



REHABILITATION
SERVICES
PATIENT EDUCATION MANUAL

Distress Tolerance Skills

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN FRANCISCO
Langley Porter Psychiatric Hospital & Clinics

DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS



Distress Tolerance Skills help you to cope with, tolerate or accept pain and distress as part of life. Together with the *Mindfulness Skills, Emotion Regulation Skills and Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills* discussed in the other three Patient Education Manuals, the skills discussed in this manual are meant to help you to tolerate and *survive* crisis and to accept life as it is in the moment.

STRATEGIES INCLUDE

1. Learning how to *distract* or *refocus* yourself away from the pain
2. Learning how to self-soothe, comfort and nurture yourself
3. Learning how to *improve the moment* by replacing negative events with more positive ones.
4. Learning how to accept the things you have no control over.

DISTRACTION or “*REFOCUSING*”

Reducing contact with events that set off painful emotions

ACTIVITIES

Watch TV, attend a group activity, engage in exercise, do art or crafts, work a puzzle, talk to a friend, read a book

CONTRIBUTING TO OTHERS

Make something nice for someone else, do a surprising, thoughtful thing, make a special card for a friend, give a compliment, say thank you



COMPARISONS

Compare yourself to people less fortunate than you. Watch soap operas, read about other people’s suffering

(OPPOSITE) EMOTIONS

Do things that create a *different* emotion. Watch scary movies, watch comedies, listen to emotional music



PUSHING AWAY

Push the situation *away* by blocking it out of your mind, put “pain in a box” and put it away for a while, *refuse* to think about painful situations, censor ruminating

OTHER (BUSY) THOUGHTS

Count to 10, count the colors in the room or in paintings, find all things in your living space that are green or yellow, anything, work puzzles, watch TV, read

OTHER (INTENSE) SENSATIONS

Hold an ice-cube in your hand, stand under a very hot shower, put a rubber band around your wrist and *snap* it hard



MATCHING YOUR REFOCUSING OR DISTRACTION TO HOW YOU'RE FEELING

Refocusing works better when you *match* what you do with how you are feeling in the moment. First take a minute and figure out what the distressing feeling is. Next match the activity to the feeling.

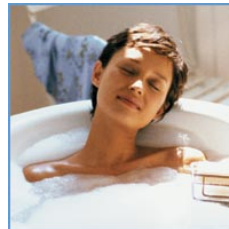
(If you're on the unit and are using a loud or expressive technique, let staff know so they can be aware and supportive.)

ANGRY, FRUSTRATED OR RESTLESS

Try something *physical*. Stomp around, exercise, clean your living space, go for a walk, make a soft clay model and smash it...

SAD, SOFT, MELANCHOLY, DEPRESSED, UNHAPPY

Do something slow and soothing. Take a hot bath, listen to soothing music, call a friend and just talk about things you like, watch TV or read a book.



CRAVING SENSATIONS, FEELING DEPERSONALIZED, DISSOCIATING, FEELING UNREAL

Do something that creates *sharp* physical sensations. Squeeze ice hard, put a finger into ice cream for a minute, chew a piece of ginger-root, rub liniment under your nose, slap a table top hard, snap your wrist with a rubber band, take a cold bath, stomp your feet on the ground, focus on how it feels to breathe.

WANTING FOCUS

Do a task that *requires* focus and concentration. Practice walking meditation around the unit. Choose an object in the room and examine it carefully, then *write* a detailed description of it, include everything: size, weight texture, color, possible uses, feel, etc. Choose a random object, like a pen, and try to list 20 different uses for it.



SELF-SOOTHING WITH YOUR SENSES

Learning to be gentle and kind to yourself

VISION

Make one space in your room *beautiful*, look at everything you see as *art*, fix your nails so they look pretty, look at beautiful pictures in a magazine, be *mindful* of each sight that passes in front of you without lingering on any.

