

**Distress  
Tolerance  
Skills**

**Distress  
Tolerance  
Week 1**

## **DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 2**

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([Distress Tolerance Worksheets 1–7b](#))

### **Overview: Crisis Survival Skills**

These are skills for tolerating painful events, urges, and emotions when you cannot make things better right away.

**The STOP Skill**

**Pros and Cons**

**TIP Your Body Chemistry**

**Distract with Wise Mind ACCEPTS**

**Self-Soothe with the Five Senses**

**Improve the Moment**



## When to Use Crisis Survival Skills

### YOU ARE IN A CRISIS when the situation is:

- Highly stressful.
- Short-term (that is, it won't last a long time).
- Creates intense pressure to resolve the crisis *now*.

### USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS when:

1. You have intense pain that cannot be helped quickly.
2. You want to act on your emotions, but it will only make things worse.
3. Emotion mind threatens to overwhelm you, and you need to stay skillful.
4. You are overwhelmed, yet demands must be met.
5. Arousal is extreme, but problems can't be solved immediately.

### DON'T USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS for:

- Everyday problems.
- Solving all your life problems.
- Making your life worth living.



## STOP Skill



**S**<sub>top</sub>

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

**T**<sub>ake a step back</sub>

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.

**O**<sub>bserve</sub>

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?

**P**<sub>roceed mindfully</sub>

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?

*Note.* Adapted from an unpublished worksheet by Francheska Perepletchikova and Seth Axelrod, with their permission.

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 5



([Distress Tolerance Worksheets 3, 3a](#))

## Pros and Cons

Use pros and cons 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 pros *and* cons of acting on your crisis urges. These might be to engage in dangerous, addictive, or harmful behaviors, or they might be to give in, give up, or avoid doing what is necessary to build a life you want to live.
- Make another list of the pros and cons of resisting crisis urges—that is, tolerating the distress and not giving in to the urges.
- Use the grid below to evaluate both sets of pros and cons (this type of grid is also used in Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3). Or you can use the type of grid seen in Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3a and in the pros-and-cons worksheets for other modules.

	PROS	CONS
Acting on crisis urges	<p><b>Pros</b> of acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Cons</b> of acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Resisting crisis urges	<p><b>Pros</b> of resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p><b>Cons</b> of resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

### **Before an overwhelming crisis urge hits:**

Write out your pros and cons; carry them with you.  
Rehearse your pros and cons over and over.

### **When an overwhelming crisis urge hits:**

Review your pros and cons. Get out your list and read it over again.

- Imagine the positive consequences of resisting the urge.
- Think of the negative consequences of giving in to crisis behaviors.
- Remember past consequences when you have acted on crisis urges.



## TIP Skills: Changing Your Body Chemistry

To reduce extreme emotion mind *fast*.

Remember these as **TIP** skills:

**T**

### **TIP THE TEMPERATURE of your face with COLD WATER\*** (to calm down fast)

- Holding your breath, put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack (or zip-lock bag of cold water) on your eyes and cheeks.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Keep water above 50°F.

**I**

### **INTENSE EXERCISE\*** (to calm down your body when it is revved up by emotion)

- Engage in intense exercise, if only for a short while.
- Expend your body's stored up physical energy by running, walking fast, jumping, playing basketball, lifting weights, etc.

**P**

### **PACED BREATHING** (pace your breathing by slowing it down)

- Breathe deeply into your belly.
- Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down (on average, five to six breaths per minute).
- Breathe *out* more slowly than you breathe *in* (for example, 5 seconds in and 7 seconds out).

### **PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION** (to calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out)

- While breathing into your belly deeply tense your body muscles (*not* so much as to cause a cramp).
- Notice the tension in your body.
- While breathing out, say the word "Relax" in your mind.
- Let go of the tension.
- Notice the difference in your body.

**\*Caution:** Very cold water decreases your heart rate rapidly. Intense exercise will increase heart rate. Consult your health care provider before using these skills if you have a heart or medical condition, a lowered base heart rate due to medications, take a beta-blocker, are allergic to cold, or have an eating disorder.

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# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 6A

([Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4](#))

## Using Cold Water, Step by Step

### COLD WATER CAN WORK WONDERS\*

When you put your full face into cold water . . . **or** you put a zip-lock bag with cold water on your eyes and upper cheeks, and **hold your breath**, it tells your brain you are diving underwater.

This causes the “**dive response**” to occur. (It may take 15–30 seconds to start.)

Your heart slows down, blood flow to nonessential organs is reduced, and blood flow is redirected to the brain and heart.

This response can actually help **regulate your emotions**.

