

TRAUMA IMPACT ON LEARNING AND CREATING STABILITY

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Lecture contents

- **Traumatic events and sense of security**
 - **Why trauma breaks human security**
- **How and why traumatic events impact learning**
 - **Impact on cognitive, emotional and social functioning**
- **Re-creating sense of security**
 - **Stabilizing, relaxation and window of tolerance**



Trauma breaks down early learned sense of security



We learn early:

- Trust in others
- Impacting others
- Calming down
- Seeking help

Trauma activates:

- * Explanation models
- * Helpseeking
- * Emotion regulation
- * Grief and loss

Adult Attachment:

- * Mental health problems
- * Reorganizing of emotions
- * Access to resources



How trauma impacts learning I

Cognitive development (Ehlers & Clark, 2000; Dalgleish, 2004; Saigh, 2006;)

Memory: Sensomotor-procedural predominates (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, smell, taste)

- **Autobiographic memory:** Narratives, episodes & emotional meaning are compromised
- **Attention:** Narrowed, distorted towards threat, danger & helplessness
- **Appraisals:** Pessimistic future, mental inflexibility & dyster world view
- **Attribution:** World as unsafe place, parents are not able to protect, people's motivation are malvolent



How trauma impacts learning II

Affects, feelings, emotions (Cicchetti, ; Shore, 2001; Cross, 2003). E

- **Emotion regulation:** Either numbing or escalating of feelings (hypo- vs. hyper-regulation)
- **Attuning:** Problems in calming down, difficulties in self-soothing
- **Overwhelming arousals and fears**
- **Lack of synchrony:** e.g., high physiological arousal and low emotion expression
- **Repertoire:** Narrowing emotion expression, fear and hate dominate
- **Emotion recognition:** (1) Difficulty recognizing own and other's feelings (2) trauma makes children 'experts' in recognition: abused -> angry faces