HEARING

Listen to beautiful soothing music or invigorating and exciting music, sing your favorite songs, hum a soothing tune, play a musical instrument, observe the sounds in the room and hear them as music, be *mindful* of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other...



SMELL

Use your favorite perfume or lotion, wash your clothes with your favorite smelling detergent, breathe in fresh smells of nature when outside, get some coffee and smell the aroma.



TASTE

Chew your favorite gum, suck on a piece of peppermint candy, savor a piece of chocolate, really taste the food you eat, eat one thing *mindfully*.

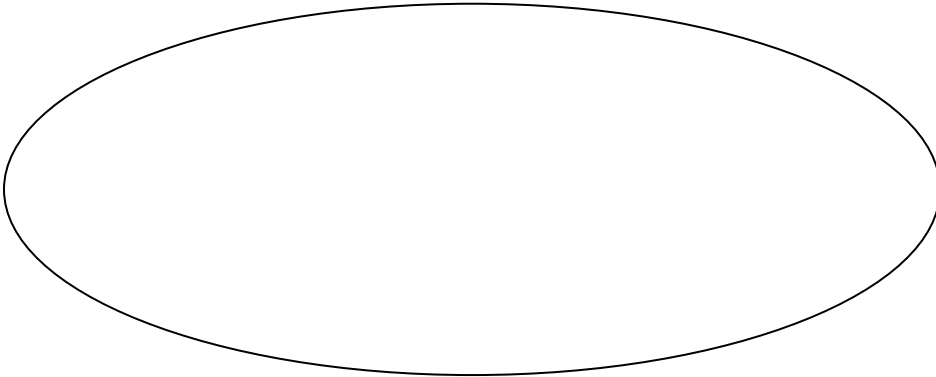
TOUCH

Take a bath, put lotion on your whole body, massage your feet, put on clean clothes, brush your hair for a long time, massage your hands and put lotion on them, experience whatever you're touching, *notice* touch that is soothing.

