

The TIPP Skill: Addressing Distress in DBT for Addiction Recovery

The TIPP skill is a cornerstone of dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) for managing acute distress, especially among clients grappling with addiction. Conceptualized by Dr. Marsha Linehan, the TIPP skill can be particularly useful during intense cravings or when confronted with triggers, guiding people toward healthier coping mechanisms.

1 Temperature

Temperature regulation, as an immediate sensory intervention, diminishes overwhelming cravings and emotions tied to addiction. For instance, submerging one's face in cold water can momentarily disrupt the overwhelming urge to use a substance. Portable cold packs can serve as on-the-go tools, and are especially beneficial for those in early recovery stages, interrupting the cycle of craving before it escalates.

2 Intensity

Physical exertion can divert the mind from intense cravings. Activities such as brisk walking or jogging can be especially helpful during moments when the compulsion to use becomes overpowering. The exertion not only distracts from cravings but also releases endorphins, which can counteract the negative emotions or moods that often accompany withdrawal or abstinence or that can trigger urges.

3 Paced Breathing

Structured breathing, such as box breathing, serves as an anchoring technique during moments of heightened anxiety or when memories of substance use surface. Managing physiological signs of distress can make the difference between relapse or continued sobriety for those in recovery.

4 Progressive Relaxation

Guiding clients through a body scan exercise can be particularly beneficial during the turbulent emotional phases of withdrawal. As the body relearns to function without the substance, becoming attuned to bodily sensations can foster a renewed sense of control and awareness. This technique can be particularly grounding during moments of disassociation or when past traumas, often linked to substance use, resurface.

Key Points

- Temperature regulation is an immediate sensory technique to counteract surges in addiction-related cravings and emotional turmoil.
- Exercise and other movement creates a physical distraction that can redirect the overpowering urge to use a substance for the short time it lasts, and also releases helpful mood-enhancing endorphins.
- Paced breathing and progressive relaxation are essential tools for grounding and re-establishing control when triggers or memories of substance use are in play.