

# DBT Distress Tolerance Skills: Tip Skill, Stop Skill, and More

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- Distress tolerance skills are used for crisis situations
- Distress tolerance skills assist in accepting reality when reality is difficult to accept and/or strong urges to engage in unskillful behavior are present
- Popular Distress Tolerance skills include the TIP Skill, STOP Skill, Half-Smile, Willing Hands, and Radical Acceptance

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# Distress Tolerance Skills

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# Distress Tolerance Module



Accepting reality just as it is

- Skills assist in not making the problem worse
- Should be combined with problem solving and not be over-used
- Help with surviving a crisis



crisis vs. something uncomfortable



Linehan, M. M. (2015). DBT® skills training manual (2nd ed.). New York, NY, US: Guilford Press.

Although most mental health treatments emphasize change, this module pays tribute to the value which exists in accepting reality just as it is rather than attempting to make things different. The skills taught in this module will not solve the problem but will assist in not making the problem worse. These skills should be combined with problem solving and not overuse to the point that they become an avoidance of engaging in life and creating one's life worth living. The distress tolerance skills help with surviving a crisis and in that vein help to determine what is an actual crisis versus what is something that's just uncomfortable.



# Crisis



- High stress
- Possibility of very bad outcomes
- Short term
- Strong urge for immediate resolution

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So a crisis is defined as being something that is very high stress that has the possibility of really bad outcomes. Crises are short term and there is a strong urge for immediate resolution.



# Distress Tolerance Skills



- Help create short-term relief for painful situations
- Help minimize the risk of impulsive actions
- Help with reality acceptance ≠ Approving reality  
↓  
Zen influence → Prevent suffering which comes from the non-acceptance of pain
- Distress Tolerance Module → Eliminate suffering



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So there is a whole other set of skills in the distress tolerance module that relates to when the crisis is addiction but we wouldn't be going over those in this module. Distress tolerance skills will also help create short-term relief for painful situations. They help to minimize the risk of impulsive actions that come as a result of the desire to alleviate the pain that an individual is in during a crisis. So there are times when the solution to the problem actually makes the problem worse. And the distress tolerance module is created to provide another variety of skills that could be utilized instead of the usual go to that the patient have used in the past. Distress tolerance skills also help with reality acceptance. So when we're accepting reality, this is not the same thing as approving of reality. There is a heavy zen influence in this module and the acceptance of reality is thought to prevent suffering which comes from the non-acceptance of pain. So pain is inevitable and human beings are subject to pain in a variety of different forms throughout their lives. However, if non-acceptance is added to the pain, then we have an additional component of suffering that goes along with it. So the idea in the distress tolerance module is to eliminate suffering and therefore, we are only left with pain which doesn't sound fantastic but it's much more tolerable than pain plus suffering.



# When to Use Distress Tolerance Skills



Intense physical and/or emotional pain



Strong urges to engage in unskillful behavior (Emotion mind)



Emotional pain is too strong and it feels overwhelming



Need to be productive but are emotionally overwhelmed

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So distress tolerance skills are supposed to be used when there is intense physical and/or emotional pain and that pain cannot be alleviated quickly or it cannot be alleviated without causing additional problems. You can use the distress tolerance skills when there are strong urges to engage in unskillful behavior. When a person is in emotion mind, there are often very strong urges to fall back on unskillful behavior that has been successful in alleviating distress in the short term but has caused long-term pain. This includes self-harm, fantasizing about suicide, impulsive sexual behavior and substance abuse as well as multiple other problem behaviors. When the emotional pain is too strong and it feels overwhelming, this is another opportunity to use the distress tolerance skills. And finally, these skills can be used when there is a need to be able to be productive or to be able to focus, to be able to center and interact with someone, for example, but the person feels too emotionally overwhelmed and does not feel like that they can get themselves together. So this may be a group of skills that an individual uses at work when they feel emotionally overwhelmed. Go to the restroom and then can walk through a few of these.