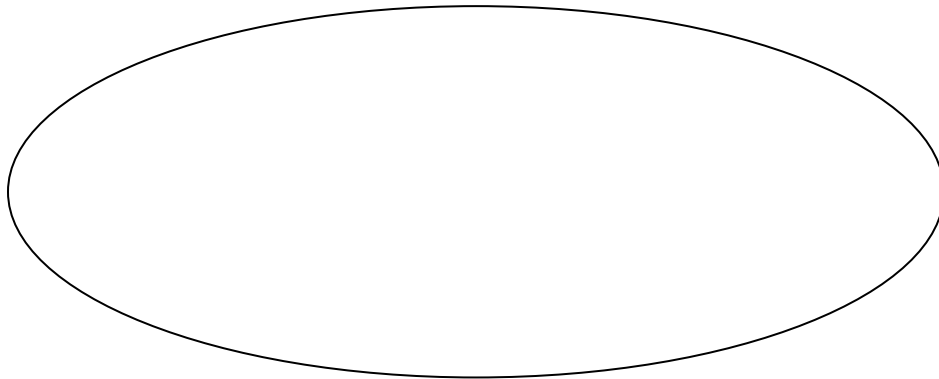
COPING SKILLS I HAVE USED

Write down your experiences

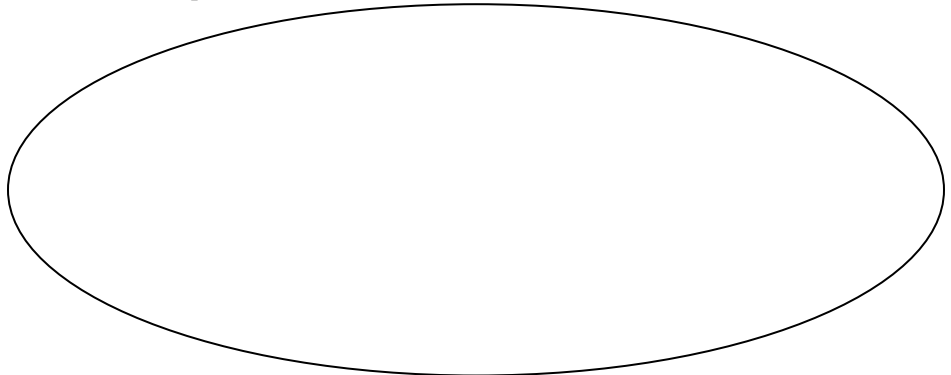
These worked for me



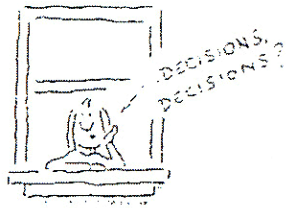
These did not work for me



I'd like to try these



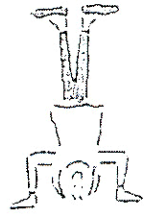
learning to love yourself...



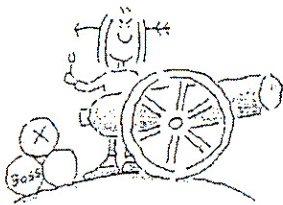
Choose to be happy.



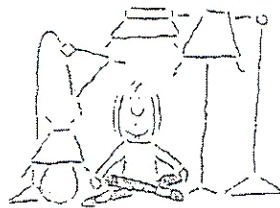
Lighten up.



Get a new perspective.



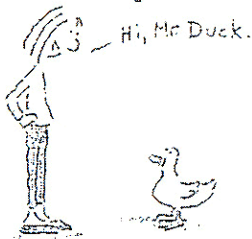
Stop being a victim.



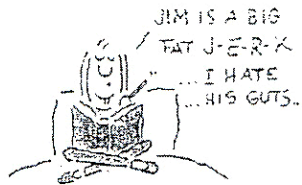
Surround yourself with light.



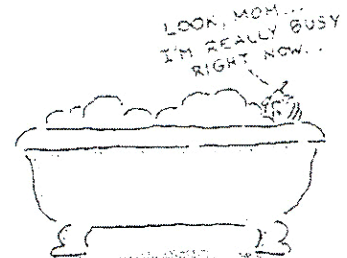
Demand your space.



Get in touch with nature.



Keep a journal.



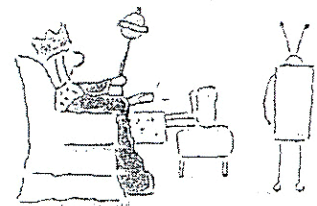
Cancel if you want to.



Buy yourself flowers.



Praise yourself.



You rule.

CARTOON BY MONICA SHEP

PLEASANT EVENTS LIST

Do pleasant things that are possible now. Doing a pleasant activity is like saving pennies in a piggybank towards a *life worth living*. Begin to accumulate the positives... those things that prompt positive emotions for you, such as love, joy, pride, self-confidence and calm.

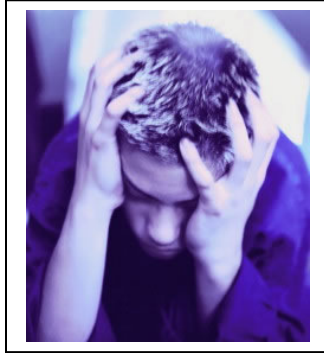
Check off the items that help. Which are your favorites? Which are new?

- ☐ Soaking in the bathtub
- ☐ Listening to favorite music
- ☐ Lying in the sun
- ☐ Planning a career change
- ☐ Laughing
- ☐ Thinking about my past trips
- ☐ Listening to others
- ☐ Reading magazines, newspapers or books
- ☐ Planning a day's activities
- ☐ Meeting new people
- ☐ Remembering beautiful scenery
- ☐ Practicing karate, judo, yoga, tai chi...
- ☐ Remembering words or deeds of loving people
- ☐ Doodling
- ☐ Exercising
- ☐ Having a discussion with friends
- ☐ Singing around the house
- ☐ Practicing religion (going to church, group praying, etc.)
- ☐ Going to the beach
- ☐ Thinking "I'm an OK person"
- ☐ Being outside in nature
- ☐ Painting
- ☐ Doing something spontaneously
- ☐ Sleeping
- ☐ Thinking about a new relationship
- ☐ Singing with groups
- ☐ Playing musical instruments
- ☐ Meditating

