



Relational Forest Therapy and the Way of the Guide

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ANFT's theory of forest therapy differs from original concepts pioneered in Japan and Korea and now adopted by many other organizations.

This presentation is about the similarities and differences between ANFT's and more typical approaches to forest therapy.






Two World Views that express themselves in many ways.

Scientific medicine has a *public health* view of medicine. Research is empirical, meaning that only what can be perceived through the senses is considered “real.”

Indigenous and folk medicine has a *relational* view of medicine. Research is experiential: stories that accumulate over time have tendencies to self-organize into cohesive narratives that are considered “real.”



Standard theory of forest therapy

Forest environments provide multiple factors that counter stressful ways of living and support human well-being.

ANFT theory of forest therapy

The standard theory is correct; the ANFT theory is “yes and...”

All species are suffering as a result broken relationships between humans and the more-than-human world.

The background of the slide features a warm, golden sunset sky. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of tree branches and leaves are visible, creating a layered, naturalistic effect. Two light blue rectangular boxes are positioned in the center, each containing text.

Public Health

The correct dose of an appropriate substance or activity can strengthen resilience, improve immunity, and support healing.

Relational

Cultivating and tending a web of relationships extending beyond other humans helps strengthen our feelings of belonging, purpose, and fulfillment.

A photograph of a forest floor covered in vibrant green moss. A tree trunk with light-colored, peeling bark is visible on the left side. The background shows more moss and some small green plants.

public health

The forest is often described as if it is a collection of resources for human exploitation in service of human health.

Relational

The forest is seen as sentient, conscious, a network of animals and plants that respond to each other in meaningful ways, and that are kin to humans.

The health of the forest and the health of humanity are inseparably linked.



Public health

Improvements in physical and psychological health result from contact with nature through five senses.

Relational

A web of meaningful relationships with the more-than-human world is cultivated through a “Heart Sense.”



Public Health

Health experts know what positive outcomes are desirable and how to support their emergence.

Relational

Guides explicitly do not know what is needed by each person. guides support individuals in their unique discovery that happens as a result of the relationships they build within the forest.



A photograph of a forest floor with moss-covered ground, tree trunks, and fallen branches. Two semi-transparent light blue rectangular boxes are overlaid on the image, each containing text.

Public Health

Biological and psychological human health factors are supported by safe, relaxed contact with nature.

Relational

Through contact with nature, we remember who we are, how we belong in the world, and what our purpose is.

WAY OF THE GUIDE

The forest is the therapist; the
guide opens the doors.

