

## **Building the tool box: Using your Crystal ball, and predicting your child's trigger moment**

### **PREPARATION; PREPARATION ; PREPARATION**

Most of us spend most of our time with children reacting rather than being proactive. When we react, it is usually when we are starting to feel annoyed and stressed about a behaviour challenge. As you feel annoyed your arousal level goes up, and so does your level of adrenalin. When this happens, you start to drop IQ points, losing 20 at your angriest. This means that you also lose problem solving strategies. As your child's arousal level increases, your arousal level increases, both of you lose IQ points and both of you lose problem solving strategies and become more rigid and act on impulse.

The best way to avoid acting on impulse is to start to learn to predict your life. This means on the big scale, thinking about trips and holidays and predicating how your child will react, but for a positive life it means proactively thinking every morning about what the day involves, predicting how you and your child will manage this and then planning to manage this.

Often parents at the end of therapy find that they have hard times still, usually these hard times are now predictable, but they failed to predict them; failed to plan accordingly; and so, the day was a wash out.

Let me give you just one family's experience:

#### **Trip to the zoo**

After a disastrous trip with their children the previous year to the zoo, this family sat down, and problem solved all the trigger points that had made it such a terrible day.

They identified that queueing was an issue for their children, so they bought tickets in advance

Their children couldn't cope when they got hungry, this triggered a memory of eating out of rubbish bins. So, they took food with them, for the car and inside (even though the rules were no eating)

They realised that the children were anxious about new things. So, they spent time looking online at the venue, they printed off a map and agreed the route round, what they would look at and how they would manage this.

They realised that on the journey home they often had a blowout due to tiredness and their children not feeling good enough for fun. So, they left in good time and avoided tiredness, and they used PACE to explain that their children were good and that it was sad they felt they weren't.

**THEY HAD A GREAT DAY**

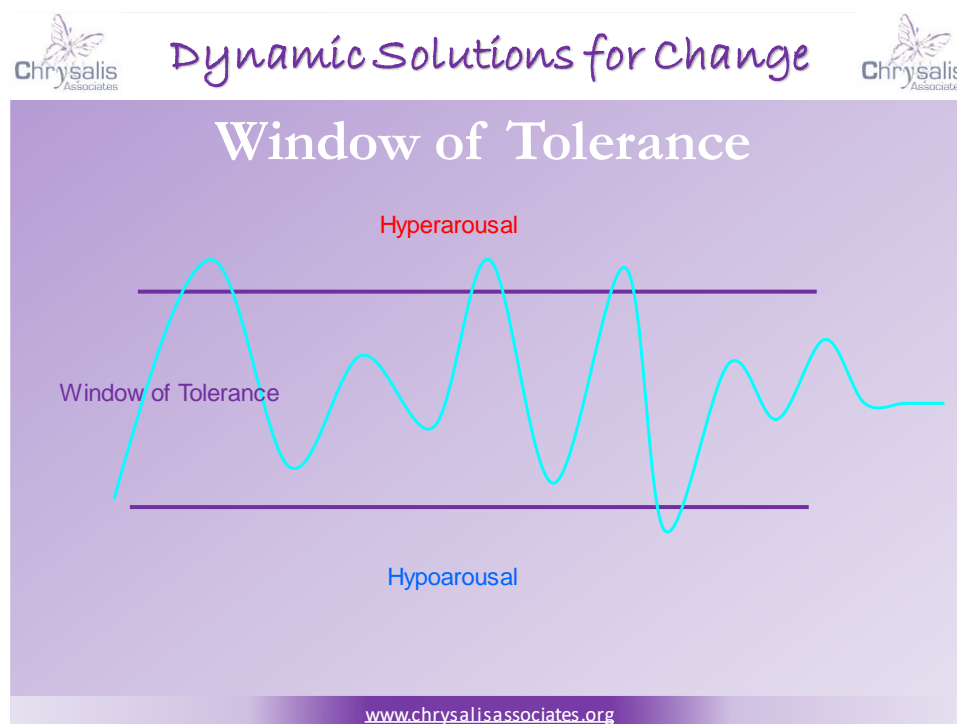
## Arousal levels; the best place to intervene and when not to even try

