

# Distress Tolerance Skills: A Pocket Guide

This handout aims to equip people with practical, user-friendly tools for managing and navigating overwhelming emotions. It offers diverse strategies to address both immediate and long-term distress, fostering resilience, emotion regulation, and self-awareness in clients on their journeys toward their mental health goals.

Distress tolerance is about managing overwhelming emotions effectively. Here are some tools that can help.

## 1 Coping With the Five Senses

**Objective:** to ground yourself and cultivate a sense of calm using your senses.

- Engage in activities that stimulate your senses.
  - Sight: watch a sunset, birds flying, or anything you find visually soothing.
  - Hearing: listen to your favorite songs or peaceful nature sounds.
  - Smell: take in the aromas of your favorite perfume or flower.

- Taste: enjoy your favorite beverage, like coffee, tea, or juice.
- Touch: take a long, hot shower or wear soft, comfortable clothing.
- You can visualize these activities if you cannot physically do them in the moment.

## 2 ACCEPTS Method

- **Objective:** to distract and soothe yourself when dealing with intense emotional distress.
- **A**ctivities: engage in physical activities such as sports or hobbies.
- **C**ontributions: perform acts of kindness for others.
- **C**omparisons: compare your current feelings to past experiences, or consider how others might deal with similar situations.
- **E**motions: use art, music, or films to induce different emotions.
- **P**ushing away: temporarily distance yourself mentally from distressing situations.
- **T**houghts: engage your mind with puzzles or stimulating reading.
- **S**ensations: use physical sensations (squeezing a stress ball, holding ice, taking a hot or cold shower) to distract from emotional distress.

### 3 Muscle Relaxation

- **Objective:** to relieve physical tension associated with emotional stress.
- Perform regular muscle relaxation exercises, focusing particularly on areas where you carry tension.

### 4 IMPROVE Method

- **Objective:** to improve the moment and create a sense of peace and positivity when you are struggling.
- **Imagery:** visualize a safe place or calming scene.
- **Meaning:** find a purpose or positive aspect in your current situation.
- **Prayer:** engage in spiritual, religious, or meditative practices.
- **Relaxation:** do activities that induce relaxation, such as going for a leisurely walk or taking a long shower.
- **One thing at a time:** focus on doing just one task at a time to prevent feeling overwhelmed.
- **Vacation:** give yourself mini-breaks doing activities you enjoy.
- **Encouragement:** practice positive self-talk and become your own cheerleader.

## 5 The RAIN Dance

- **Objective:** to understand, accept, and soothe emotional distress without trying to escape or resist it.
- **Recognize:** identify the emotion and its physical manifestations.
- **Allow:** accept emotions and physical symptoms without judgment.
- **Inquire:** ask yourself gentle, nonjudgmental questions about the emotion.
- **Nurture:** practice self-care and stress management skills.

## 6 HALT Skill

- **Objective:** to prevent emotional vulnerability by addressing basic needs and reducing potential stress triggers.
- **Hungry:** follow a regular meal schedule to avoid hunger.
- **Angry:** find healthy ways to express and release anger, such as journaling.
- **Lonely:** seek company, join groups or clubs, or engage in social activities.
- **Tired:** adhere to a regular sleep schedule and prioritize rest.

**Remember** to practice these skills regularly to increase their effectiveness. They can be your tools for navigating difficult emotions and situations.