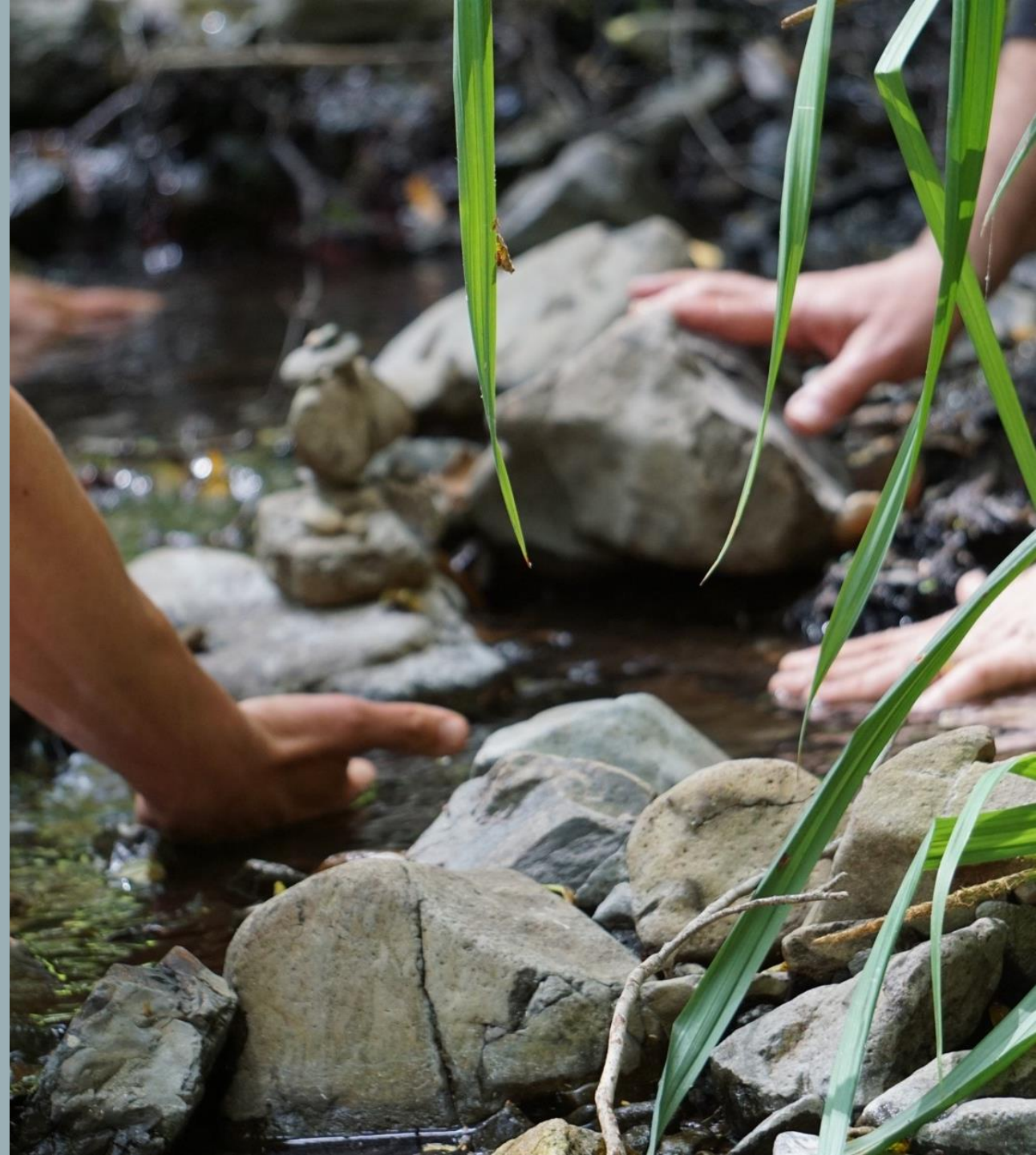


GUIDE TRAINING: NO PRESCRIBED OUTCOMES

Each person is unique

With a unique destiny.

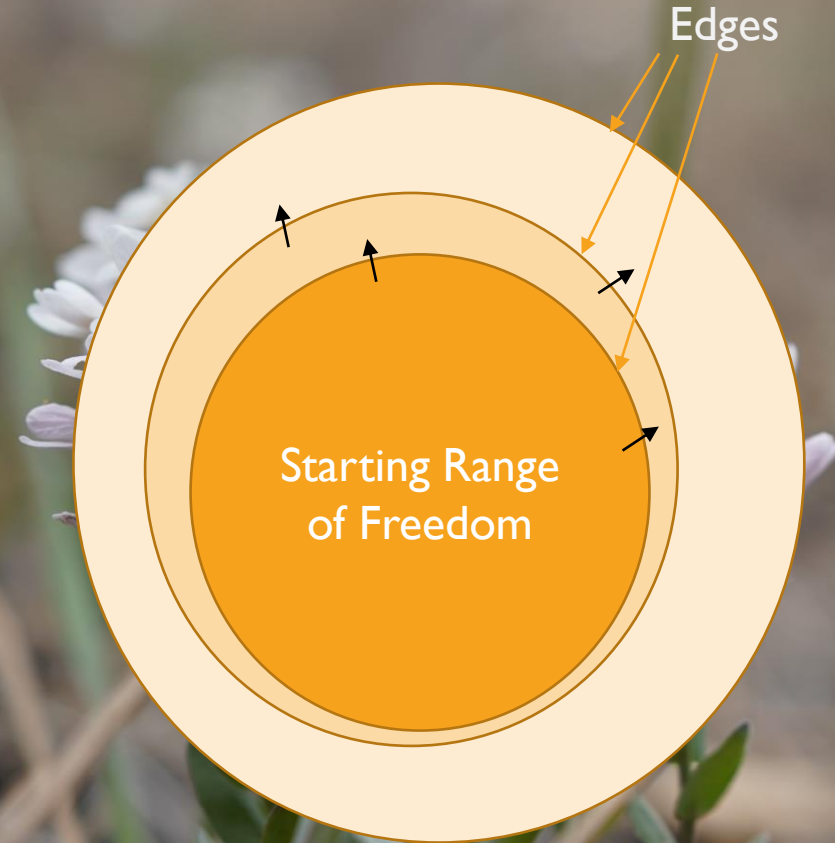
*We don't know what those who come to be guided need
from the forest.*



