

Mindfulness and Distress Tolerance

Occupational Therapy



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER



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For a digital copy of this book, visit go.osu.edu/pted5605.

This book is for informational purposes only. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any questions about your care.

Review of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

What is dialectical behavioral therapy?

Feeling strong emotions like sadness, anger, or fear is a normal part of life. But some people feel these emotions more often and more intensely than others. This can happen for many reasons, like going through something hard, from not feeling supported, or even because of your genetics.

Dialectical behavioral therapy, or DBT, is a type of talk therapy that helps people manage strong emotions and improve their relationships. The word dialectical means combining 2 opposite ideas. In DBT, this often means accepting yourself as you are, while also working to change behaviors that are harmful or unhelpful to you.

An important idea of DBT is that harmful behaviors—like self-harming, throwing up on purpose, or using drugs—are ways people have learned to cope with really painful emotions.

Doing things quickly without thinking, like acting on impulse, may help people feel better in the moment. But these actions can also cause problems later on—emotionally, physically, and mentally.

The 4 skill sets of DBT

1. Mindfulness

This means paying attention to what is happening right now, without judging it as good or bad. It helps you notice how you are feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically—and how all those parts of you are connected.

2. Distress Tolerance

These are tools that help you get through really tough emotions and hard situations. They build on your strengths and give you new ways to handle stress without making things worse.

3. Emotion Regulation

These skills help you understand what you are feeling and notice your emotions without letting them take over. The goal is to stay in control and not act in ways that could hurt you or others.

4. Interpersonal Effectiveness

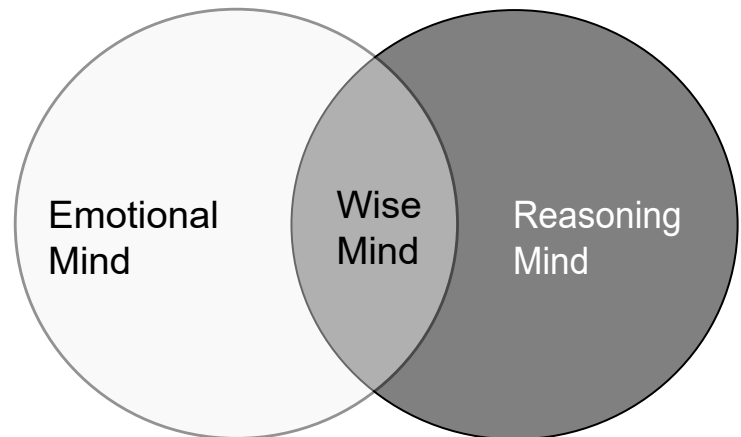
These are tools to help you speak up for yourself, ask for what you need, set healthy boundaries, and solve problems with others—while still being respectful and keeping your relationships strong.

Mindfulness: Having a Wise Mind

Using a wise mind leads to balanced decision-making.

We have 3 states of mind:

- **Emotional mind:** when we use feelings alone to make our decisions.
- **Reasoning mind:** when we use only logic to make decisions, ignoring our feelings.
- **Wise mind:** when we recognize and respect our feelings while responding to them in a rational way.



“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.”

- *Thich Nhat Hanh*

Mindfulness is the ...

- Ability to be present in a single moment.
- Ability to be so aware of the current moment that we are not overwhelmed by, or avoiding, what is present.
- Base state of humans.

“Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, as if your life depended on it.”

- *Jon Kabat-Zinn*



Mindfulness Skills

These are mindfulness skills that can help you feel calmer and more in control. They teach you how to slow down, notice what is happening around you, and help you handle stress in healthy ways.



Meditation

Practicing meditation every day can help lower your stress.

