

Distress Tolerance Skills



STOP Skill

Stop - Do not just react. Stop! Freeze! Do not move a muscle! Your emotions may try to make you act without thinking. Stay in control!

Take a step back - Take a step back from the situation. Take a break. Let go. Take a deep breath. Do not let your feelings make you act impulsively.

Observe - Notice what is going on inside and outside you. What is the situation? What are your thoughts and feelings? What are others saying or doing?

Proceed mindfully - Act with awareness. In deciding what to do, consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people's thoughts and feelings. Think about your goals. Ask Wise Mind: Which actions will make it better or worse?



For and Against

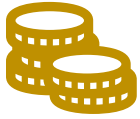
Use for and against any time you have to decide between two courses of action. An urge is a crisis when it is very strong and when acting on the urge will make things worse in the long term.

Make a list of the For and Against of acting on your urges. These might be to engage in dangerous, addictive, or harmful behaviours, or they might be to give in, give up, or avoid doing what is necessary to build the life you want to live.

Make another list of the For and Against of resisting your urges, that is, to tolerate the distress in the short term and not give in to your urges.

Use the grid below to evaluate both sets of For (Pros) and Against (Cons):

	For (Pros)	Against (Cons)
Acting on Strong Emotional Urges	For acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.	Against acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.
Resisting Acting on Strong Emotional Urges	For resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.	Against resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.



TIP - Changing Your Body Chemistry to Calm Down Fast



Temperature Reduction – Hold your breath and splash cold water on your face for 30 seconds or hold your breath and hold a cold pack on your eyes and cheeks for 30 seconds. (Keep water/temperature above 50°F). This triggers your “dive response,” where your heart rate slows down, blood flow is redirected to the brain and heart, which reduces the level of distress and intensity.



Intense Exercise - Engage in a brief bout of intense exercise, to use up your body’s stored physical energy. E.g. running up and down the stairs a few times, jumping on the spot until out of breath, going out for a brisk walk or run etc. Using up energy in these ways starts to metabolise the adrenalin and cortisol involved in intense emotion and, thus, will reduce the level of distress and intensity.



Paced Breathing – Breathe deeply into your belly. Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down, to about 5 or 6 breaths only per minute. Breathe out more slowly than you breathe in, for example, 5 seconds in, 7 seconds out. This helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system which brings feelings of calm, contentment, and relaxation by, again, metabolising the chemicals in the body associated with distress.



Paired Muscle Relaxation

Before you start the exercise, find a quiet place to practice, with reduced distractions, make sure you have enough time, phones turned off, no interruptions etc. Remember that effectiveness improves with practice. If judgments and other negative thoughts arise while you are doing muscle relaxation, observe them, let them go, and gently return your attention to your practice. If you become anxious, focusing on your breathing in to the count of five and out to the count of seven.

- a. Get your body into a comfortable position in which you can relax. Loosen tight clothing. Lie or sit down, with all body parts uncrossed and no body part supporting any others.
 - b. For each area of the body listed below, gather tension by tightening muscles. Focus on the sensation of tightness in and around that area. Hold the tension as you inhale for 5–6 seconds, then release as you slowly breathe out.
 - c. As you release, you can say in your mind slowly the word “Relax.”
 - d. Notice the changes in sensations as you relax for 10–15 seconds then move on to the next muscle.
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1. Ankles: Legs out; point toes together, heels out, toes curled under.
 2. Calves: Legs out; point toes down.
 3. Upper legs and thighs: Legs out; tense thighs.
 4. Buttocks: Squeeze buttocks together.
 5. Stomach: Hold stomach in tightly.
 6. Chest: Take deep breath and hold it.
 7. Back: Arch back, bringing shoulder blades together.
 8. Hands and wrists: Make fists with both hands and pull fists up on the wrists.
 9. Lower and upper arms: Make fists and bend both arms up to touch your shoulders.
 10. Shoulders: Pull both shoulders up to your ears
 11. Neck: Push head back into chair, floor, or bed, or push chin down to chest.