# The TIP Skill

- The fastest and most popular of the distress tolerance skills
- Alleviates distress very quickly
- Clients are encouraged to use it when they are very emotionally overwhelmed and strong urges to self-harm are present

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So some of the skills that are taught in this module include several acronyms and for lack of time we're not going to go into every one of these but I'm going to pick a few to touch on. So the TIP skill is one of the fastest and most popular of the distress tolerance skills, fastest in that it alleviates distress very quickly. And clients are encouraged to use this skill when they are very emotionally overwhelmed and strong urges to self-harm are present, for example.



# The TIP Skill

T

Tipping the temperature of your face with very cold water



I

Intense exercise of approximately 20 minutes



P

Paced breathing as well as paired muscle relaxation



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So the TIP acronym stands for tipping, this is the T, tipping the temperature of your face with very cold water. The idea is to bring on the dive reflex and bring the physiology down to slow it down. The I stands for intense exercise of approximately 20 minutes. The P stands for paced breathing as well as paired muscle relaxation. So slowing down and bringing the body's physiology down to a more normative level.

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# The STOP Skill

**S**

Stop



**T**

Take a  
step back



**O**

Observe



**P**

Proceed  
mindfully

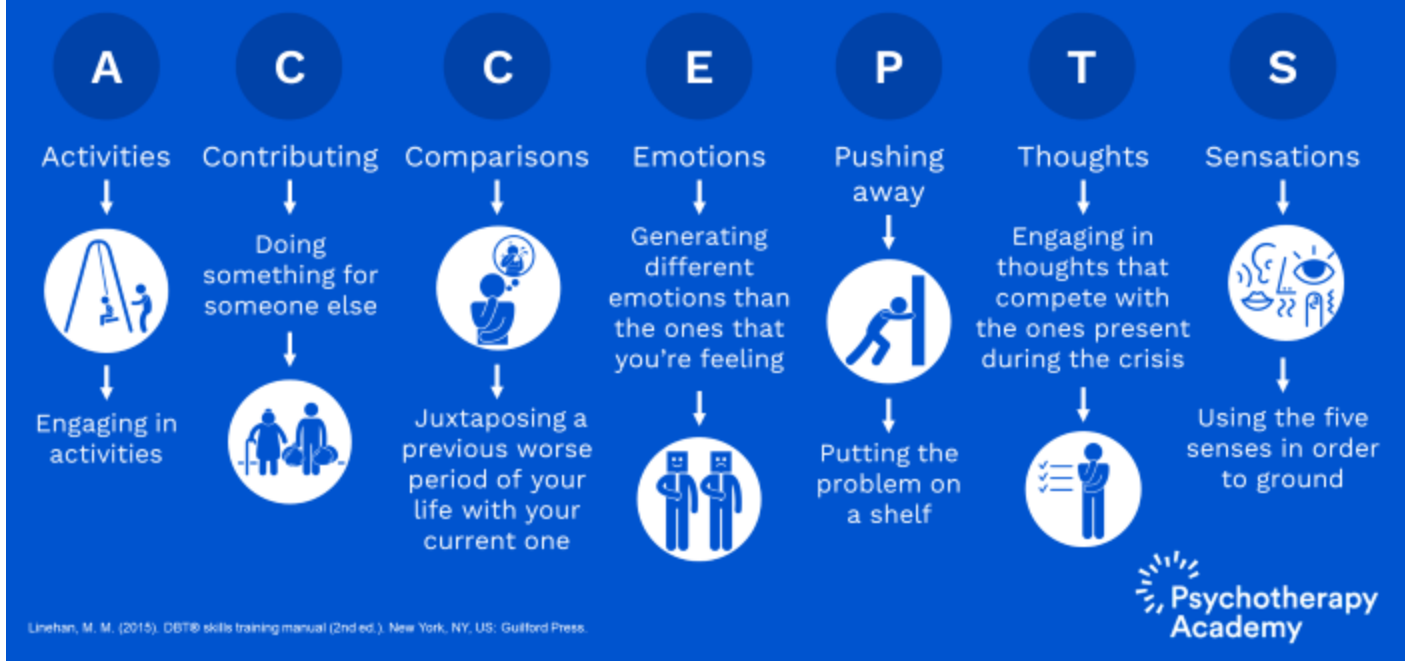


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Another acronym is the STOP skill. And STOP stands for – Literally, the S is stop. The T is take a step back and this is both a figurative and a literal take a step back. So in an interpersonal situation, taking a step back might mean literally taking a full step back away from the other person rather than stepping forward and further instigating a conflict. The O is observe and the observe is the same as the mindfulness skill of observe which is to take in with all of the senses everything that is happening, not thoughts about what's happening although those can be observed but not conclusions about what's happening. So just observing the data that's present. And P is to proceed mindfully. So it involves a pause and then a forward motion into the decision of what to do.