- Various breathing methods you can use on your own. Examples are:
 - Figure 8 pattern: 4-count breathing (breathe in for 4 seconds, out for 4 seconds)
 - 4-7-8 breathing (breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, breathe out for 8 seconds)
- You can use apps to help guide you through meditation. Some examples are:
 - Mindfulness in Motion (free)
 - Stop, Breathe, and Think (basic version is free)
 - Smiling Mind (free)
 - Mindfulness Daily
 - HeadSpace

Activity Focus

Focus on one activity, paying attention to what you are doing. Some examples are:

- Shuffling cards
- Coloring
- Eating slowly and paying attention to the taste
- Squeezing a stress ball

Conscious observation

Pick up something nearby, like a pen or a rock. Hold it in your hand and really look at it. Do not try to judge it or think too hard. Just notice:

- What does it look like?
- How does it feel?
- Is it smooth or rough?
- Are there sharp edges or smooth ones?



Rewiring Your Brain: How Does it Work?

Our brains change based on how they are used. Practicing meditation every day, for example, can rewrite your brain to be calmer and more focused.

Every time you have a thought, neurons connect like little impulses across the map of your brain. When these neurons connect, your brain grows thicker and stronger in certain places based on the thoughts you think.

We can actually change the circuitry of the brain to help us be more peaceful and compassionate, simply by directing our thoughts and imaginations.

Just like a bodybuilder lifting weights to build muscle, the more you think **balanced** thoughts, the stronger the part of your brain that allows you to have positive feelings will become.

Benefits of Yoga

Circle the benefits of yoga that may help you:

Promotes being grounded and relaxed

Encourages mindfulness

Coping skill for anger and stress

Promotes good breathing

Builds strength and flexibility

Lessens overthinking and negative self-talk

Helps you fall asleep

Helps manage pain

Encourages moving and exercise

Feel better by doing (Behavioral Activation)



Gentle Seated Yoga

This set of yoga poses is designed to increase your strength and range of motion, improve your breathing, and calm your mind and body.

Instructions

- Sit on a firm chair that supports your back. Your feet should rest on the floor.
- For each pose, take 3 to 5 deep, slow breaths (inhalations and exhalations).
- If any pose or movement causes you pain, stop right away.
- If you have any questions, ask your occupational or physical therapist.

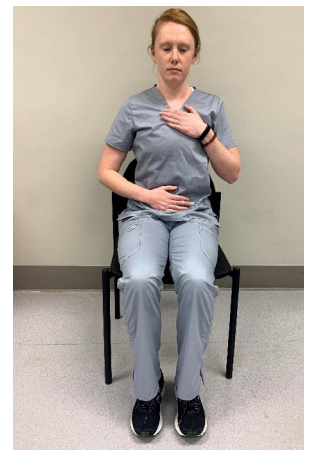


Watch this video at go.osu.edu/yogachair

Yoga poses

Grounding with Belly Breathing

1. Sit up tall and relax your body.
2. Place 1 hand under your belly and 1 hand on your chest.
3. Take a slow, big breath in, filling up your belly like a balloon. Feel your belly and chest rise.
4. Exhale slowly. Feel both hands fall on your belly and chest.
5. Do this 5 times, while feeling your body relax. Notice if you feel more grounded and connected to yourself.



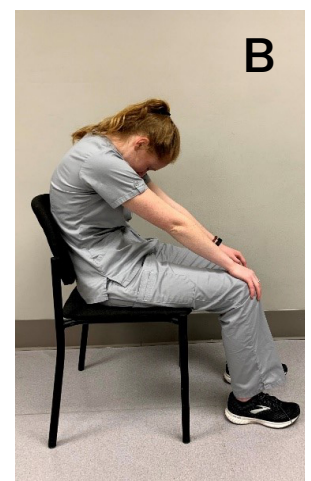
Cat/Cow Poses

Cow (A)

1. Breathe in, arch your back, and stick your belly forward.
2. Squeeze shoulder blades together and look up.

Cat (B)

1. From cow pose — exhale, round your back and tuck your chin to your chest.
2. Move smoothly back and forth between these two poses.



Side Bends

1. Inhale as you reach both arms to the sky.
2. Exhale as you reach one arm up and over, dropping the other arm.
3. Feel the stretch between your armpit and hip.
4. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Trunk Twist

Do not do this pose if you had a surgery, a procedure or have another medical reason to limit movement of your spine, such as no twisting (spinal precautions).