This will be useful as a **distress tolerance strategy** when you are having a very **strong, distressing emotion**, or when you are having very **strong urges to engage in dangerous behaviors**.

(This strategy works best when you are sitting quietly—activity and distraction may make it less effective.)

**TRY IT OUT!**

**\*Caution:** Very cold water decreases your heart rate. If you have any heart or medical condition, have a lowered base heart rate due to medications, or are on a beta-blocker, consult your health care provider before using these skills. Avoid ice water if you are allergic to the cold.

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# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 6B

(Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4a)

## Paired Muscle Relaxation, Step by Step

If you have decided to practice **paired muscle relaxation**, it can be very helpful to practice relaxing each of your muscles first.

**When you are starting**, practice in a quiet place to reduce distractions, and make sure that you have enough time. As you improve with practice, you will want to practice in many different kinds of places, so that you can relax effectively when you most need to.

**Remember that effectiveness improves with practice.** If judgments arise, observe them, let them go, and return to your practice. If you become anxious, try focusing on breathing *in* to the count of 5 and *out* to the count of 7 (or the counts you have already determined for paced breathing), breathing all the while into your belly until you can return to relaxation exercises.

**Now that you are ready to begin . . .**

1. 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.
2. 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 and breathe out.
3. As you release, say in your mind very slowly the word “Relax.”
4. Observe the changes in sensations as you relax for 10–15 seconds then move on to the next muscle.

Start first with each of the 16 muscle groups.

Once you can do that, practice with medium groups of muscles and then large groups.

Once you are good at that, practice tensing your entire body at once.

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 three or four times a day until 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.”

Large  
Medium  
Small

1. Hands and wrists: Make fists with both hands and pull fists up on the wrists.
2. Lower and upper arms: Make fists and bend both arms up to touch your shoulders.
3. Shoulders: Pull both shoulders up to your ears.
4. Forehead: Pull eyebrows close together, wrinkling forehead.
5. Eyes: Shut eyes tightly.
6. Nose and upper cheeks: Scrunch up nose; bring upper lips and cheeks up toward eyes.
7. Lips and lower face: Press lips together; bring edges of lips back toward ears.
8. Tongue and mouth: Teeth together; tongue pushing on upper mouth.
9. Neck: Push head back into chair, floor, or bed, or push chin down to chest.
10. Chest: Take deep breath and hold it.
11. Back: Arch back, bringing shoulder blades together.
12. Stomach: Hold stomach in tightly.
13. Buttocks: Squeeze buttocks together.
14. Upper legs and thighs: Legs out; tense thighs.
15. Calves: Legs out; point toes down.
16. Ankles: Legs out; point toes together, heels out, toes curled under.

**Remember**, paired relaxation is a skill. It takes time to develop. With practice, you will notice the benefits.

*Note.* Adapted from Smith, R. E. (1980). Development of an integrated coping response through cognitive–affective stress management training. In I. G. Sarason & C. D. Spielberger (Eds.), *Stress and anxiety* (Vol. 7, pp. 265–280). Washington, DC: Hemisphere. Copyright 1980 by Hemisphere Publishing Corporation. Adapted by permission.

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# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 2

(Distress Tolerance Handout 4)

## Practicing the STOP Skill

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe two crisis situations that happened to you. Then describe your use of the STOP skill.

**CRISIS EVENT 1:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

Behavior you are trying to stop: \_\_\_\_\_

- Stop**
- Take a step back**
- Observe**
- Proceed mindfully**

At left, check the steps you used, and describe what you did here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle a number to indicate how effective the skill was in helping you tolerate the distress and cope with the situation (keeping you from doing something to make the situation worse). Use the following scale:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

**CRISIS EVENT 2:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

Behavior you are trying to stop: \_\_\_\_\_

- Stop**
- Take a step back**
- Observe**
- Proceed mindfully**

At left, check the steps you used, and describe what you did here:

Describe the outcome of using the skills:

Circle effectiveness of the skill:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 3

(Distress Tolerance Handout 5)

## Pros and Cons of Acting on Crisis Urges

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe the *problem behavior* you are trying to stop: \_\_\_\_\_
2. List pros and cons for acting on crisis urges (including urges to act and urges to quit), and create a separate list for resisting crisis behavior by tolerating distress and using skills. Use the back of this sheet if you need more room.
3. Read the pros and cons when an urge toward the problem behavior occurs.

Problem behavior	PROS	CONS
<b>Acting on crisis urges</b>	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
	4.	4.
	5.	5.
<b>Resisting crisis urges</b>	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.
	4.	4.
	5.	5.

