



The current situation with Coronavirus has increased everyone's stress, but the situation is particularly difficult if you, or a family member, is experiencing mental health difficulties or has behaviour difficulties related to their Autism or Learning Disability. DBT distress tolerance skills help you get to a more manageable emotional place for crisis survival. Try the following tips when things feel too intense:

TIPP

You're at your emotional breaking point. Maybe the worst has happened, or maybe it was just the "last straw". The DBT distress tolerance skill you need is TIPP. This skill is designed to bring you down from the metaphorical (hopefully not literal) ledge.

TIPP stands for **Temperature**, **Intense exercise**, **Paced breathing**, and **Paired muscle relaxation**.

TEMPERATURE

When we're upset, our bodies often feel hot. To counter this, splash your face with cold water, hold an ice cube, or eat an ice pop. Changing your body temperature will help you cool down—both physically and emotionally.

INTENSE EXERCISE

Do intense exercise to match your intense emotion. You're not a marathon runner? That's okay, you don't need to be. Run on the spot if you can or do jumping jacks until you've tired yourself out. Increasing oxygen flow helps decrease stress levels. Plus, it's hard to stay dangerously upset when you're exhausted. (Hint: Try some Joe Wicks videos when things are calmer to give you ideas on intense exercise)

PACED BREATHING

Even something as simple as controlling your breath can have a profound impact on reducing emotional pain. There are many different types of breathing exercises. If you have a favourite, breathe it out. If you don't, try a technique called "box breathing". Each breath interval will be four seconds long. Take in air four seconds, hold it in four seconds, breathe out four, and hold four. And then start again. Continue to focus on this breathing pattern until you feel more calm. Steady breathing reduces your body's fight or flight response.

PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION

The science of paired muscle relaxation is fascinating. When you tighten a voluntary muscle, relax it, and allow it to rest, the muscle will become more relaxed than it was before it was tightened. Relaxed muscles require less oxygen, so your breathing and heart rate will slow down.

Try this technique by focusing on a group of muscles, such as the muscles in your arms. Tighten the muscles as much as you can for five seconds. Then let go of the tension. Let the muscles relax, and you'll begin to relax, as well.

ACCEPTS

The DBT distress tolerance acronym ACCEPTS is a group of skills to help you tolerate a negative emotion until you are able to address and eventually resolve the situation.

This DBT skill stands for

Activities, Contributing, Comparisons, Emotions, Push away, Thoughts, and Sensation.

These techniques are designed to keep your emotions manageable until you can resolve the problem.

ACTIVITIES

Engage in an activity, and this can be just about any healthy activity. Read a book, draw something, clean, call your friend, wash the dishes. Anything that keeps you busy and keeps your mind off the negative emotion will help. If you finish, move on to a new activity. (You could potentially have a very productive day while awaiting that dreaded situation!)

CONTRIBUTING

Do something kind for another person. Giving service can help you relieve emotional distress in a couple ways. An act of service is also an activity that, as mentioned above, will help get your mind off of the problem at hand. Additionally, we feel good about ourselves when we help someone else, and that in itself can help you deal with stress. Help cook dinner, check in with a friend or relative, or make something for someone else. Each of these contributing ideas will distract you from your current situation.

COMPARISONS

Put your life in perspective. Is there a time when you've faced more difficult challenges than you're facing today? Maybe not—maybe this is the most intense situation and most intense emotion you've ever experienced. (If so, you may need to jump back up to the TIPP section.) If that's the case, is there another person who has suffered more than you? Are you in your safe home, while in another part of the world someone else is searching for food and shelter after a natural disaster? The goal of this exercise is not to add more distress and emotional pain to your current situation. Instead, use this skill to add a different perspective to what you're experiencing right now.

EMOTIONS

You have the power to invoke the opposite emotion of your current distressed feeling. If you are feeling anxious, practice meditation for 15 minutes. If you're feeling depressed, go ahead and Google Image search "adorable puppies". (If you're in need of a real laugh, search "ugly puppies".) Adding a dose of the opposite emotion helps reduce the intensity of the negative emotion.

PUSH AWAY

When you can't deal with something just yet, it's okay to push the problem out of your mind temporarily. You can push away by distracting yourself with other activities, thoughts, or mindfulness. You can even set a time to come back to the issue. You know that it will be addressed, and you can relax in the interim.

