



Brief Behavioral Skills: Distress Tolerance Resources and Acknowledgements

Resources

- **Treatment Manuals**
Linehan, M. <https://blogs.uw.edu/linehan/treatment-manuals/>
- **MHIP Toolkit**
Comtois, K. (2010) DBT Distress Tolerance Skills <https://vimeo.com/61764159>
- [Improve the Moment Worksheet](#)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following for their support in the development of these training materials:

- Kate Comtois, PhD; CHAMMP University of Washington
- Stacy Shaw-Welch, PhD; Evidenced Based Treatment Centers of Seattle
- University of Washington AIMS Center
- Mental Health Integration Program
- Community Health Plan of Washington
- Public Health – Seattle & King County

IMPROVE THE MOMENT WORKSHEET

ADVANCED DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

Gloria Whelchel, LPC

IMAGERY

1. WHEN RUMINATING ABOUT THE PAST

a. Remember & LIST times/things you did you're proud of or at which you were successful.

- _____
- _____
- _____

b. Remember & LIST any good memories or people from your past who were kind/helpful.

- _____
- _____
- _____

c. Safe Place (describe) _____

FLASHBACKS

a. When having flashbacks, imagine each memory:

- being encased in a balloon and, when you pop the balloon, the flashback explodes.
- being encased in a piñata. When you break the piñata, what will come out of it?

b. When having flashbacks:

1. Imagine yourself shrinking the images and memories that come into your head and then picking them up and putting them in a tiny box & burning it or in a bottle.
2. Imagine changing the colors in the images to black & white.
3. Imagine making the images out of focus or turning them upside down.
4. Imagine turning the volume down or increasing the speed to chipmunk speed.

c. When having flashbacks:

- Imagine yourself surrounded by the police, army, or whatever forces you need to be in control of this memory and make things happen in your imagination the way you wished it could have happened years ago. Who would you bring with you & what would they do?

2. WHEN RUMINATING ABOUT THE FUTURE

a. Play the positive "What if..." Game and imagine good things happening.

- What if _____ [something good] happened?
- What if _____ [everything turned out better than I hoped]?
- Ask what am I able to do now? What is needed? Let go of the impossible.

- b. IMAGINE (Yourself as a superhero able to “save the day” and vanquish all the bad guys).
 - What super powers would you have? _____.
 - What would your “Super” name be? _____.
 - What kind of costume would you wear? _____.
- c. What if you over-extended your catastrophizing & imagined adding lots of silly things to the story your mind is trying to tell you?
- d. What if your wildest & best fantasy came true? What would happen?

MEANING

1. WHY IS THERE SUFFERING?

- a. What do you believe about suffering? Does it have a meaning? A purpose?

“Remember that by trying to find positive things about our distress, we are not denying that things are bad, or trying to say that distressing things are not distressing. We are trying to Improve the Moment, to find some things that help us feel better in the moment.” Lisa Dietz

2. HISTORICAL EXAMPLES:

- a. Holocaust – Jews given homeland after almost 2,000 years. Victor Frankl.
- b. Depression – FDIC created, beautiful buildings, learned to live simply.

3. EVERYDAY EXAMPLES:

- a. Are you seeing something more clearly? Have you learned something?
- b. Has this brought you closer to anyone or finally ended a toxic relationship?
- c. Has this encouraged you to use your DBT Skills more?

PRAY

1. WITH WORDS

- a. Why me prayer? Do this now and see how you feel? _____
- b. Distress prayer. Beg for help or release? Do this now and see how you feel? _____
- c. Acceptance prayer. Ask for the courage & peace to accept and acknowledge what is. Do this now and see how you feel? _____

- 2. List examples of when your “higher power” has entered your life & answered your prayers or the prayers of someone you know. _____

RELAX

1. WHY?

- a. You'll be able to focus & concentrate better.

2. HOW?

- a. Progressive Relaxation
- b. Abdominal Breathing (breathe out first)
- c. Use all the self-soothing skills.
- d. Is there a problem that could be solved now?

- 3. Accepting with the body can help accepting with the mind.

ONE THING AT A TIME

1. BE ONLY IN ONE TIME PERIOD AT A TIME

- a. Be present "NOW". Being in the "now" allows you to let go of anger, shame, worry...
- b. Let go of the past and future—ruminating increases suffering. Exercise instead.
- c. Use grounding skills when distressed.
 - (1) Sing a song & stay with each note & word.
 - (2) Balance egg on short side
 - (3) Memorize something important to you.
 - (4) Count all the squares, triangles, rectangles, circles within your vision.
 - (5) Count all the red, blue, yellow, green, orange, brown, black, purple items you can see.
 - (6) Choose a random object, like a paperclip, and try to list 20-30 possible/crazy uses for it.
- d. Do Body Sensations Mindfulness
- e. Do Inside/Outside and Urge/Action Mindfulness Exercises
- f. Sit and listen to "now".

VACATION

1. MINI BREAKS

- a. Pick the right time, not when you must meet a deadline.
- b. Make them 5-10 minutes.
- c. Don't take too many vacations at once.
- d. Do what you would suggest your best friend should do. Be kind to yourself.

