:

- Angry
- Anxious
- Loud
- Restless
- Aggressive
- Tearful
- Unable to listen

Although these behaviours can look challenging, they are often signs that the nervous system is working hard to keep the child safe.



When the Window Becomes Too Low



Other times, the nervous system slows down to conserve energy.

This is known as **hypoarousal**.



A child might:

- Withdraw
- Become quiet
- Seem disconnected
- Avoid conversation
- Appear sleepy
- Freeze
- Find it difficult to engage

Children don't always become louder when overwhelmed. Sometimes they become quieter.



What Helps?



Before trying to change behaviour, ask yourself:

“What might my child's nervous system need right now?”

Sometimes helpful responses include:



Reducing demands

Sitting quietly together



Offering food or water

Reducing sensory input



Going for a walk

Using a calm voice

Giving space if needed



Small moments of co-regulation often have a bigger impact than trying to reason during distress.



Co-Regulation Comes Before Self-Regulation



Children are not born knowing how to regulate their emotions.

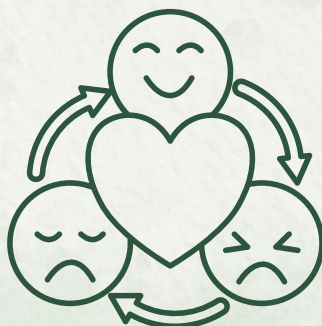
They learn through relationships.



When a trusted adult stays calm, predictable and emotionally available, the child's nervous system begins to borrow that sense of safety.

Over time, these repeated experiences help children develop their own regulation skills.

This is called co-regulation.



A Different Question



When behaviour feels challenging, try replacing:

"Why are they behaving like this?"

with



"What is their nervous system telling me?"

This small shift moves us away from blame and
towards understanding.

Behaviour often becomes easier to understand when
we recognise it as communication.



Reflection



This week, notice:



- What helps your child feel calm?

.....



- What situations increase stress?

.....



- What signs tell you they are becoming overwhelmed?

.....



- What helps them return to a calmer state?

.....



Remember:

Look at your child's behaviour
from a different lens, identify
their invisible window.

One Gentle Thought



"A regulated child isn't a child
who never struggles.

It's a child who has adults helping them
feel safe enough to find their way back."





Key Takeaways



Every child has a unique Window of Tolerance



Behaviour often reflects what's happening in the nervous system.



Overwhelm isn't a choice - it's a sign your child needs support.



Connection and co-regulation help children return to a place where they can think, learn and communicate.

Remember...

You know your child best.

Trust your instincts.

You are doing an incredible job.



With Love and Support,

Becky

Parenting Pandas UK