Identify which pros and cons are short-term (just for today) or long-term (beyond today). Then ask your Wise Mind: Would you rather have a good day or a good life? Make a mindful choice about your behavior.

If this worksheet helps you choose skillful behavior over crisis behavior, be sure to keep it where you can find it and review it again when you are in crisis.

Adapted from an unpublished worksheet by Seth Axelrod, with his permission.

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# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 4

(Distress Tolerance Handouts 6, 6a, 6b)

## Changing Body Chemistry with TIP Skills

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the situation you were in when you chose to practice each skill. Rate both your emotional arousal and distress tolerance before and after using the TIP skill. Describe what you actually did. Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

**T** { **CHANGING MY FACIAL TEMPERATURE**  
Used cold water to change emotions  
Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Arousal (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
Distress tolerance (0 = I can't stand it; 100 = I can definitely survive) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I did (describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I** { **INTENSE EXERCISE**  
Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Arousal (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
Distress tolerance (0 = I can't stand it; 100 = I can definitely survive) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I did (describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**P** { **PACED BREATHING**  
Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Arousal (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
Distress tolerance (0 = I can't stand it; 100 = I can definitely survive) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I did (describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**P** { **PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION**  
Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
Arousal (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
Distress tolerance (0 = I can't stand it; 100 = I can definitely survive) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_  
What I did (describe): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Distress  
Tolerance  
Week 2**

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 7



(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 5–5b)

## Distracting

A way to remember these skills is the phrase “**Wise Mind ACCEPTS.**”

### With Activities:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus attention on a task you need to get done. | <input type="checkbox"/> Go out for a meal or eat a favorite food. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rent movies; watch TV.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Call or go out with a friend.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean a room in your house.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to your iPod; download music.      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find an event to go to.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Build something.                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play computer games.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with your children.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go walking. Exercise.                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Play cards.                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surf the Internet. Write e-mails.               | <input type="checkbox"/> Read magazines, books, comics.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play sports.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Do crossword puzzles or Sudoku.           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                              |

### With Contributing:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find volunteer work to do.                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Call or send an instant message encouraging someone or just saying hi. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help a friend or family member.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Make something nice for someone else.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surprise someone with something nice (a card, a favor, a hug). | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something thoughtful.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give away things you don't need.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With Comparisons:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt different. | <input type="checkbox"/> Compare yourself to those less fortunate.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Think about people coping the same as you or less well than you.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Watch reality shows about others' troubles; read about disasters, others' suffering. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With different Emotions:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read emotional books or stories, old letters.                                 | <i>Ideas:</i> Scary movies, joke books, comedies, funny records, religious music, soothing music or music that fires you up, going to a store and reading funny greeting cards. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watch emotional TV shows; go to emotional movies.                             |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to emotional music.<br>(Be sure the event creates different emotions.) |   |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With Pushing away:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Push the situation away by leaving it for a while.          | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice ruminating: Yell “No!”                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leave the situation mentally.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Refuse to think about the painful situations.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation. | <input type="checkbox"/> Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Block thoughts and images from your mind.                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Deny the problem for the moment.                                |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____  |

### With other Thoughts:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Count to 10; count colors in a painting or poster or out the window; count anything. | <input type="checkbox"/> Work puzzles.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repeat words to a song in your mind.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Watch TV or read. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____      |

### With other Sensations:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Squeeze a rubber ball very hard. | <input type="checkbox"/> Go out in the rain or snow. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to very loud music.       | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a hot or cold shower.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hold ice in your hand or mouth.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                |

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 8



(Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6–6b)

## Self-Soothing

A way to remember these skills is to think of soothing each of your **FIVE SENSES**.

### With Vision:

- Look at the stars at night.
- Look at pictures you like in a book.
- Buy one beautiful flower.
- Make one space in a room pleasing to look at.
- Light a candle and watch the flame.
- Set a pretty place at the table using your best things.
- Go people-watching or window-shopping.
- Go to a museum or poster shop with beautiful art.
- Sit in the lobby of a beautiful old hotel.
- Look at nature around you.
- Walk in a pretty part of town.
- Watch a sunrise or a sunset.
- Go to a dance performance, or watch it on TV.
- Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of you.
- Take a walk in a park or a scenic hike.
- Browse through stores looking at things.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Hearing:

- Listen to soothing or invigorating music.
- Pay attention to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling).
- Pay attention to the sounds of the city (traffic, horns, city music).
- Sing to your favorite songs.
- Hum a soothing tune.
- Learn to play an instrument.
- Burn a CD or make an iPod mix with music that will get you through tough times. Turn it on.
- Be mindful of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other.
- Turn on the radio.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Smell:

- Use your favorite soap, shampoo, aftershave, cologne, or lotions, or try them on in the store.
- Burn incense or light a scented candle.
- Open a package of coffee and inhale the aroma.
- Put lemon oil on your furniture.
- Put potpourri or eucalyptus oil in a bowl in your room.
- Sit in a new car and breathe the aroma.
- Boil cinnamon. Make cookies, bread, or popcorn.
- Smell the roses.
- Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.
- Open the window and smell the air.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Taste:

- Eat some of your favorite foods.
- Drink your favorite soothing drink, such as herbal tea, hot chocolate, a latté, or a smoothie.
- Treat yourself to a dessert.
- Eat macaroni and cheese or another favorite childhood food.
- Sample flavors in an ice cream store.
- Suck on a piece of peppermint candy.
- Chew your favorite gum.
- Get a little bit of a special food you don't usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice or your favorite candy.
- Really taste the food you eat. Eat one thing mindfully.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Touch:

- Take a long hot bath or shower.
- Pet your dog or cat.
- Have a massage. Soak your feet.
- Put creamy lotion on your whole body.
- Put a cold compress on your forehead.
- Sink into a comfortable chair in your home.
- Put on a blouse or shirt that has a pleasant feel.
- Take a drive with the car windows rolled down.
- Run your hand along smooth wood or leather.
- Hug someone.
- Put clean sheets on the bed.
- Wrap up in a blanket.
- Notice touch that is soothing.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 9



(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 7, 7a, 7b)

## Improving the Moment

A way to remember these skills is the word **IMPROVE**.

### With Imagery:

- Imagine very relaxing scenes.
- Imagine a secret room within yourself. Furnish it the way you like. Close and lock the door on anything that 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.
- Remember a happy time and imagine yourself in it again; play out the time in your mind again.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Meaning:

- Find purpose or meaning in a painful situation.
- Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find.
- Repeat these positive aspects in your mind.
- Remember, listen to, or read about spiritual values.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Prayer:

- Open your heart to a supreme being, God, or your own Wise Mind.
- Ask for strength to bear the pain.
- Turn things over to God or a higher being.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Relaxing actions:

- Take a hot bath or sit in a hot tub.
- Drink hot milk.
- Massage your neck and scalp.
- Practice yoga or other stretching.
- Breathe deeply.
- Change your facial expression.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With One thing in the moment:

- Focus your entire attention on just what you are doing.
- Keep yourself in the moment.
- Put your mind in the present.
- Focus your entire attention on the physical
- Listen to a sensory awareness recording (or use Distress Tolerance Handout 9a)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With a brief Vacation:

- Give yourself a brief vacation.
- Get in bed; pull the covers up over your head.
- Go to the beach or the woods for the day.
- Get a magazine and read it with chocolates.
- Turn off your phone for a day.
- Take a blanket to the park and sit on it for a whole afternoon.
- Take a 1-hour breather from hard work.
- Take a brief vacation from responsibility.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With self-Encouragement and rethinking the situation:

- Cheerlead yourself: "You go, girl!" "You da man!"
- "I will make it out of this."
- "I'm doing the best I can."
- Repeat over and over: "I can stand it."
- "This too shall pass."
- "I will be OK."
- "It won't last forever."
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

List (and then practice) rethoughts that are particularly important in your crisis situations (e.g., "The fact that he did not pick me up doesn't mean he doesn't love me"):

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 5

(Distress Tolerance Handout 7)

## Distracting with Wise Mind ACCEPTS

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe two crisis situations that happened to you. Then describe your use of the ACCEPTS skills.

**CRISIS EVENT 1:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- A**ctivities
- C**ontributions
- C**omparisons
- E**motions
- P**ushing away
- T**houghts
- S**ensations

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle a number to indicate how effective the skills were in helping you tolerate the distress and cope with the situation (keeping you from doing something to make the situation worse). Use the following scale:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

**CRISIS EVENT 2:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- A**ctivities
- C**ontributions
- C**omparisons
- E**motions
- P**ushing away
- T**houghts
- S**ensations

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle effectiveness of skills:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 6

(Distress Tolerance Handout 8)

## Self-Soothing

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe two crisis situations that happened to you. Then describe your use of the self-soothing skills.

**CRISIS EVENT 1:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- Vision
- Hearing
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle a number to indicate how effective the skills were in helping you tolerate the distress and cope with the situation (keeping you from doing something to make the situation worse). Use the following scale:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

**CRISIS EVENT 2:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- Vision
- Hearing
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle effectiveness of skills:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 7

([Distress Tolerance Handout 9](#))

## IMPROVE the Moment

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe two crisis situations that happened to you. Then describe your use of the IMPROVE skills.