1. Inhale as you sit up tall and reach one arm to the back of the chair.
2. Twist your body to the side. Look to the side or back over your shoulder, if it feels good in your neck.
3. Reach your other arm to the outside of your knee.
4. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Hamstring Stretch with Strap

You will need a gait belt or a long strap.

1. Sit tall on the edge of your chair.
2. Straighten one leg and wrap the strap around your foot, right under your toes.
3. Exhale as you pull back on the strap with both hands. Feel the back of your leg get longer.
4. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Half Sun Salutation Flow

Do this series 3 to 5 times. Move with your breath as quickly or slowly as you like.

High Mountain



1. Inhale as you reach your arms up into High Mountain Pose.

Swan Dive



2. Exhale as you swoop your arms down into Swan Dive.

Forward Fold



3. Fold your body forward to let your belly rest on your legs. Relax your head, neck, and arms down towards the floor into Forward Fold.

Lift Halfway



4. Inhale as you lift your body up halfway. Keep your back straight and push your arms into your shins.

Forward Fold



5. Exhale into Forward Fold again.

High Mountain



6. Inhale as you swoop your arms up into Swan Dive. Reach your arms all the way up overhead into High Mountain.

Goal Post Arms Flow

1. Inhale as you reach your arms up.
2. Exhale as you bend your elbow to create a football goal post.
3. Inhale as you reach your arms back up again.
4. Move between these 2 poses for 3 to 5 breaths.



Eagle Pose

1. Inhale and sit up tall. Cross one leg over the other, as you bring both arms out to the side and into a “T” shape.

Option A: Exhale as you give yourself a hug. Reach for your opposite shoulders. Stack your elbows on top of each other, if possible.

Option B: Exhale as you give yourself a hug. Turn your forearms up so your fingers point to the ceiling, with the backs of your hands together or palms together.

2. Lift your elbows off your chest, as much as possible.
3. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose.
4. Repeat on the other side.



Figure Four

1. Sit up tall. Inhale as you cross your ankle over your thigh.
2. Pull your toes towards your knee.
3. Exhale as you fold forward with a flat back until you feel a stretch in the outside of the hip.
4. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose.
5. Repeat on the other side.



Final Resting

1. Sit up tall, relax your shoulders away from ears. Put your palms on your thighs in comfortable position.
2. Do a big inhale and exhale, then close your eyes.
3. Release and relax.
4. Take 3 to 5 breaths in this pose (or longer if it feels good).



Yoga Resources and Recommendations

The following are resources to introduce yoga into your daily routine. These are recommendations that should be considered along with medical advice. Ask your therapist if you have any questions or concerns.

Free Yoga Videos

Ohio State Yoga Videos

- Chair Yoga- Arms only: go.osu.edu/yogachair
- Chair Yoga- Arms and Legs: go.osu.edu/yogabededge
- Laying on your back (in bed or on floor): go.osu.edu/yogabedgentle

Leap Services Videos: youtube.com/channel/UCluKcGhYJelnOjG6E6nOyww

- 5 Chair yoga class options
- Guided relaxation videos for mindfulness

Yoga with Adreine: yogawithadriene.com/free-yoga-videos

- Many options, including chair and gentle yoga or yoga for specific pain or problems

Love Your Brain: loveyourbrain.com

- Full library for gentle yoga, mindfulness, and meditation
- Geared towards mild brain injury recovery but appropriate for all
- Requires registration with email address to access free content

Insight Timer app: insighttimer.com

- App for smart phone
- Guided relaxation primarily, also has various yoga videos/events
- Helpful for guided relaxation to fall asleep