# The ACCEPTS Skill



Another acronym is the ACCEPTS skill. And this stands for engaging in activities, that's the A. Contributing which is doing something for someone else. Comparisons which is juxtaposing a previous period of your life with your current one, juxtaposing a previous period of your life that was much worse with the one that you're in or comparing yourself to someone else whose life is much worse. E, emotions which is generating different emotions than the ones that you're feeling. P is pushing away, sort of like putting the problem on a shelf. T or thoughts, engaging in thinking about math problems, making a grocery list, making a holiday list, any thoughts that compete with the thoughts and emotions that are present during the time of the crisis. And sensations which is using the five senses in order to ground.

# Other Distress Tolerance Skills

- Self-soothing
  - Distraction
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- These skills could be overused or could be an avoidance
  - They should be combined with problem solving
  - If the problem cannot be solved and a time period has to elapse, it's important to use these skills to cope with the emotions that arise

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In addition to these acronyms, self-soothing is encouraged and this is doing things that are comforting and feel good, incorporating positive activities, things that one would enjoy, distracting which can be self-soothe and distraction at the same time, taking one's thoughts away from the problem and putting them on something else. And it's easy to see how these skills could be overused or could be an avoidance if practiced at the expense of problem solving. So these skills should be combined with problem solving. But in the case that the problem cannot be solved and a time period has to elapse before anything can be done, it's important to be able to use these skills to cope with the emotions that arise as you're waiting on the solution or as you're waiting on the opportunity to problem solve.



# Other Distress Tolerance Skills



- Radical acceptance: 100% accepting reality as it is.
  - Does not mean approval
  - You cannot move to problem solving until the problem has been radically accepted



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So one of the most popular DBT skills is encompassed in the distress tolerance section and this is radical acceptance. So radical acceptance is beyond just typical acceptance. The term radical meaning fully, wholly, absolutely, 100% accepting reality as it is. And acceptance again does not mean approval. It means looking at things in the face. So a radical acceptance of locking your keys in your car would not be to stare through the window wondering how it happened. It would be to immediately move to a solution of calling a locksmith. So you cannot move to problem solving until the problem has been radically accepted. So we have to have acceptance in order to have change. In order to change the fact that I've dropped an egg on the floor and it's made a mess, I have to first accept that that has happened rather than staring at it and wishing that it wasn't true.



# Other Distress Tolerance Skills

- Half smile and willing hands: both capitalize on the feedback loop between the body and mind



- Posture of openness when angry



- Soft smile when stressed

- The mind mimics what the body is saying

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So the final skills that I'm going to go over are half smile and willing hands. And both of these capitalize on the feedback loop that exists between the body and mind. When we take a posture of openness which is willing hands, this is literally opening one's hands up and showing the wrists, when we do that when we're angry or we make a soft smile, we call the Mona Lisa smile, when stressed, then the mind starts to mimic what the body is saying is happening. And although the inside may feel very high strung, if the outside suggest relaxation or patience or willingness, then the inside will start to match.



# Key Points

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- Distress tolerance skills are used for **crisis situations**
- Distress tolerance skills assist in **accepting reality** when reality is difficult to accept and/or strong urges to engage in unskillful behavior are present
- **Popular Distress Tolerance** skills include the TIP Skill, STOP Skill, Half-Smile, Willing Hands, and Radical Acceptance



The key points for the distress tolerance skills. The distress tolerance skills are used for crisis situations. Distress tolerance skills assist in accepting reality when reality is difficult to accept and/or strong urges to engage in unskillful behavior are present. Popular distress tolerance skills include the TIP skill, STOP skill, half smile, willing hands and radical acceptance.

