

EMBRACING ACCULTURATION, STRESS AND VULNERABILITY

The goal is to create an experience where individuals, with their diverse life stories—including crisis, trauma, or pain—are acknowledged and seen through a lens of compassion and acceptance.

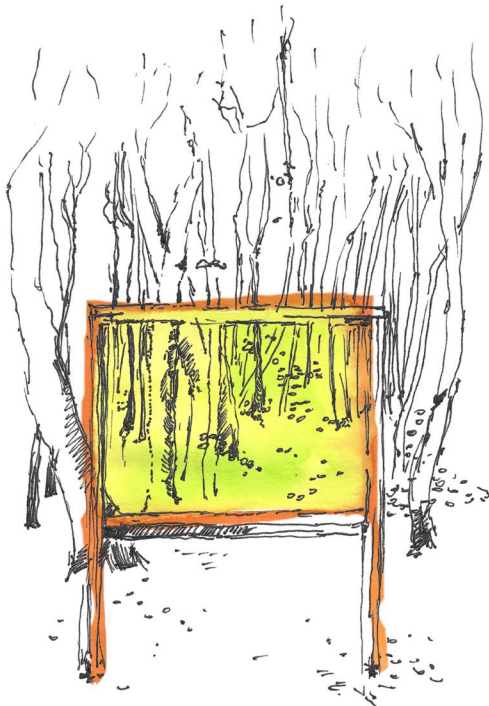
WINDOW OF TOLERANCE

Each of us responds to life's challenges using the resources we have, shaped by our childhood experiences, personality traits, social support networks, material resources, and the unique responsiveness of our nervous system.

Dr. Dan Siegel describes the concept of the Window of Tolerance, **the zone where we feel calm, focused, and in control**. In this zone, we can think clearly and handle stress well.

When we move outside this window, we may:

- Go above it (hyperarousal): feeling anxious, angry, or overwhelmed.
- Go below it (hypoarousal): feeling numb, shut down, or disconnected.



REFLECT:

- What strengths and life forces do you notice in the participants of your walk?
- How can you see each participant as a unique, strong, and resilient tree, able to grow despite what they have been through?
- What can you do to find and nurture such a tree within yourself?

- Stress, trauma, or burnout can narrow this window, making it easier to be pushed outside of it. People who have experienced trauma or stress related to forced migration may have a narrower window, meaning they are more easily thrown into hyper- or hypoarousal.
- With this knowledge, you can prepare your accessible forest practice in a way that feels safe both for you and your participants.

TIPS

- When preparing a nature walk for a vulnerable group, think about **ways to help people feel calmer and more relaxed**. For example, start with light conversation on the way to the forest, share your own connection to nature, or ask participants about their favorite elements of nature.
- **Introduce a simple group ritual** before the walk begins. This could be something like visiting a local bakery to buy warm bread rolls or standing in a circle to take a few deep breaths together. Connecting to the senses helps soothe the nervous system.
- Remember: **less is more**. Participants with a narrower Window of Tolerance may need fewer stimuli and more time to process. Plan shorter walks with fewer activities and allow time for individual reflection or sharing if desired.
- Close each walk in a warm, connecting way – such as **sharing** a picnic and letting participants engage in its preparation.
- Prepare a **list of local or national support organizations** and helpline numbers to share if participants ask for additional help.

EXPLORE

Find a tree nearby that has survived severe weather – like storms, strong winds, or lightning and is alive. Look at this tree with compassion and admiration.

- What strengths are you noticing in this tree?
- What life forces have helped it survive and grow despite its challenges?

Try to draw this tree symbolically, capturing its strengths and life forces.