Free In-person Classes

Columbus Commons Yoga Classes (Summer only)

columbuscommons.org/events/fitness

Calendar: columbuscommons.org/series/free-fitness-at-the-commons

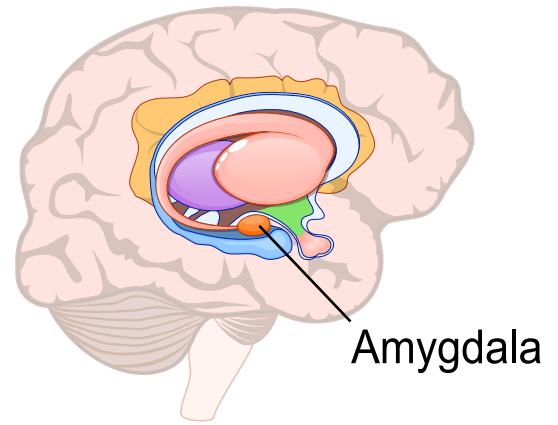
- Free, outdoor classes in downtown Columbus Commons Park

Stress and the Body

Amygdala

The amygdala is a small, almond-shaped part of your brain that helps you feel emotions—especially fear, anger, and anxiety. When you are stressed, it acts like an alarm system. It quickly decides if something is dangerous and tells your body to get ready to fight, run away, or freeze.

It sends signals to your adrenal glands to release stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones make your heart beat faster, your breathing faster, and your muscles tighten.



Body systems for stress

Many of the body's functions work automatically, meaning that they work without you having to think about it, like breathing and digestion.

These automatic functions are controlled by the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), which is divided into 2 parts: 1) sympathetic nervous system and 2) parasympathetic nervous system.

Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS):

The SNS is your “fight or flight” response system. In a stressful or dangerous situation, it kicks in to help you react quickly.

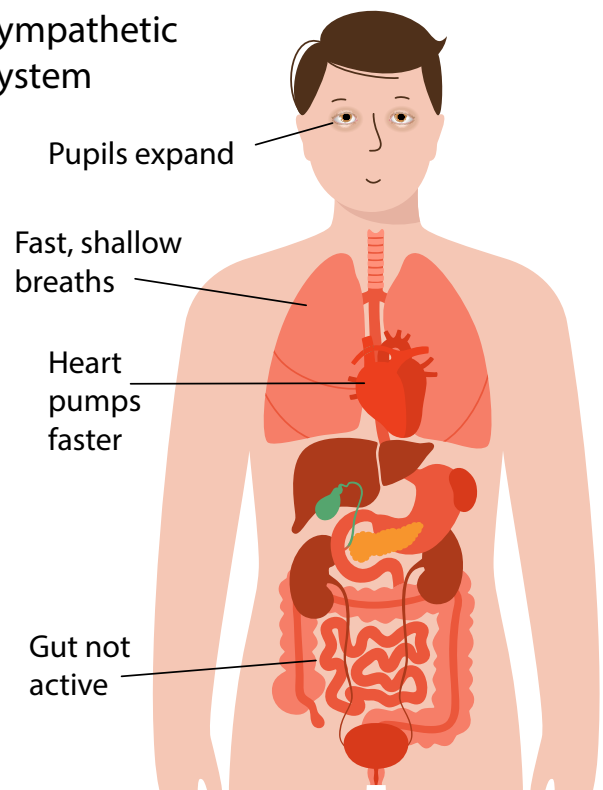
When the SNS is triggered:

- A chemical called adrenaline moves through your blood and affects your whole body.
- Your heart beats faster.
- Your blood pressure goes up.
- Your breathing becomes faster and more shallow.
- Your pupils get bigger.
- Your muscles tighten.

This system helps you stay safe in emergencies.

When your SNS system turns on during everyday stress, it can make you feel anxious, tired, or unwell.