**CRISIS EVENT 1:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- I**magery
- M**eaning
- P**rayer
- R**elaxation
- O**ne thing
- V**acation
- E**ncouragement

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle a number to indicate how effective the skills were in helping you tolerate the distress and cope with the situation (keeping you from doing something to make the situation worse). Use the following scale:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

**CRISIS EVENT 2:** Rate level of distress (0–100) Before: \_\_\_\_\_ After: \_\_\_\_\_

**Prompting event** for my distress (who, what, when, where): What triggered the state of crisis?

- I**magery
- M**eaning
- P**rayer
- R**elaxation
- O**ne thing
- V**acation
- E**ncouragement

At left, check the skills you used, and describe here:

Describe the outcome of using skills:

Circle effectiveness of skills:

*I still couldn't stand  
the situation, even  
for one more minute.*

1

2

*I was able to cope somewhat,  
at least for a little while.  
It helped somewhat.*

3

4

*I could use skills,  
tolerated distress, and  
resisted problem urges.*

5

**Distress  
Tolerance  
Week 3**



## Radical Acceptance

(When you cannot keep painful events and emotions from coming your way.)

### WHAT IS RADICAL ACCEPTANCE?

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 don't 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 signaling that something is wrong.
4. Rejecting reality turns pain into 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 misery. By refusing to accept the misery that is part of climbing out of hell, you fall back into hell.

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 11A

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## Radical Acceptance: Factors That Interfere

### **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE IS NOT:**

Approval, compassion, love, passivity, or against change.

### **FACTORS THAT INTERFERE WITH ACCEPTANCE**

- 1. You don't have the skills for acceptance; you do not know how to accept really painful events and facts.
- 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 behavior).
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 11B

([Distress Tolerance Worksheets 9, 9a](#))

## 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 for the reality. 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 self (mind, body, and spirit). Be creative in finding ways to involve your whole self. Use accepting self-talk—but also consider using relaxation; mindfulness of your breath; half-smiling and willing hands while thinking about what feels unacceptable; prayer; going to a place that helps bring you to acceptance; or imagery.
- Practice opposite action. List all the behaviors you would do if you did accept the facts. Then act as if you have already accepted the facts. Engage in the behaviors that you would do if you really had accepted.
- Cope ahead with events that seem unacceptable. Imagine (in your mind’s eye) believing what you don’t want to accept. Rehearse in your mind what you would do if you accepted what seems unacceptable.
- Attend to body sensations as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow disappointment, sadness, or grief to arise within you.
- Acknowledge that life can be worth living even when there is pain.
- Do pros and cons if you find yourself resisting practicing acceptance.

# DISTRESS TOLERANCE WORKSHEET 9

(Distress Tolerance Handouts 11, 11a, 11b)

## Radical Acceptance

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Week Starting: \_\_\_\_\_

### FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU NEED TO RADICALLY ACCEPT

1. Make a list of two **very important** things in your life right now that you need to radically accept. Then give each one a number indicating how much you accept this part of yourself or your life: from 0 (no acceptance, I am in complete denial and/or rebellion) to 5 (complete acceptance, I am at peace with this). *Note:* if you have already completed this section, you don't need to do it again unless things have changed.

What I need to accept (Acceptance, 0–5)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_)

2. Make a list of two **less important** things in your life you are having trouble accepting this week. Then rate your acceptance just as you did above.

What I need to accept (Acceptance, 0–5)

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_)

### REFINE YOUR LIST

3. Review your two lists above. **Check the facts.** Check for interpretations and opinions. Make sure that what you are trying to accept is in fact the case. **Check for judgments.** Avoid “good,” “bad,” and judgmental language. Rewrite any items above if needed so that they are **factual and nonjudgmental.**

### PRACTICE RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

4. Choose one item from the very important list and one item from the less important list to practice on.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Focus your mind on each of these facts or events separately, allowing your Wise Mind to radically accept that these *are* facts of your life. *Check off* any of the following exercises that you did.

Observed that I was questioning or fighting reality.

Reminded myself that reality is what it is.

Considered the causes of the reality, and nonjudgmentally accepted that causes exist.

Practiced accepting all the way with my whole being (mind, body, spirit).

Practiced opposite action.

Coped ahead with events that seemed unacceptable.

Attended to my body sensations as I thought about what I need to accept.

Allowed myself to experience disappointment, sadness, or grief.

Acknowledged that life can be worth living even when there is pain.

Did pros and cons of accepting versus denial and rejection.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Rate your degree of acceptance after practicing radical acceptance (0–5): \_\_\_\_\_