12. Tongue and mouth: Teeth together; tongue pushing on upper mouth.
13. Lips and lower face: Press lips together; bring edges of lips back toward ears.
14. Nose and upper cheeks: Scrunch up nose; bring upper lips and cheeks up toward eyes.
15. Eyes: Shut eyes tightly.
16. Forehead: Pull eyebrows close together, wrinkling forehead.

Start first just by relaxing each of the sixteen muscle groups in turn. When you tense your entire body, you are like a robot—stiff, nothing moving. When you relax your entire body, you are like a rag doll—all muscles drooping down. Once you can relax all your muscles, practice doing this every day so you can routinely relax your entire body rapidly. By practicing pairing exhaling and the word “Relax” with relaxing your muscles, you will eventually be able to relax just by letting go and saying the word “Relax.”



Effective Rethinking Paired with Relaxation

Step 1. Write down the prompting/triggering event that is often related to distressing emotions and that you want to work on reducing your emotional reaction/arousal to.

Step 2. Ask: “What am I telling myself, how am I interpreting the situation that causes such distress and arousal in me?” Write down the answers, e.g. “They hate me,” “I can’t stand this!” “I can’t do this,” “This is the worst thing in the world.”

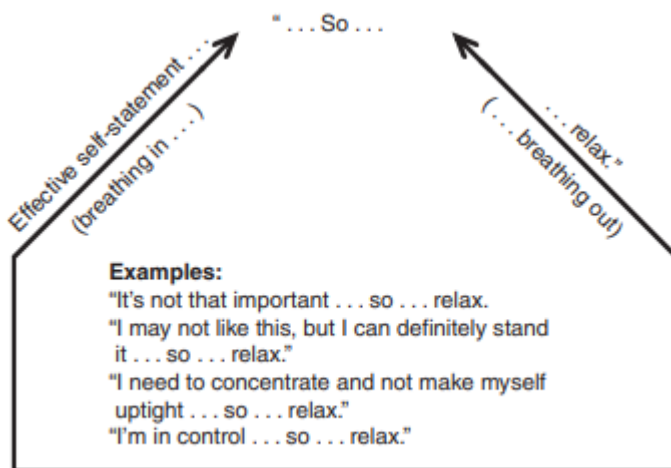
Step 3. Rethink the situation and its meaning in a way that counteracts the thoughts and interpretations producing the distressing emotions. See the situation differently and in a more helpful way and write down as many helpful/effective thoughts as you can to replace the unhelpful/stressful thoughts.

Step 4. When you are not in the stressful triggering event/situation, practice imagining the stressful event and

- a. While breathing in, say to yourself an effective self-statement, e.g. “I can cope with this.” “I like me and that’s all I need” “I know I am good enough.” “It’s not that important.”
- b. and then while slowly breathing out, saying “Relax” to yourself and notice all the tension leave your body. You can also try tensing your muscles first then saying relax as you breath out to heighten the effect.

Step 5. Keep practicing every chance you get until you have mastered the strategy.

Step 6. When a stressful situation occurs, practice effective rethinking paired with relaxation.





Distraction with ACCEPTS

Activities

Do a task you need to get done	Watch TV, a Film etc	Clean a room in your house
Find an event to go to	Play computer games	Go walking. Exercise
Surf the Internet	Write e-mails	Play sports
Go out for a meal	eat a favourite food	Call or go out with a friend
Listen to music	Build or make something	Play with your children
Play cards or games	Read magazines, books, comics	Do crossword puzzles or Sudoku

Contributing

Find volunteer work to do	Help a friend or family member	Do something nice for someone
Give away things you don't need	Call or text someone to just say hi	Make something nice for someone
Do something thoughtful		

Comparisons

Think about people who cope less well than you	Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt worse	Compare yourself to those less fortunate
Watch reality shows about others' troubles	Read/watch disasters and how people have overcome adversity	Read inspiring biographies of people who have overcome adversity

Emotions

Read emotional books or stories	Watch emotional TV shows or films	Listen to emotional music
(Access different emotions, e.g. scary/horror, jokes/comedies, feel-good/happy-endings, funny/religious/soothing/energising music)		