Stress Sympathetic System



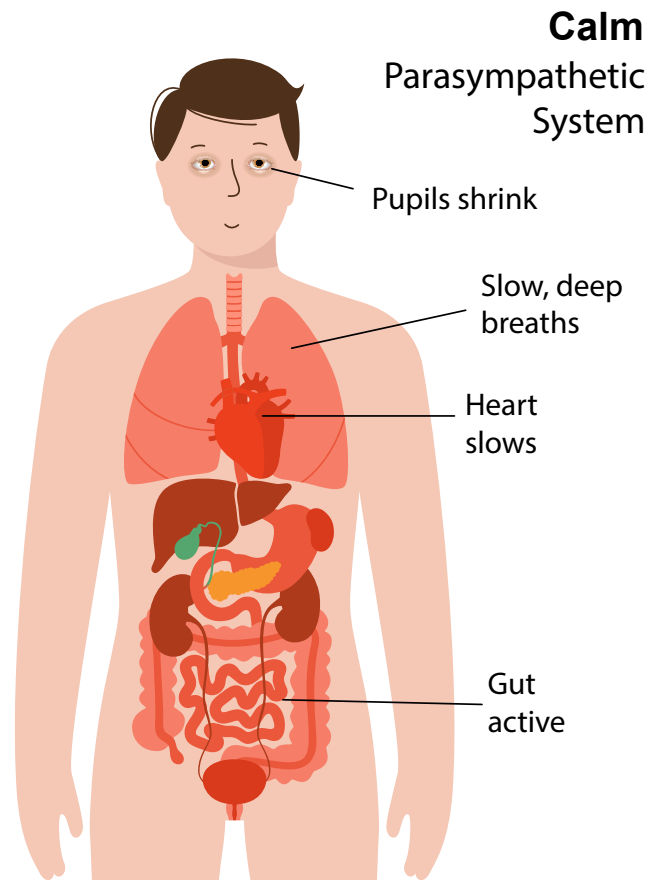
Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS):

The PNS is the “rest and digest” system or calming response. It helps you relax and recover after a stressful event.

When the PNS is turned on:

- Your heart rate slows down.
- Your blood pressure goes down.
- Your breathing becomes slower and deeper.
- Your pupils get smaller.
- Your muscles relax.

You can help turn on your PNS by practicing mindfulness, meditation, or taking slow, deep breaths. This helps turn off the “fight or flight” system and makes your body feel safe and calm.



Distress Tolerance: Coping with a Crisis

What is distress tolerance?

Distress tolerance means being able to tolerate, or deal with, strong feelings like fear, sadness, or anger (distress) without doing something that might hurt you or others.

Distress tolerance skills are positive ways to cope with crisis situations.

It will NOT make the crisis go away, but will help you to tolerate the pain and distress. These skills involve using mindfulness and actions with purpose—like focusing on your breathing or doing something calming—to help you stay in control.

The goal is to get through the tough moment and, when possible, make it a little better.

Unhealthy Avoidance

When we try to escape or ignore problems instead of facing them. This can make things worse over time.

Examples include:

- Staying in denial: Pretending the problem does not exist.
- Ignoring the problem: Choosing not to deal with it even when there is a clear solution.
- Stuffing emotions: Hiding or pushing down feelings instead of expressing them in a healthy way.
- Escaping: Hoping the problem will go away on its own without taking any action.



Healthy Distractions

Activities you choose to do on purpose to take your mind off a stressful situation — especially when there is no way to fix the problem right away.

Examples include:

- Doing a puzzle or crossword
- Listening to music
- Playing a game
- Coloring or doing crafts
- Using a fidget toy

These activities give your brain a break and help you feel more in control until you are ready to deal with the problem.