THE PROCESS:
INCREASE RANGES
OF FREEDOM

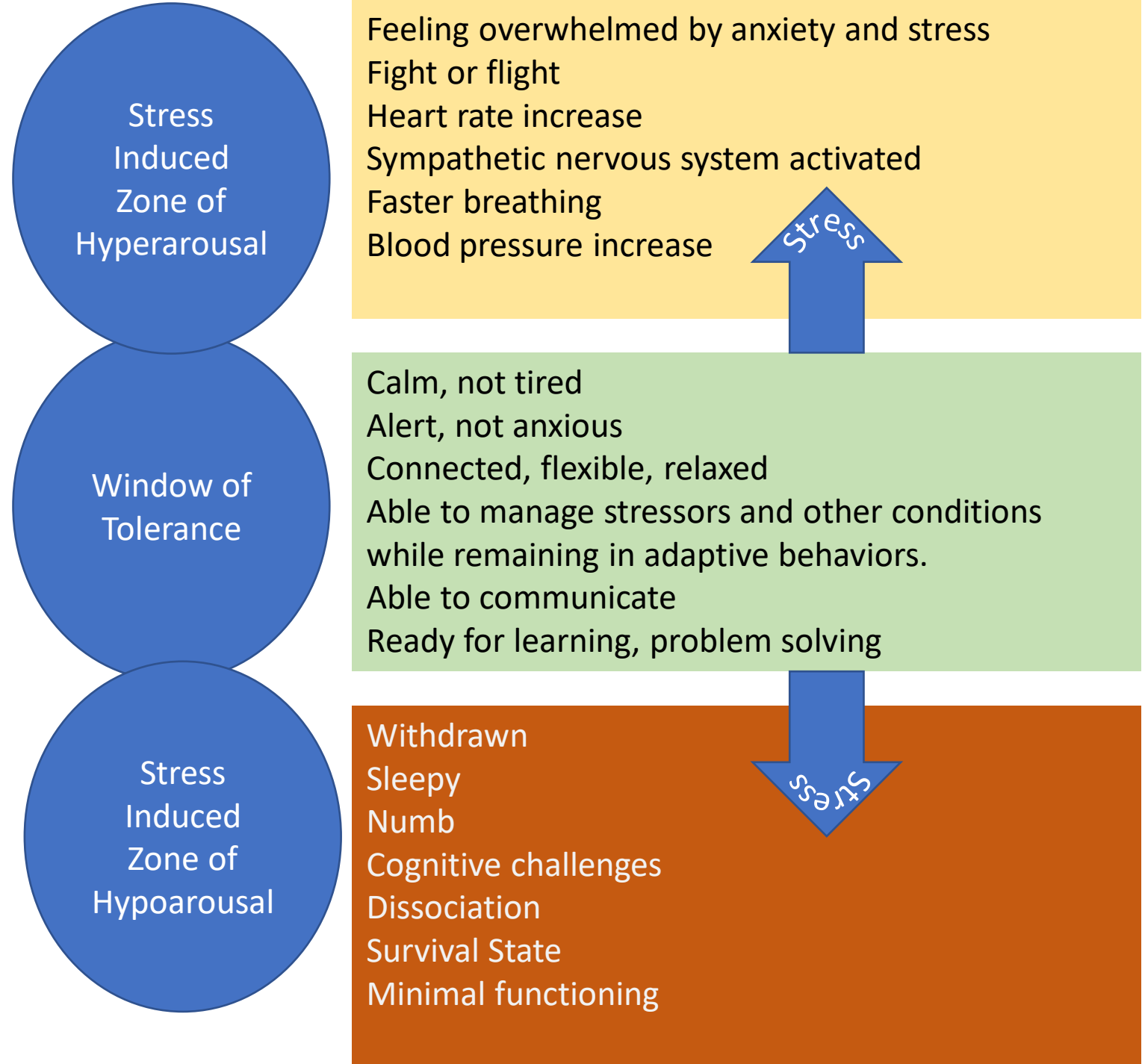
*As we expand our
mental, emotional,
spiritual freedom we can
better explore the world.*