Pushing Away

Leaving the situation for a while	Leave the situation mentally	Deny the problem for the moment
Shout "Stop" or "No" if you notice you are ruminating.	Block thoughts and images from your mind	Put the pain on an imaginary shelf and walk away
Box up the distress and put it away for a while	Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation	

Thoughts

Count to ten in your own language, then try it in another language	Name all the different colours you see in a painting or in the scene looking out of your window	Recite a poem or sing the words to a song in your mind
Name one thing you can see, one thing you can hear, one thing you can taste, one thing you can touch, one thing you can smell in your immediate environment		

Sensations

Squeeze a rubber ball very hard	Listen to very loud music	Hold ice in your hand or mouth
Go out in the rain or snow	Take a hot or cold shower	Tense and relax muscles



Self-Soothing – With the Five Senses

With **Vision**:

Look at the stars at night	Look at pictures you like in a book	Buy one beautiful flower
Make a room visually pleasing	Light a candle and watch the flame	Lay the table using best things
People-watch or window-shop	Go to an art gallery	Sit in the lobby of grand hotel
Look at nature around you	Walk in a pretty part of town	Watch a sunrise or a sunset
Go to a live dance/drama show	Watch dance/drama show on TV	Notice everything that you see
Walk in a park or take a scenic hike	Browse through online stores	

With **Hearing**:

Listen to soothing music	Listen to invigorating music	Listen to sounds of rain falling
Listen to sounds of the town	Listen to sounds of the waves	Listen to sounds of birds singing
Sing your favourite songs	Hum a soothing tune	Learn to play an instrument
Make a playlist of favourite songs	Listen to the radio or TV	Stop and listen for sounds

With **Smell**:

Use your favourite-smelling soap	Use your favourite-smelling scent	Burn incense, light a scented candle
Open a pack of fresh coffee	Put lemon oil on your furniture	Make cookies, bread, or popcorn
Smell flowers	Walk in the woods and smell the air	

With **Taste**:

Eat some of your favourite foods	Drink a favourite soft drink	Treat yourself to something sweet
Eat some comfort childhood food	Sample ice cream flavours	Chew mint-gum or bubble-gum
Eat slowly and mindfully		

With **Touch**:

Take a long hot bath or shower	Pet a cat or dog or horse etc	Have a massage
Give yourself a manicure	Give yourself a pedicure	Visit a beauty parlour
Put soothing lotion on your body	Use hand cream	Wear something soft on your skin
Put clean sheets on your bed	Wrap up in a soft blanket	Touch objects to notice the texture



Improving the Moment

With **I**magery

Remember a happy time and imagine yourself in it again; play out the time in your mind again	Imagine a safe, secret, and beautiful room within yourself, close the door so nothing can hurt you.
Imagine everything going well	Make up a calming fantasy world
Imagine hurtful emotions draining out of you like water out of a pipe	Imagine very relaxing scenes

With **M**eaning:

Find purpose or meaning in painful situations	Experience yourself growing stronger
Focus on whatever positive aspects of the painful situation you can find, repeat these positive aspects in your mind	Find, listen to, read about things that are important to you, your values, whether spiritual or environmental, what gives you life purpose, that you want to live your life by.

With **P**rayer

Open your heart to a greater power, supreme being, God, or whatever seems the right wording for you, that represents your higher self.	Turn things over to this greater power and ask for strength to bear the pain and make it through the difficulty
Trust that all will be well and then behave accordingly	

With **R**elaxing actions

Take a long, hot shower or bath or sit in a hot tub	Drink warm milk or hot chocolate
Massage your hands, neck, and scalp	Practice yoga, tai chi, or other gentle, soothing exercise
Breathe deeply and mindfully	Change your facial expression to a soft smile

With **O**ne Thing in the Moment

Focus your entire attention on the physical information coming in from your 5 senses	Keep yourself and your mind in the present moment, not thinking about the past or worrying about the future
Focus all your attention on just what you are doing	

With a **V**acation

Give yourself a brief vacation from all responsibilities	Get in bed and pull the covers up over your head
Get a magazine and read it with chocolates	Go to the beach or the woods for the day
Turn off your phone for a day	Go to the park for a whole afternoon with a picnic
Put your feet up for an hour's break from hard work	

With **E**ncouragement and Rethinking the Situation

Be your own cheerleader "You got this!"	Remind yourself you can cope and will cope brilliantly
Praise yourself, "I am doing the best I can and that's good enough!"	Remind yourself everything is going to be okay and "this too shall pass."