THOUGHTS

Replace negative, anxious thoughts with activities that busy your mind, such as saying the alphabet backwards or doing a Sudoku puzzle.

SENSATION

Use your five senses to self-soothe during times of distress. A self-soothing behavior could be taking a warm bath with a lavender bath bomb and relaxing music, eating a comforting snack, or watching your favourite show. Anything that appeals to your senses can help you cope with the present situation.

IMPROVE

Right now, we don't have too much control on what is happening outside our front doors. During these times, you'll need distress tolerance to make it through the situation. Intense emotions don't last forever. You can use the dialectical behavior skill IMPROVE to tolerate emotions until the intensity subsides.

IMPROVE stands for

Imagery, Meaning, Prayer, Relaxation, One thing in the moment, Vacation, and Encouragement.

IMAGERY

Imagine yourself dealing successfully with the problem, being in wise mind, and feeling accomplished when the situation is over.

MEANING

Try to find meaning in painful situations. What can you learn from this experience? Maybe you'll be more empathetic. Maybe you'll build new relationships. Maybe this will launch you on a healing journey. Find a reason, or a possible reason, to assign your present suffering.

PRAYER/ PRACTICE

Prayer can come in any form that works for you. The prayer can be to any higher power, including God or the universe. Ask to tolerate the situation a little longer. If Prayer doesn't sit well with you, replace it with "practice." Practice refers to doing something in your mind that builds mastery. Practice, for example, can mean reciting the lyrics to a song you like or practicing a new route home in your mind. Practice helps you focus on how to increase your ability in one area that isn't too challenging, so you can feel a sense of accomplishment.

RELAXATION

We tense up during stressful situations thanks to our fight or flight instinct. Engage in relaxing activities to calm the psychological distress you're experiencing. These activities can include deep breathing, yoga, or a hot bath.

ONE THING IN THE MOMENT

Stay in the moment by letting go of the past and future. Adding old issues to the situation, or future tripping about potential consequences of the situation, will not be helpful in solving the problem. Find one thing to do and focus your entire self to that task. A one-track mind helps emotions feel less overwhelming.

VACATION

On the ideal vacation, you're able to take a break from all your stressors and return home ready to take on the challenges you left behind. Unfortunately, most of us aren't able to take a real vacation at the moment! Instead, you can take a vacation in your mind. Imagine yourself somewhere else, like taking an evening stroll around the lake or driving on the Pacific Coast Highway. Stay on your "vacation" as long as necessary, and revisit as often as needed. Hopefully, you'll "return" better able to tolerate your circumstances.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement doesn't have to come from an external source to be effective. Give yourself encouragement by repeating phrases that are meaningful to you, such as "I got this", "I can improve this moment", or "This too shall pass". Say it loud, say it proud! You'll be amazed at your ability to motivate yourself to make it through a challenging time.

The distress tolerance techniques found in IMPROVE can be used anywhere, and anytime you need to tolerate a situation that you can't change. Practice these techniques during minor situations and they'll come to you naturally when bigger problems arise.

SELF SOOTHE

Another simple way to increase your distress tolerance in a crisis situation is to use your body's senses. Self-soothing through senses can quickly reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

SIGHT

Use your vision to focus on something else. Count how many places you can see a certain colour in the room, or focus on an object's texture. You can also pull out your phone and scroll through some of your favourite photos.

HEARING

Listen to sounds—any sounds. Can you hear birds chirping? Turn the volume up on your favourite song and just listen. If you prefer soothing sounds, there are many apps you can install on your phone to play on the go.

TASTE

A small treat can give you something pleasurable to focus on while you're getting through a tough moment. You don't need to prepare a full meal—a piece of gum or a few mints will do the trick.

TOUCH

Embrace your sense of touch by noticing how a pen feels in your hand, running your fingers through your hair, or using a fidget toy. When appropriate, you can wrap yourself in a blanket or take a warm bath.

SMELL

Whether it's good or bad, focus on whatever scent is in the air. Can you identify the smell, or break it down into its components? If you have a smell you particularly enjoy, try and keep some of it to hand!

MOVEMENT

While you technically only have five senses, DBT introduces a sixth sense of movement. Your emotional state can be altered by your body's movements, so take a walk around the house or dance to your favourite song!

Your senses are a tool you'll always have with you to reduce the intensity of a situation. Try focusing on only one sense at a time to incorporate mindfulness into the self-soothing skill.

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