2. Take a vacation from adulthood.

- a. Get another to take over your duties—short term.
- b. Time out to regroup.
- c. Plan in advance how & when & who will help.
- d. Avoidance = chaos (running away vs. planning vacation).

ENCOURAGEMENT

1. CHEERLEADING STATEMENTS

- a. I can do it. Say to yourself what you'd say to encourage another.
- b. I can win.

2. REMEMBER CHEERLEADERS DON'T YELL:

- a. You "might" do it.
- b. You'll probably lose, but it won't hurt to try.

3. BELOW ARE SOME GOOD AFFIRMATIONS TO READ TO YOURSELF WHEN DISCOURAGED?

1. This situation won't last forever.
2. I've already been through many other painful experiences, and I've survived.
3. This too shall pass.
4. My feelings make me uncomfortable right now, but I can accept them.
5. I can be anxious and still deal with the situation.
6. I'm strong enough to handle what's happening to me right now.
7. This is an opportunity for me to learn how to cope with my fears.
8. I can ride this out and not let it get to me.
9. I can take all the time I need right now to let go and relax.
10. I've survived other situations like this before, and I'll survive this too.
11. My anxiety/fear/sadness won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now.
12. My anxiety/fear/sadness won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now.
13. These are just my feelings, and eventually they'll go away.
14. It's okay to feel sad/anxious/afraid sometimes.
15. My thoughts don't control my life. I do.
16. I can change different thoughts if I want to.
17. I'm not in danger right now.
18. So what?!
19. This situation sucks, but it's only temporary.
20. I'm strong and I can deal with this.
21. I am a valuable and important person, and I'm worthy of the respect of others.
22. I am my own expert, and I allow others the same privilege.
23. I can express my ideas, and others need to respect my point of view.
24. I am aware of my value system and confident of the decisions I make based on my current awareness. I am doing the best I can.
25. I have a positive expectancy of reaching my goals, after all, I've gotten things far against all odds and I am not willing to give up the good fight.
26. I have pride in my past performance and a positive expectancy of the future.
27. I do many things deserving of compliments even though it is hard to hear them.
28. I feel warm and loving toward myself, for I am a unique and precious being, ever doing the best my awareness permits, ever growing in wisdom and love.
29. I am actively in charge of my life and direct it in constructive channels. That is why I come to therapy and DBT Skills group. My primary responsibility is for my own growth and well being (the better I feel about myself, the more willing and able I am to help others.)
30. I am my own authority (and I am not affected by negative opinions or attitudes of others.)
31. It is not what happens to me, but how I handle it, that determines my emotional well being.
32. I'm a success to the degree that I feel warm and loving toward myself.

33. No one in the entire world is more or less worthy, more or less important, than I.
34. I count my blessings and rejoice in my growing awareness.
35. I am an action person; I do first things first and one thing at a time.
36. I am warm and friendly toward all I contact; I treat everyone with consideration and respect.
37. I am kind, compassionate and gentle with myself.

PANIC LIST FOR DISTRESS TOLERANCE

Believe it or not, even the worst or most ridiculous of the suggestions below that sound stupid usually help a little, and the best skill of all is to wait 15 minutes, and then ask yourself if you can wait another 15 minutes, and so forth.

WHEN YOU FEEL ANGRY, FRUSTRATED, RESTLESS

1. Squeeze ice hard (this really hurts). Put ice on a spot you want to harm.
2. Bite into a hot pepper or chew a piece of ginger root.
3. Rub liniment or Vicks Vapor Rub under your nose.
4. Take a cold bath/shower.
5. Scream or scream-sing your favorite song.
6. Stomp your feet on the ground...a lot.
7. Cover your arms with a layer of Elmer's glue and let it dry (or dry it with a hairdryer if you are impatient). Slowly, gradually pick the glue off your skin.
8. Try to balance an egg on its short side.
9. Memorize a poem or prayer or Scripture.
10. Flatten aluminum cans for recycling, seeing how fast you can go.
11. Rip an old newspaper or phone book apart. Shred documents one-by-one.
12. Throw ice against a brick wall.
13. Crank up the music and dance.
14. Stomp around in heavy shoes.

WHEN YOU FEEL DEPRESSED, SAD, MELANCHOLY, UNHAPPY

1. Use self-soothing skills.
2. Research something that interests you on the web.
3. Write in your journal answering these questions:
 - a. Why do I feel I need to hurt myself? What has brought me to this point?
 - b. Have I been here before? What did I do one time that made me feel better?
 - c. What would I wish I had done four hours from now?
4. Make a list of the things you are grateful for. Start with the easy things. You might want to begin with "I'm grateful for my non-toothache." Then go wild. "I'm thankful that I can walk" or whatever is appropriate to you.

WHEN YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED OR OBSESSED WITH NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

When you are "triggered", often that younger part of you becomes present and is unaware that it is now 2010. Doing things that focus on child-like needs and behaviors often is exactly what is needed.

1. Watch a funny or cartoon movie.

2. Watch a children's programs
3. Color in a coloring book.
4. Go outside and swing, play on monkey-bars, ride a skate-board, "play".
5. Find an old photo of yourself and create a fanciful and fun story about that child. Spend time developing that part of the story in which your character finds answers to life's problems and discovers the gateway into "fun".