Sensory Awareness Step-by-Step

Find a comfortable position and read the suggestions below and then try to notice, imagine, and connect with the feeling or sensation being suggested:

1. Notice your scalp and your hair on your head
2. Notice your stomach rising and falling as you breathe in and breathe out
3. Notice the space between your eyes at the top of your nose
4. Notice the distance between your each of your ears
5. Notice the air flow through your nostrils is slightly cooler on the in breath, slightly warmer on the out breath
6. Imagine a far away place you love
7. Notice your arms against your body
8. Notice the soles of your feet in your shoes or on the floor
9. Imagine a beautiful sunny day by a calm river
10. Notice the space within your mouth
11. Notice the position of your tongue in your mouth
12. Notice the air against your cheeks
13. Notice any tingling sensations in your hands
14. Notice the temperature in the air around you
15. Notice if one of your hands feels warmer than the other
16. Imagine how it would feel to be as floppy and relaxed as a rag doll
17. Notice if there is any tightness or tension in neck or back
18. Imagine something very pleasant
19. Imagine what it would feel like to be floating on a cloud
20. Imagine what it would feel like to be in bath full of thick chocolate or molasses
21. Can you picture something far away?
22. Notice any feelings of heaviness in your legs
23. Imagine floating serenely in warm water
24. Notice your flesh and muscles attached to your bones
25. Imagine yourself drifting peacefully and happily in and out of sleep
26. Notice your face relaxing and feeling soft
27. Imagine a beautiful flower with a wonderful aroma

Reality Acceptance Skills

Radical Acceptance

Radical Acceptance - What Is It?

1. Radical means all the way, complete and total.
2. It is accepting in your mind, your heart, and your body.
3. It's when you stop fighting reality, stop throwing tantrums because reality is not the way you want it, and let go of bitterness.

What Has to Be Accepted?

1. Reality is as it is (the facts about the past and the present are the facts, even if you do not like them).
2. There are limitations on the future for everyone (but only realistic limitations need to be accepted).
3. Everything has a cause (including events and situations that cause you pain and suffering).
4. Life can be worth living even with painful events in it.

Why Accept Reality?

1. Rejecting reality does not change reality.
2. Changing reality requires first accepting reality.
3. Pain can't be avoided; it is nature's way of signalling that something is wrong.
4. Rejecting reality turns tolerable pain into intolerable suffering.
5. Refusing to accept reality can keep you stuck in unhappiness, bitterness, anger, sadness, shame, or other painful emotions.
6. Acceptance may lead to sadness, but deep calmness usually follows.
7. The path out of hell is through acceptance that misery is a normal and expected part of human life. By refusing to accept the misery that is part of life, you cannot climb out of hell.

Radical Acceptance is not against change, it is not approving of the way things are, it is not compassion, love, or passivity. It is the ability to know when there is nothing that can be done to change a situation and that acceptance is the only way to lessen suffering, to turn intolerable suffering into bearable.

Factors That typically Interfere with The Ability to Be Accepting

1. You may not have the skills for acceptance; you do not know how to accept painful events and facts and confuse 'acceptance' with approval. Acceptance is recognising that there is nothing one can do to change the situation. Acceptance is the opposite of fighting a lost cause or losing battle.
2. You believe that if you accept a painful event, you are making light of it or are approving of the facts, and that nothing will be done to change or prevent future painful events.
3. Emotions get in the way (unbearable sadness; anger at the person or group that caused the painful event; rage at the injustice of the world; overwhelming shame about who you are; guilt about your own behaviour).

