DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 2
(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 1–7b)

Overview:
Crisis Survival Skills

These are skills for tolerating painful events, urges, and emotions when you cannot make things better right away.

- The STOP Skill
- Pros and Cons
- TIP Your Body Chemistry
- Distract with Wise Mind ACCEPTS
- Self-Soothe with the Five Senses
- Improve the Moment
When to Use Crisis Survival Skills

YOU ARE IN A CRISIS when the situation is:

- Highly stressful.
- Short-term (that is, it won’t last a long time).
- Creates intense pressure to resolve the crisis now.

USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS when:

1. You have intense pain that cannot be helped quickly.
2. You want to act on your emotions, but it will only make things worse.
3. Emotion mind threatens to overwhelm you, and you need to stay skillful.
4. You are overwhelmed, yet demands must be met.
5. Arousal is extreme, but problems can’t be solved immediately.

DON’T USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS for:

- Everyday problems.
- Solving all your life problems.
- Making your life worth living.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 4

(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 2, 2a)

STOP Skill

S - Stop
Do not just react. Stop! Freeze! Do not move a muscle! Your emotions may try to make you act without thinking. Stay in control!

T - Take a step back
Take a step back from the situation. Take a break. Let go. Take a deep breath. Do not let your feelings make you act impulsively.

O - Observe
Notice what is going on inside and outside you. What is the situation? What are your thoughts and feelings? What are others saying or doing?

P - Proceed mindfully
Act with awareness. In deciding what to do, consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people’s thoughts and feelings. Think about your goals. Ask Wise Mind: Which actions will make it better or worse?

Note. Adapted from an unpublished worksheet by Francheska Perepletchikova and Seth Axelrod, with their permission.
Use pros and cons any time you have to decide between two courses of action.

- An urge is a crisis when it is very strong and when acting on the urge will make things worse in the long term.
- Make a list of the pros and cons of acting on your crisis urges. These might be to engage in dangerous, addictive, or harmful behaviors, or they might be to give in, give up, or avoid doing what is necessary to build a life you want to live.
- Make another list of the pros and cons of resisting crisis urges—that is, tolerating the distress and not giving in to the urges.
- Use the grid below to evaluate both sets of pros and cons (this type of grid is also used in Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3). Or you can use the type of grid seen in Distress Tolerance Worksheet 3a and in the pros-and-cons worksheets for other modules.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROS</th>
<th>CONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acting on crisis urges</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cons of acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pros of acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cons of acting on impulsive urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Resisting crisis urges** | **Cons of resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.** |
| **Pros of resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.** | **Cons of resisting impulsive urges, doing what needs to be done, and not giving up.** |

**Before an overwhelming crisis urge hits:**
Write out your pros and cons; carry them with you.
Rehearse your pros and cons over and over.

**When an overwhelming crisis urge hits:**
Review your pros and cons. Get out your list and read it over again.
- Imagine the positive consequences of resisting the urge.
- Think of the negative consequences of giving in to crisis behaviors.
- Remember past consequences when you have acted on crisis urges.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 6

(Tip Distress Tolerance Worksheet 4)

TIP Skills: Changing Your Body Chemistry

To reduce extreme emotion mind fast.

Remember these as TIP skills:

**TIP THE TEMPERATURE** of your face with COLD WATER*  
(to calm down fast)

- Holding your breath, put your face in a bowl of cold water,  
  or hold a cold pack (or zip-lock bag of cold water) on your eyes and cheeks.  
- Hold for 30 seconds. Keep water above 50°F.

**INTENSE EXERCISE***  
(to calm down your body when it is revved up by emotion)

- Engage in intense exercise, if only for a short while.
  - Expend your body’s stored up physical energy by running, walking fast, jumping,  
    playing basketball, lifting weights, etc.

**PACED BREATHING**  
(pace your breathing by slowing it down)

- Breathe deeply into your belly.
- Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down (on average, five to six breaths  
  per minute).
- Breathe out more slowly than you breathe in (for example, 5 seconds in and 7  
  seconds out).

**PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION**  
(to calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out)

- While breathing into your belly deeply tense your body muscles (not so much as  
  to cause a cramp).
- Notice the tension in your body.
- While breathing out, say the word “Relax” in your mind.
- Let go of the tension.
- Notice the difference in your body.

*Caution: Very cold water decreases your heart rate rapidly. Intense exercise will increase heart rate. Consult your health care provider before using these skills if you have a heart or medical condition, a lowered base heart rate due to medications, take a beta-blocker, are allergic to cold, or have an eating disorder.

Using Cold Water, Step by Step

COLD WATER CAN WORK WONDERS*

When you put your full face into cold water . . . or you put a zip-lock bag with cold water on your eyes and upper cheeks, and hold your breath, it tells your brain you are diving underwater.

This causes the “dive response” to occur. (It may take 15–30 seconds to start.)

Your heart slows down, blood flow to nonessential organs is reduced, and blood flow is redirected to the brain and heart.

This response can actually help regulate your emotions.

This will be useful as a distress tolerance strategy when you are having a very strong, distressing emotion, or when you are having very strong urges to engage in dangerous behaviors.

(This strategy works best when you are sitting quietly—activity and distraction may make it less effective.)

TRY IT OUT!

*Caution: Very cold water decreases your heart rate. If you have any heart or medical condition, have a lowered base heart rate due to medications, or are on a beta-blocker, consult your health care provider before using these skills. Avoid ice water if you are allergic to the cold.