- ☐ Writing books (poems, articles)
- ☐ Discussing books
- ☐ Gardening
- ☐ Early morning coffee and newspaper
- ☐ Daydreaming
- ☐ Planning to go to school
- ☐ Thinking about sex
- ☐ Completing a task
- ☐ Eating healthy "comfort" foods
- ☐ Helping another person
- ☐ Staying on a diet
- ☐ Writing in a journal
- ☐ Being alone
- ☐ Writing a letter
- ☐ Cleaning
- ☐ Giving someone a compliment or smile
- ☐ Having lunch with a friend
- ☐ Playing cards
- ☐ Writing a list of things to do
- ☐ Doing a crossword puzzle
- ☐ Dressing up to look nice
- ☐ Talking on the phone
- ☐ Saying "I love you"
- ☐ Doing arts or crafts
- ☐ Thinking about volunteering in the community
- ☐ Doing a jigsaw puzzle
- ☐ Thinking "I'm a person who can cope"
- ☐ Other: _____

A COMMON PROBLEM...

Doing pleasant activities will make me feel better, but when I'm depressed, I don't feel like doing anything.



WHAT CAN I DO??

1. What *thoughts* might help you *do* pleasant activities even when you don't feel like it? Write down the thoughts you can say to yourself.

2. Complete the following sentences:

- **YES**, I don't feel like doing a pleasant activity,
BUT _____

- If I do a pleasant activity, I *will* feel _____

- If I do a pleasant activity, I *might* feel _____

TAKE ACTION, START NOW

Make a list

Make a poem

Make a collage using magazines and newspapers of things that make you feel

**STRONG
COURAGEOUS
GROUNDED
CALM
HAPPIER
HEALTHIER**

Pick one or do them all

Make up your own

What did you observe about your mood as you worked on this project?

**...grant me
the SERENITY
to accept the things
I cannot change...**



**the COURAGE to change
the things I can...**



**And the
WISDOM
to know the
difference.**

RESOURCE LIST FOR ADDITIONAL READINGS

This manual is part of a four manual series discussing Mindfulness Skills, Distress Tolerance Skills, Emotion Regulation Skills and Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills. If you would like additional reading materials or resources related to the skills discussed in these manuals, we would like to direct you to the following:

Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life: How Dialectical Behavior Therapy Can Put You in Control by Scott E. Spradlin, MA, New Harbinger Publications, 2003.

The Feeling Good Handbook by David D. Burns, M.D., Penguin Books, 1999.

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., Dell Publishing, 1990.

Guided Meditations, Explorations and Healings by Stephen Levine, Doubleday, 1991.

The Language of Letting Go by Melody Beattie, Hazeldon Foundation Meditation Series, 1990.

The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, publisher New World Library, (www.newworldlibrary.com), 1999.

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis, Ph.D., New Harbinger Publications, 2000.

The Spirituality of Imperfection by Ernest Kurtz, Ph.D., Bantam Books, 1994.

Turning Suffering Inside Out: A Zen Approach to Living with Physical and Emotional Pain by Darlene Cohen, Shambhala Publications, 2000.

Women, Anger & Depression: Strategies for Self Empowerment by Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., Health Communications, Inc., 1992.

Audio

Guided Mindfulness Meditation by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Stress Reduction CDs and Tapes, P.O. Box 547, Lexington, MA 02420 or www.mindfulnesscds.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many of the materials discussed in these manuals are based on the works of Marsha M. Linehan, Ph. D. as presented in her books **Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder** and **Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder**. Both are available through Guilford Press, 1993.