Practicing radical Acceptance Step-by-Step

- Observe that you are questioning or fighting reality ("It shouldn't be this way").
- Remind yourself that the unpleasant reality is just as it is and cannot be changed ("This is what happened").
- Remind yourself that there are causes/reasons for the reality being the way it is. Acknowledge that some sort of history led up to this very moment. Consider how people's lives have been shaped by a series of factors. Notice that given these causal factors and how history led up to this moment, this reality had to occur just this way ("This is how things happened").
- Practice accepting with the whole yourself (mind, body, spirit). Be creative in finding ways to involve your whole self in the activity of acceptance using the strategies/skills above. Use accepting self-talk, be your own cheerleader, use relaxation; use mindfulness of your breath; use half-smiling and willing hands (see below); use prayer; use going to a place that helps bring you to acceptance; use imagery.
- Practice opposite action. List all the behaviours you would do if you did accept the facts. Then act as if you have already accepted the facts. Then engage in the behaviours that you would do as if you really have accepted the way things are.
- Cope/plan ahead with events that seem as if they might be unacceptable. Imagine (in your mind's eye) believing that what you don't want to accept is actually acceptable and tolerable, even if you don't like it. Rehearse in your mind what you would do as if you accept what seems unacceptable.
- Attend to your body sensations as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow space for disappointment, sadness, or grief to arise within you as a natural part of being a human being and not feelings that must be rejected, they are part of you and deserve validation.
- Acknowledge that life is worth living even when there is pain and that a life without pain is impossible for all humans.
- Do For (pros) and Against (cons) if you find yourself resisting the practice of acceptance.

Turning the Mind

Turning the mind is like facing a fork in the road. You must turn your mind toward the acceptance road, and away from the road of rejecting reality. Turning the mind is choosing to accept. The choice to accept does not itself equal acceptance, it just puts you on the path.

Turning the Mind Step-by-Step

1. Observe that you are not accepting. Look for anger, bitterness, annoyance; avoiding emotions; saying “Why me?”, “Why is this happening?”, “I can’t stand this,” “It shouldn’t be this way.” – these are all signs of non-acceptance and rejecting reality.
2. Go within yourself and make an inner commitment to accept reality as it is.
3. Do it again, over, and over. Keep turning your mind to acceptance each time you come to the fork in the road where you can reject reality or accept it.
4. Develop a plan for catching yourself in the future when you drift out of acceptance.

Willingness

Willingness is readiness to enter and participate fully in life and living and to find a willing response to each situation.

Willingness is doing just what is needed in each situation and wholeheartedly, without dragging your feet.

Willingness is listening very carefully to your Wise Mind, and then acting from your Wise Mind.

Willingness is acting with awareness that you are connected to the universe (to the stars, planets, milky way, to all people (those you like and do not like), to the earth, the floor, the ocean, all animals etc.)

Replace Wilfulness with Willingness

Wilfulness is refusing to tolerate the moment.

Wilfulness is refusing to make the changes that are needed.

Wilfulness is giving up.

Wilfulness is the opposite of “doing what works.”

Wilfulness is trying to fix every situation.

Wilfulness is insisting on being in control.

Wilfulness is attachment to “me, me, me” and “what I want right now!”

Willingness Step-by-Step

1. Observe your own wilfulness. Label it. Experience it.
2. Radically accept that at this moment you feel (and may be are acting) wilfully. You cannot fight wilfulness with more wilfulness.
3. Turn your mind toward acceptance and willingness.
4. Try half-smiling and a willing posture.
5. When wilfulness is immovable, identify the threat, ask “What and where is the threat?”

Half-Smiling and Willing Hands

Accepting reality with your body through Half-Smiling

1st. Relax your face from the top of your head down to your chin and jaw. Let go of each facial muscle (forehead, eyes, and brows; cheeks, mouth, and tongue; teeth slightly apart). Try tensing your facial muscles and then letting go

to help you notice when your facial muscles are relaxed. A tense smile is a grin (and might tell your brain you are hiding or masking your real feelings).