Managing a Crisis

Learn to use your skills to manage and exit a crisis

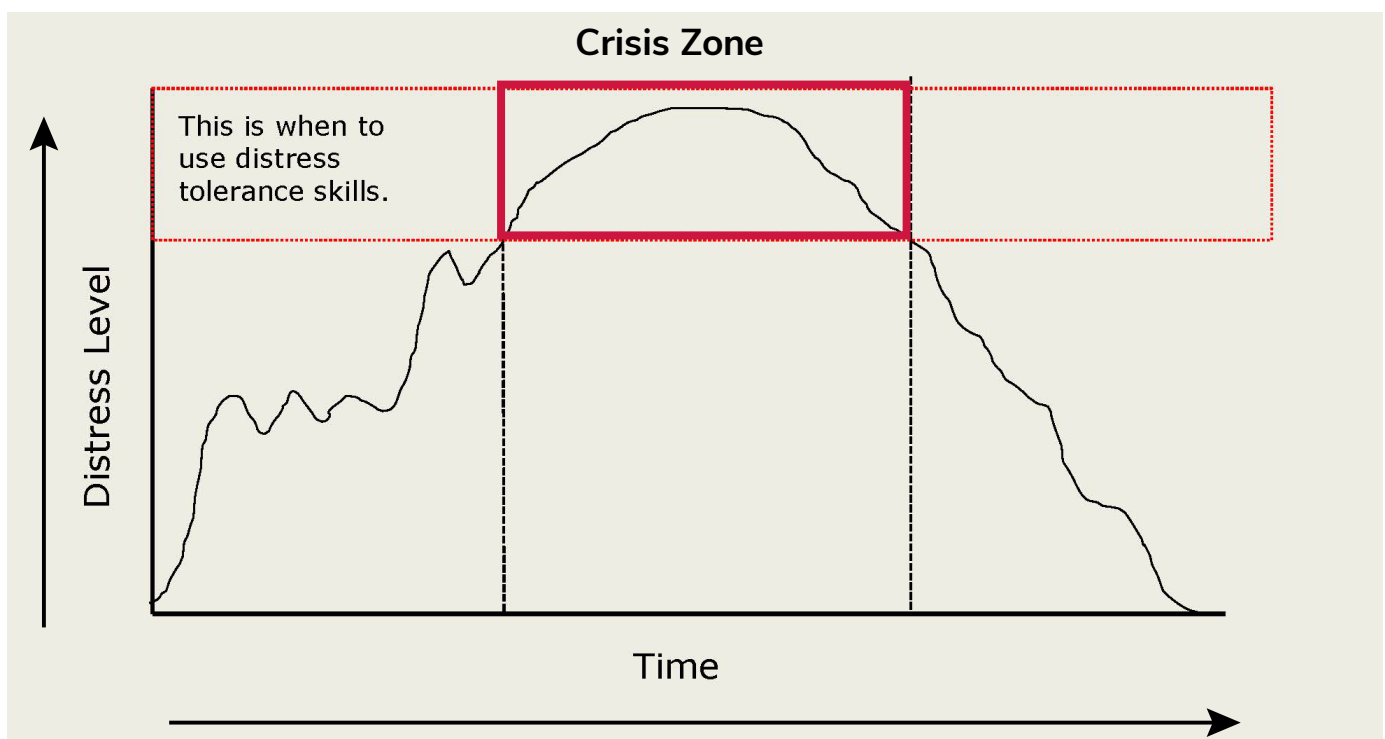
As your emotions get stronger, your level of distress increases (shown by the arrow on the left hand side). This happens as time passes (shown by the bottom arrow). The amount of time can vary for everyone. At a certain point, you are entering the crisis zone and your fight or flight system turns on. Some symptoms that will let you know you are entering the crisis zone include:

- Trouble thinking logically
- A racing heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Faster and more shallow breathing

During this time, you are most at risk for using unhealthy coping, such as self-harm, substance use, or lashing out. Instead, this is the time to use the distress tolerance and mindfulness skills you are learning.

After some time, you can calm your emotions and bring your distress level back down. You will know you are leaving the crisis zone when you see signs including:

- Returning ability to problem solve
- Being able to think more clearly
- Slower breathing
- Relaxed muscles
- Lower heart rate



Ways to Tolerate

Self-Soothing with Your 5 Senses

Vision

- Buy a beautiful flower.
- Decorate a space in a room, so you really like it.
- Light a candle and watch the flame.
- Set a place at the table for a meal using your best things.
- Go to a museum with beautiful art.
- Go sit in the lobby of a beautiful old hotel.
- Look at nature around you.
- Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars.
- Walk in a pretty part of town.
- Look at beautiful pictures in a book.
- Go to a ballet or other dance performance, or watch one on TV. Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of you, not lingering on anything too long.



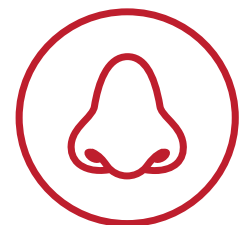
Hearing

- Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or exciting music.
- Pay attention to sounds of nature, like waves, birds, or rainfall.
- Sing to your favorite songs.
- Hum a soothing tune.
- Learn to play an instrument.
- Be mindful of any sounds that get in your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other.