Posttraumatic stress disorder PTSD

-> Child development features

Intrusive symptoms – re-experiencing trauma

Young children: Repetitive and ritualistic play

Bad dreams without recognisable content

Adolescents: Reenacting trauma scene, risk behaviors

Avoidance of trauma reminders

Withdrawal symptoms

Emotion numbing

Arousal and hypervigilance for danger

Young children: Difficult to soothe

Adolescents: Irritability, aggressiveness, vigilance

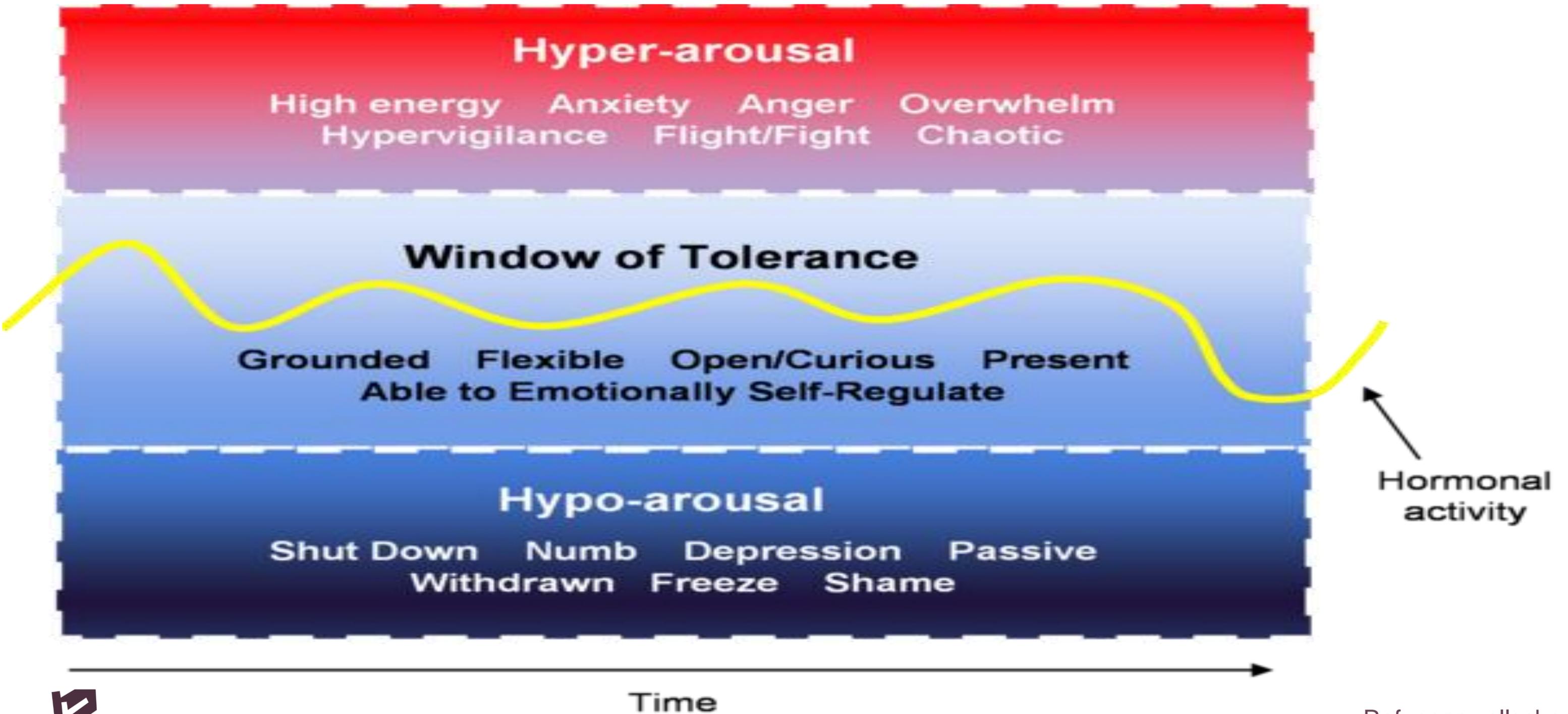


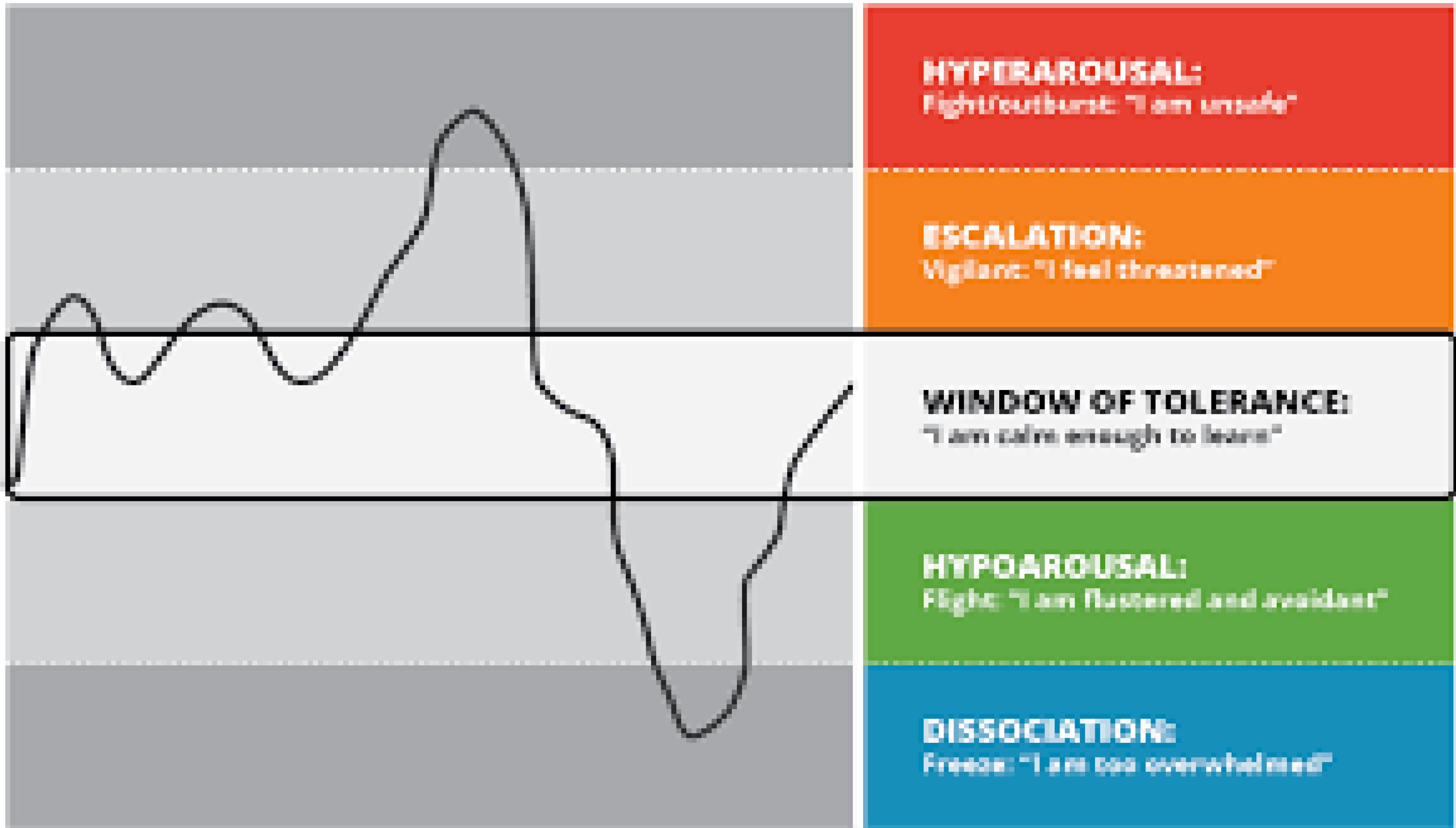
Window of tolerance: A visual tool to stabilize arousal

- **Students with both too high and too low arousal face difficulties in learning**
- **The visual tool helps finding the zone of optimal arousal in which students are able to function most effectively**
- **When students are within the optimal zone, they are able to readily receive, process, and integrate information**
- **Fining optimal window of tolerance help students respond to the demands of everyday life and avoid difficulties**
- **Learning about own window of tolerance space quarantees feeling safety and sense of security**



Window of tolerance @ Psychology Today





Exercise: How to find own coping mechanism to regulate over- and under arousal

Describe yourself when you have the **OPTIMAL AROUSAL/ALARTNESS – Beautiful window of tolerance**

- How does it feel? What do you think? How does the optimal state of alertness feel in your body? How do you maintain the optimal alertness?

Describe yourself when you are in the **HYPER AROUSAL STATE**

- How does hyper-arousal feel? What do you then think? Where does the hyper-arousal feel in your body, and how?
- Describe your breathing.
- Tell what causes you to have the **HYPER AROUSAL STATE** ?
- Give examples of situations that cause you hyper arousal state (in school, with peers, home, when remembering something)
- What issues help you to return to the **OPTIMAL AROUSAL STATE** ?

Describe yourself when you are in the **HYPO AROUSAL STATE**

- Tell what makes you to withdraw? What causes your low mood and lack of energy?
- Give examples of situations that cause you hypoaousal state (in school, with peers, home, when remembering something)
-  Where in your body you feel the hypo arousal? How does it feel? What do you think?
- What issues help you to return to the **OPTIMAL AROUSAL STATE** ?

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