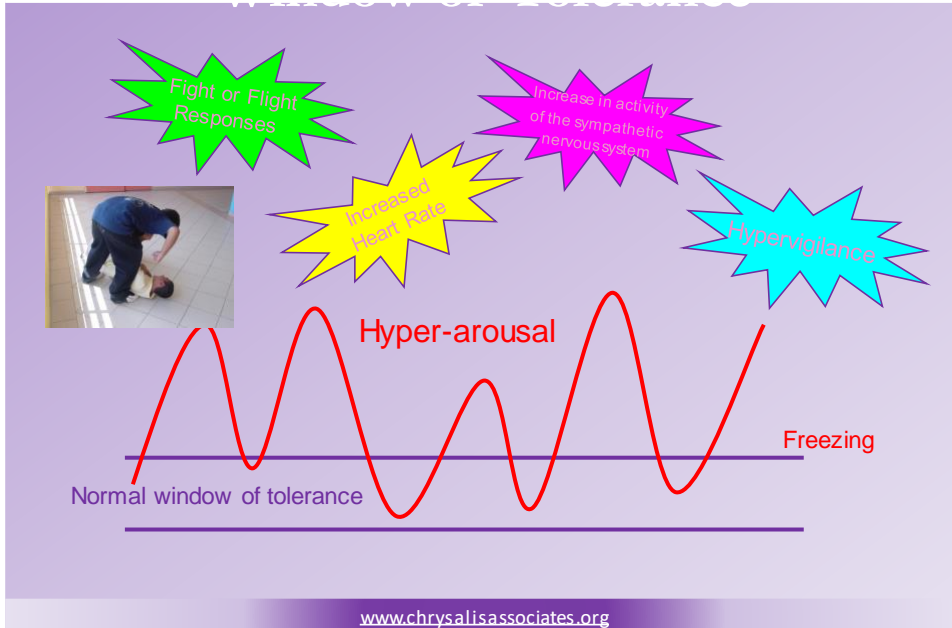
It's important that you start to understand how your child's chemical, arousal level changes in the day based upon how they're feeling.

For most of us we travel through our day within our window of tolerance and this means that whilst we have day to day challenges that make us become hyper or hypo aroused, we remain in our window of tolerance and are able to stay more or less calm with whatever life throws at us.



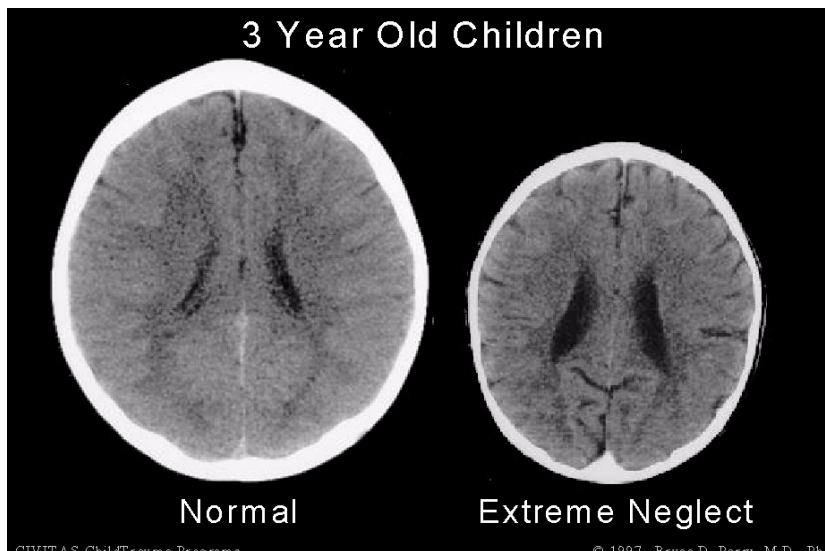
But, just think back the glass. Your child's brain has been exposed to an excess of stress hormone and this has worked to reduce their window of tolerance to become much smaller than yours.