2nd. Let both corners of your lips go slightly up, just so you can feel them. It is not necessary for others to see it. A half-smile is slightly upturned lips with a relaxed face.

3rd. Try to adopt a serene facial expression. Remember, your face communicates to your brain; your body connects to your mind.

Accepting reality with your body through Willing Hands

Standing: Drop your arms down from your shoulders; keep them straight or bent slightly at the elbows. With hands unclenched, turn your hands outward, with thumbs outwards, palms up, and fingers relaxed.

Sitting: Place your hands on your lap or your thighs. With hands unclenched, turn your hands with palms facing up and fingers relaxed.

Lying down: Arms by your side, hands unclenched, turn your palms up with fingers relaxed.

Remember, your hands and every part of your body are intricately linked/connected to your brain and forms a feedback loop, so relaxed and confident posture with open chest, open hands, uncrossed arms, steady eye contact, gentle smiling will help create these emotions in yourself.

Practicing Half-Smiling and Willing Hands Step-by-Step

1. Half-smile when you first wake up in the morning. Hang a branch, any other sign, or even the word “smile” on the ceiling or wall, so that you see it right away when you open your eyes. This sign will serve as your reminder. Use the first moments when you wake up to half-smile and take hold of your breath, so you inhale and exhale three breaths gently while maintaining your half-smile. Follow your breathing, add willing hands to your half-smile, or practice willing hands alone.

2. Half-smile and mindful breathing during the day anytime you notice that you are not half-smiling and not mindful of your breathing. Anywhere you find yourself sitting or standing, half-smile. Look at a child, a leaf, a painting on a wall, or anything that is relatively still, and smile. Inhale and exhale mindfully three times.

3. Half-smile with willing hands and mindful breathing whilst listening to calming music or calming meditation for 2-3 minutes every day. Pay attention to the words, music, rhythm, and sentiments you are listening to and half-smile while also mindfully breathing and observing your inhalations and exhalations. Adopt a willing-hands posture.

4. Half-smile with willing hands and do mindful breathing when you are feeling negative emotion. As soon as you realise you are beginning to feel a negative emotion, half-smile and/or adopt a willing-hands posture and mindful breathing for three deep breaths.

5. Half-smile in a lying-down position. Lie on your back on a flat surface. Keep your two arms loosely by your sides with willing-hands and keep your two legs slightly apart and feet falling to each side. Maintain willing hands and a half-smile and breathe in and out gently, keeping your attention focused on your breathing. Tense and then let go of the tension in every muscle in your body. Relax each muscle as though it were sinking down through the floor, or as though it were as soft and yielding as a piece of silk hanging in the breeze to dry. Let go entirely, keeping your attention only on your breath and half-smile. Think of yourself as a cat, completely relaxed before a warm fire, whose muscles yield without resistance to anyone’s touch. Practice for between 5-10 minutes or as long as you can.

6. Half-smile in a sitting position. Sit on the floor with your back straight, or on a chair with your two feet touching the floor. Half-smile. Inhale and exhale while maintaining the half-smile. Let go.

7. Half-smile with willing hands and mindful breathing while you are contemplating a person you dislike or are angry with.

- Sit quietly. Breathe and smile a half-smile. Hold your hands open with palms up.
- Imagine the image of the person who has caused you suffering.
- Regard the features you dislike the most or find the most repulsive.
- Try to examine what makes this person happy and what causes suffering in his or her daily life.
- Imagine the person's perceptions; try to see what patterns of thought and reason this person follows.
- Examine what motivates this person's hopes and actions.
- Finally, consider the person's consciousness. See whether the person's views and insights are open and free or not, and whether the person has been influenced by any prejudices, narrow-mindedness, hatred, or anger.
- See whether the person is master of him- or herself or are they influence by others?
- Continue until you feel compassion rise in your heart like a well filling with fresh water, and your anger and resentment disappear. You may need to practice this exercise many times on the same person to dissolve the resentment.