

Working within the Window of Tolerance

David Sisco & Marcia Lesser

	Effects on the Body	Effects on the Voice	Physiological Adjustments	Vocal Adjustments	Intention Adjustments
toward Hyper-arousal <i>(Mobilization, fight or flight, sympathetic)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Racing brain, manic, unfocused responses ● Fidgeting in various parts of the body ● Clenched jaw, tightening of muscles, squeezed butt or thighs, rigid spine and alignment ● Vigilant scanning of others or space, narrow, hard focus in eyes ● Uncomfortable body heat ● Erratic breathing ● Anger, defensiveness, reactivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Locking or increased contraction of the diaphragm ● Increased breath pressure and closed quotient ● Effortful singing and challenging registration shifts ● Jaw and tongue tension ● Manipulated or manufactured sound ● More vertical (note-to-note) singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sitting in a chair and finding where body is accepting support ● Connecting to inner body, what feels good or okay ● Body scan beginning at feet and moving up through entire body ● Finding a “safe enough” place through visualization of a person or animal ● Start vocalizing in chair, continuing the feeling of support and ‘okayness’ <p style="text-align: center;"><i>It is helpful to work in this particular order to begin finding regulation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lower breath engagement through floor work or sit-up exercise in chair ● Hiss (or exhale into fist)/sing alternating ● Aspirate onset and/or fall-off on release ● “Bowed staccato,” encouraging throughline and lightness ● Falsetto down into head voice (male-identifying) ● Chant the lyric on one note in the lower register, closest to speech, then transition to singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Simplify circumstance by asking for no more than 2 sentences of an embodied explanation. ● If circumstance is about taking back power, ask where in the body this need is (e.g. a burning in the stomach, butterflies in the chest) ● Encourage the student to find the courage to express oneself in the immediate risk of the given circumstance
Optimal Arousal	<p style="font-size: 1.2em; margin: 0;"><i>The Window of Tolerance</i></p> <p style="margin: 0;"><i>In a regulated system, the embodied singer finds the capacity to hold both excitement (sympathetic) and dampening (parasympathetic), which allows them a “safe enough” place to find resilience, presence, and expressive freedom in their performance.</i></p>				

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<p>toward Hypo-arousal <i>(Immobilization, shutdown, or freeze, parasympathetic)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slight lean backward or legs and arms not “online” ● Issues of posture in the upper body (e.g. head, neck, shoulders) due to a lack of leg engagement ● Insufficient energy ● Slow respiration ● Cold hands and feet ● Spaced out, flat affect, blank or foggy eye gaze ● Movements of arms are from elbows down with no connection to upper arms and back ● Spine going towards collapse ● Apathetic, passive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of breath proper engagement (either through collapse or locking) or clavicular breathing ● Decreased or increased closed quotient due to the lack of proper air speed ● Slow or controlled vibrato ● Jaw and/or tongue tension ● Challenging registration shifts ● Lack of sustainable resonance pattern ● More vertical (note-to-note) singing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Activate legs through stretching and lightly patting them ● Use lunges while singing to activate legs and core ● Adjust stance by placing yoga block between the legs to release hips and engage legs ● Push against wall or person to activate core and arms/upper body. Push must begin from back (shoulder blades) ● Chair work (see above) ● Bend legs and lift heels off the ground until legs begin shaking. The arms should be outstretched forward, hands flexed ● Place the singer against the wall, supported by mid-sized rubber ball between the shoulder blades to open chest ● Place small towels in the armpits when arms are hanging and ‘lifeless.’ ● Swing arms side to side with fists closed and legs hip width apart. Increase intensity/speed ● Extend arms from shoulder blade to third finger in slow, easy motion with an awareness of the arms connected to the scapula/wing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hiss (or exhale into fist)/sing alternating ● Mouth words while exhaling, as if singing, to bring breath online ● “Bowed staccato,” encouraging throughline and lightness ● Place thumb behind top teeth and down the length of the chin to release chin down/back ● Release tongue forward on bottom lip and articulate normally while slowly allowing tongue to relax into proper position ● Sing on [lɑ] to release jaw and tongue ● Invest in consonants as a way of maintaining breath flow through the phrase ● Temporarily increase the tempo of ballads to speed up air flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Define clear given circumstances (objective, stakes, etc.) ● Create a clear “other” so the singer has an outward focus ● Utilize action verb cards, having students change their action everytime they inhale ● Engage “1, 2, 3” focus exercise to change intention and increase breath flow ● Play with the “dimmer switch,” exploring lighter and darker actions ● Look for activation in arms and legs and encourage them to follow their impulses (e.g. moving forward, raising arms, etc.)

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Recommended Reading

1. Allal, Linda. 2020. "Assessment and the co-regulation of learning in the classroom." *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, Vol. 27, no. 4, 332-349 DOI: 10.1080/0969594X.2019.1609411
2. Barrett, Lisa Fedlman. 2021. "Your Brain Predicts (Almost) Everything You Do." Mindful.org, April 29, 2021. <https://www.mindful.org/your-brain-predicts-almost-everything-you-do/>.
3. Dana, Deb. 2021. *Anchored: How to Befriend Your Nervous System Using Polyvagal Theory*. Boulder, CO: sounds true.
4. LaDyne, Rebekkah. 2020. *The Mind-Body Stress Reset: Somatic Practices to Reduce Overwhelm and Increase Well-Being*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
5. Simpson, Fay. 2019. "Rewiring Stage Fright: A Neuroscience and Art Conversation with Fay Simpson and Marcia Lesser." *Lucid Body*, February 7, 2019. <https://lucidbody.com/blog/rewiring-stage-fright-a-neuroscience-and-art-conversation-with-fay-simpson-and-marcia-lesser/>.
6. Treleaven, David. 2018. *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
7. Wilson, Deb Em. 2023. *The Polyvagal Path to Joyful Learning: Transforming Classrooms One Nervous System at a Time*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.