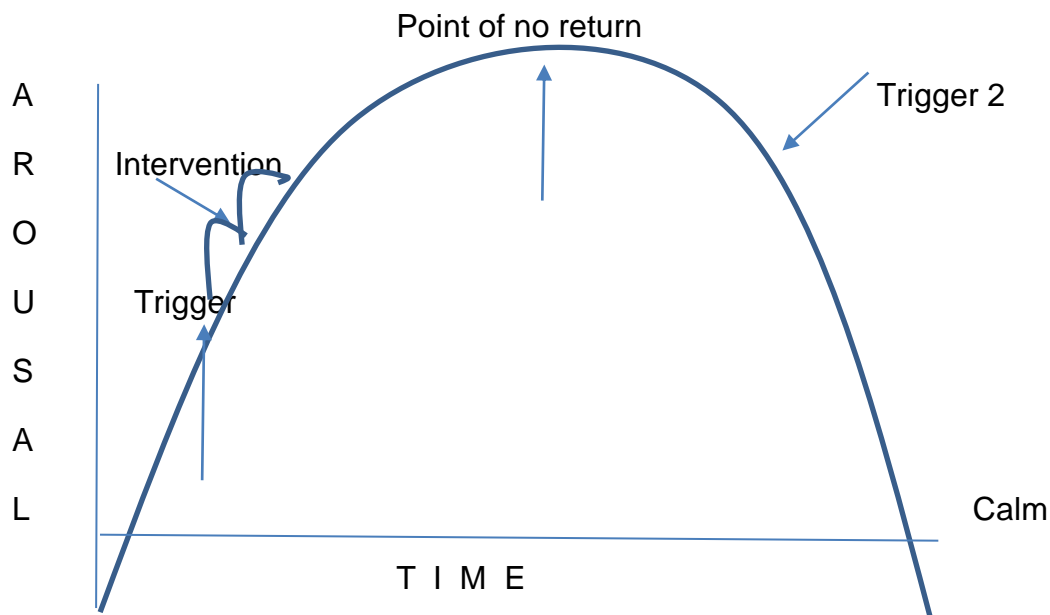


Combine this with the fact that the lack of stimulation as a baby and toddler meant that the frontal lobe of your child's brain did not develop the skills to down regulate once it up regulated, the outcome is a much-reduced window of tolerance, with a low threshold when triggered.

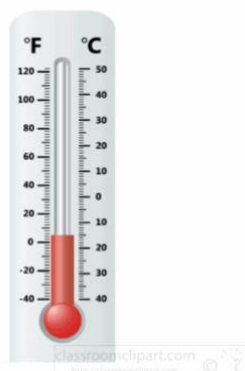
**THIS MEANS THAT YOUR CHILD'S BRAIN IS BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE!**



Now that you've worked out some of your child's triggers, we now need to estimate how long you have, to do an intervention before the explosion or withdrawal happens.



As you can see, over time (which may feel all too short) your child's arousal level will start to increase after it's been triggered, you have a window of opportunity in which you can use several levels of intervention. If this doesn't work, your child's arousal level will reach critical, and an outburst of emotion will occur



Once this happens, you have reached the point of no return and there is really no strategy that will help you here other than keeping you and your child safe.

After the explosion, your child's arousal level will plateau, they may not be shouting or angry, but their level of stress hormone is still strong, they will then start to come down. This is the moment many parents make the mistake of intervening. Often parents experience their child as having tantrums all day, this is because as their arousal level starts to come down you have tried a sanction, or a conversation when their adrenalin is still quite high. It is important that you wait until their arousal levels are back to near normal for them before you try to intervene in any way, or you will trigger another explosion and another, and that will be your day set for you.

So, let's break this down into bite sized pieces;

- triggers
- how big is the gap between the trigger and the point of no return?
- how long does your child stay at their top level of arousal

So, how can you use this to help you to plan for a fun day out, family event or just a trip to school in the morning? Planning in what you know about your child's arousal levels means that you can have a fun day.