*This increases the
chances that we will
encounter forgotten
aspects of our truest
selves.*



The window of tolerance

This concept was developed by Dan Siegel, MD, and refers to the ideal emotional zone that a person needs for optimal functioning. If you're within your optimal tolerance zone, you feel grounded and can manage your emotions effectively.



ONE TYPE
OF EDGE JOURNEY:

FROM “I CAN’T” TO “I CAN”



FIND THE RIGHT EDGE

One step outside the window of tolerance

Knowledge

Competence

Confidence

Emotional Comfort

Self-disclosure

Openness to novel and new experience

Sense of Reality



GUIDE TRAINING: LANGUAGE OF INVITATION

Invitations bring us to edges

Given using skillful phrasing

No forcing or coercion

No expected outcome



GUIDE TRAINING: IMAGINAL EXPERIENCE

The Imagination is a powerful capacity
That gathers impressions from the forest
And can interpret them as messages,
Conversations, guidance.

Imaginal experience can easily take us beyond
familiar territory, across edges, into expanded
freedom.



GUIDE TRAINING: THE PARTICULAR MEDICINE OF EACH GUIDE

We are not here to train you
to guide the way we guide.

We are here to train you
to guide the way you guide.



A three-hour forest therapy walk
Using the Standard Sequence
Is an ideal container
For the practice of guiding.