Smell

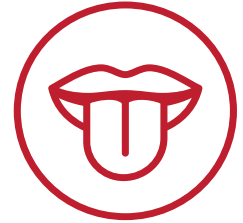
- Use your favorite perfume or lotions, or try them on in the store.
- Spray fragrance in the air.
- Light a scented candle.
- Put lemon oil on your furniture.
- Put potpourri in a bowl in your room.
- Boil cinnamon.



- Bake cookies, cake, or bread.
- Smell the roses.
- Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.

Taste

- Have a good meal.
- Have a favorite soothing drink, such as herbal tea or hot chocolate.
- Treat yourself to a dessert.
- Put whipped cream on your coffee.
- Sample flavors in an ice cream store.
- Suck on a piece of peppermint candy.
- Chew your favorite gum.
- Have some special food you do not usually buy or make, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice.
- Really taste the food you are eating, one bite at a time.



Touch

- Take a bubble bath or hot shower.
- Put clean sheets on the bed.
- 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 really comfortable chair in your home, or find one in a luxurious hotel lobby.
- Put on silky pants or a soft robe.
- Wrap yourself in a warm towel or blanket just out of the dryer.
- Hug someone.
- Pay attention to whatever you are touching and notice when that touch is soothing.



Sensory-Based Coping

Sensory-based coping means using your five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—to help calm your body and mind during stress. You can learn to use what you see, hear, smell, and feel around you (your sensory environment) in your coping methods.

By using sensory-based coping strategies (ways to calm down or wake up using our senses), you can help yourself feel better during tough moments.

Calming

If you are feeling stressed or upset, you might try a calming strategy. This could be listening to soft music, dimming the lights, smelling something relaxing like lavender, or sipping a warm cup of tea. These things can help your body and mind slow down and feel more peaceful.

Alerting

If you are feeling tired or sad, you might need an alerting strategy to wake yourself up or boost your mood. This could include listening to fast music, eating something spicy, taking a cold shower, or turning on bright lights. These things can give you more energy and help you feel more awake.

5 Senses	Calming Examples (for anxiety or anger)	Alerting Examples (for sadness or tiredness)
Sight	Dim lights; pastel colors, like blue or green; images of nature; being around people you love; comforting movie	Bright or flashing lights; vibrant colors, like red or yellow; new or exciting movie
Sound	Soft or slow music; classical music; nature sounds; soft drum beats; white noise; brown noise; quiet time	Loud music; rock or rap music; upbeat pop music; alarms
Touch	Soft blankets; petting animals; warm showers; hugs; deep pressure; drinking a warm beverage	Cold shower; holding an ice cube; fast movements; using fidget spinner; drinking ice cold beverages
Smell	Essential oils, like lavender; smell of laundry, vanilla, or chamomile	Citrus scents, like orange or lemon; smells of cinnamon or peppermint
Taste	Comfort foods, like pasta; sweet desserts; sweet drinks, like hot chocolate or tea; cottage cheese or yogurt	Spicy foods, like chili peppers or wasabi; sour candy; citrus fruit; peppermint gum or mints; crunchy snacks, like pretzels

Sensory-Based Coping Skills

Everyone responds differently to sensory stimuli (things you see, hear, taste, smell, or feel). Brainstorm some calming and alerting stimuli you could use to adjust your mood in daily life.

5 Senses

Calming

Use when anxious
or angry

Alerting

Use when
depressed or tired

Taste

Smell

Sight

Touch

Sound

Over 100 Things To Do

Instead of Ruminating About Things Out of Your Control

Ruminating means getting stuck thinking about the same upsetting thought or problem over and over without finding a solution. Instead, here are ideas of things you could do instead. Check off the ones you may want to try.