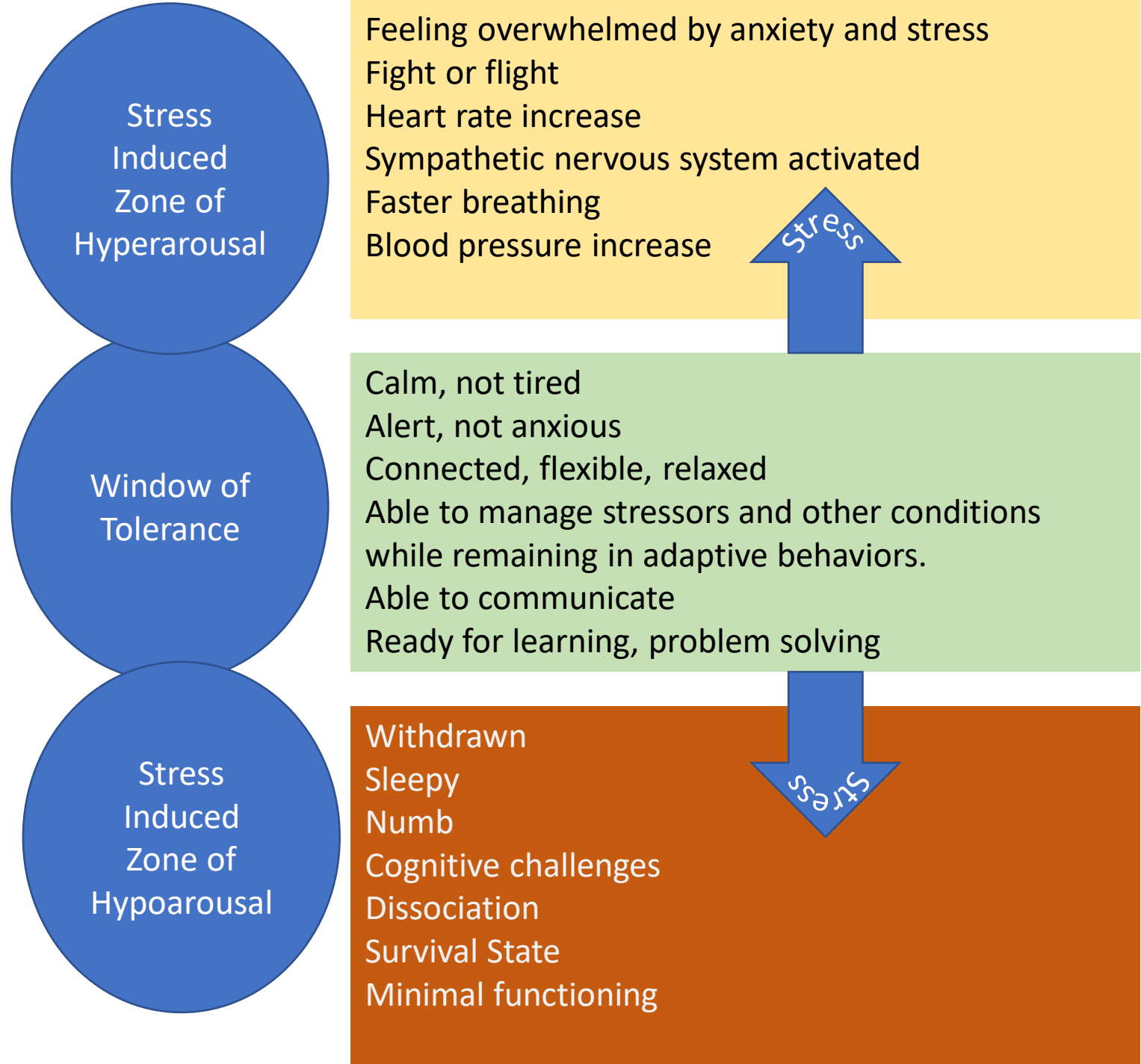


Research Ideas

Does window of tolerance expand as forest therapy experiences accumulate?

Do people gain more of a sense of purpose?

Do people feel that they are able to be more effective in life in circumstances that in the past may have been disabling?



HEALTH BENEFITS

Reduces Stress

Improved immune functioning

Improved cardiovascular
Function

Improved moods

Improved cognition

MORE BENEFITS

Sense of connection to nature

Reconnecting to inspiration

Remembering what is important

Refocusing life purpose

Spiritual support or awakening

HOW FOREST THERAPY IS DONE

Relaxing in natural environments

Taking time: 3 hours to walk 300 meters

Focus on the senses and body

Playful interactions with nature

Making creative art with natural elements

Child play: feet in the mud, staring at clouds

Sitting quietly doing nothing

FOREST THERAPY MOTTOS

It's more about being here than
about getting there

The forest is the therapist, the
guide opens the doors

The forest has your back

It's Zen...until you say so.

With deep gratitude to the forests of
the world and all those who love them

And to the researchers, trainers, policy
makers, program developers and
practitioners who are listening to the
forests

And to those who have hosted me in
my travels and generously shared their
expertise and wisdom



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