- Cook a gourmet dinner you think you cannot cook.
- Clean a closet at home.
- Put together a time capsule to be opened in the year 2110.
- Go take some artsy pictures of random objects.
- Rearrange your living room furniture.
- Put a puzzle together.
- Go to your favorite coffee or tea shop or discover a new one.
- Attend a free concert or theater-in-the-park. There are plenty!
- Using a map, see what a day's drive in any direction has to offer.
- Go feed ducks or geese at a pond somewhere.
- Go to a batting cage or a driving range.
- Replace the air filter in your furnace (you're supposed to do this every 3 months).
- Visit a hobby shop for new hobby ideas.
- Go garage sale-ing.
- Start a blog about something you're passionate about.
- Visit the local historical society.
- Make some sun tea.
- Search for a painting or pottery class you could sign up for.
- Go to a baseball game.
- Print off a world map and then mark all the places you want to go.
- Visit antique stores in a town near you.
- Create a list of movies you want to watch or books you want to read.
- Go to a local farmer's market on weekends in summer.
- Learn about a religion you do not understand.
- Learn how to make jam.
- Go window shopping.
- Cash in on some old books by selling them to a used book store.
- Start writing a book or a play.
- Research your genealogy.
- Write an article for a local newspaper.
- Visit someone at a senior center.
- Grill outside. If it's winter or rainy, all the better!
- Reach out to someone who may be suffering.
- Take up beading.
- Write a letter to a patient at Saint Jude's Hospital (google to find out how).
- Take an upholstery class. Go to garage sales for something to practice on.
- Go see a play.
- Learn how to say something in 15 different languages.
- Write a haiku.
- Take a bubble bath.
- Make a whole bunch of "top ten" lists.

- Paint your picture frames at home.
- Try to repair something that you've been putting off.
- Make a scrapbook about something you love.
- Plant some trees.
- Learn how to dance (or look up a Just Dance video on YouTube).
- Dig up your old Legos or Tinker Toys.
- Organize your kitchen.
- Have a cupboard potluck. Look up what you can make using the ingredients you currently have in your pantry.
- Try to improve your meditation or prayer skills.
- Take a hike. Literally.
- Gather up old or unused clothing and bring it to the thrift store.
- Take a glass-blowing class.
- Learn how to roller skate or ice skate.
- Go get a good back massage, then learn how to give one.
- Make a fruit smoothie.
- Do a crossword puzzle.
- Go join a gym.
- Go bowling.
- Sharpen your pruning tools, then sharpen your pruning skills.
- Learn how to change your engine oil.
- Fly a kite.
- Mow someone's lawn or rake their leaves.
- Sort your recipes.
- Learn how to groom your dog.
- Go bird watching.
- Write a letter to someone you have not spoken to in years.
- Call a family member or friend.
- Re-pot your houseplants.
- Make some pickles.
- Go for a jog.
- Give your cat some catnip.
- Plan a menu.
- Learn how to juggle.
- Plant an herb garden.
- Dye your hair.
- Learn to read music.
- Take up guitar.
- Stretch.
- Learn martial arts.
- Take a boxing or fencing class.
- Find a pinball machine to play.
- Polish your furniture.
- Learn Ikebana (Japanese flower arranging).
- Plan an English Garden.
- Volunteer somewhere (Call 2-1-1).
- Pick up garbage in a park.
- Play with your kids.
- Paint a still life of random objects.
- Get a library card and spend some time at the library.
- Make some tortillas from scratch.
- Try and see every movie on the American Film Institute's Top 100 Movies list.
- Make something out of cotton swabs or toothpicks.
- Do your nails.
- Make a playlist for a friend or loved one.
- Set up a domino topple.
- Build a house of cards.
- Make or add to an entry on Wikipedia.
- Organize the files on your computer.
- Learn to make balloon animals.
- Learn some magic tricks.
- Read your favorite book again.
- Check out the local community calendar.
- Take a drive down the old National Road (U.S. 40) and look for the milestones.
- Get a guided journal, or look up prompts online.

Distress Tolerance Plan



Distraction coping skills to use at home:



Distraction coping skills to use away from home:



Relaxation and self-soothing to use at home:



Relaxation and self-soothing to use away from home:



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