Paired Muscle Relaxation, Step by Step

If you have decided to practice paired muscle relaxation, it can be very helpful to practice relaxing each of your muscles first.

**When you are starting**, practice in a quiet place to reduce distractions, and make sure that you have enough time. As you improve with practice, you will want to practice in many different kinds of places, so that you can relax effectively when you most need to.

**Remember that effectiveness improves with practice.** If judgments arise, observe them, let them go, and return to your practice. If you become anxious, try focusing on breathing in to the count of 5 and out to the count of 7 (or the counts you have already determined for paced breathing), breathing all the while into your belly until you can return to relaxation exercises.

**Now that you are ready to begin . . .**

1. Get your body into a comfortable position in which you can relax. Loosen tight clothing. Lie or sit down, with all body parts uncrossed and no body part supporting any others.
2. For each area of the body listed below, gather tension by tightening muscles. Focus on the sensation of tightness in and around that area. Hold the tension as you inhale for 5–6 seconds, then release and breathe out.
3. As you release, say in your mind very slowly the word “Relax.”
4. Observe the changes in sensations as you relax for 10–15 seconds then move on to the next muscle.

Start first with each of the 16 muscle groups.
Once you can do that, practice with medium groups of muscles and then large groups.
Once you are good at that, practice tensing your entire body at once.

When you tense your entire body, you are like a robot—stiff, nothing moving.
When you relax your entire body, you are like a rag doll—all muscles drooping down.

Once you can relax all your muscles, practice three or four times a day until you can routinely relax your entire body rapidly.

By practicing pairing exhaling and the word “Relax” with relaxing your muscles, you will eventually be able to relax just by letting go and saying the word “Relax.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Small</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hands and wrists: Make fists with both hands and pull fists up on the wrists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Lower and upper arms: Make fists and bend both arms up to touch your shoulders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Shoulders: Pull both shoulders up to your ears.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Forehead: Pull eyebrows close together, wrinkling forehead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Eyes: Shut eyes tightly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Nose and upper cheeks: Scrunch up nose; bring upper lips and cheeks up toward eyes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lips and lower face: Press lips together; bring edges of lips back toward ears.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tongue and mouth: Teeth together; tongue pushing on upper mouth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Neck: Push head back into chair, floor, or bed, or push chin down to chest.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Upper legs and thighs: Legs out; tense thighs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Calves: Legs out; point toes down.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Ankles: Legs out; point toes together, heels out, toes curled under.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Remember,** paired relaxation is a skill. It takes time to develop. With practice, you will notice the benefits.

**Effective Rethinking and Paired Relaxation, Step by Step**

Step 1. Write down the **prompting event** that is often related to distressing emotions and that you want to work on reducing your emotional reactions to.

Step 2. **Ask**: “What must I be telling myself (that is, what are my interpretations and thoughts) about the event that causes such distress and arousal?” Write these down. Examples:

- “He hates me,” “I can’t stand this!” “I can’t do this,” “I’ll never make it,” “I’m out of control!”

Step 3. **Rethink** the situation and its meaning in a way that counteracts the thoughts and interpretations producing stress and distressing emotions. As you rethink the situation, write down as many **effective thoughts** as you can to replace the stressful thoughts.

Step 4. When you are **not** in the stressful prompting event, **practice imagining** the stressful event:

   a. At the same time, while **breathing in**, say to yourself an effective self-statement.

   b. When **breathing out**, say “Relax” while intentionally relaxing all your muscles.

Step 5. **Keep practicing** every chance you get until you have mastered the strategy.

Step 6. When a stressful situation occurs, practice effective rethinking and paired relaxation.

Examples:

- “It’s not that important... so... relax.
- “I may not like this, but I can definitely stand it... so... relax.”
- “I need to concentrate and not make myself uptight... so... relax.”
- “I’m in control... so... relax.”
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 7

(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 5–5b)

Distracting

A way to remember these skills is the phrase “Wise Mind ACCEPTS.”

With Activities:

- Focus attention on a task you need to get done.
- Rent movies; watch TV.
- Clean a room in your house.
- Find an event to go to.
- Play computer games.
- Go walking. Exercise.
- Surf the Internet. Write e-mails.
- Play sports.
- Go out for a meal or eat a favorite food.
- Call or go out with a friend.
- Listen to your iPod; download music.
- Build something.
- Spend time with your children.
- Play cards.
- Read magazines, books, comics.
- Do crossword puzzles or Sudoku.
- Other:

With Contributing:

- Find volunteer work to do.
- Help a friend or family member.
- Surprise someone with something nice (a card, a favor, a hug).
- Give away things you don’t need.
- Call or send an instant message encouraging someone or just saying hi.
- Make something nice for someone else.
- Do something thoughtful.
- Other:

With Comparisons:

- Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt different.
- Think about people coping the same as you or less well than you.
- Compare yourself to those less fortunate.
- Watch reality shows about others’ troubles; read about disasters, others’ suffering.
- Other:

With different Emotions:

- Read emotional books or stories, old letters.
- Watch emotional TV shows; go to emotional movies.
- Listen to emotional music.
- (Be sure the event creates different emotions.)
- Ideas: Scary movies, joke books, comedies, funny records, religious music, soothing music or music that fires you up, going to a store and reading funny greeting cards.
- Other:

With Pushing away:

- Push the situation away by leaving it for a while.
- Leave the situation mentally.
- Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation.
- Block thoughts and images from your mind.
- Notice ruminating: Yell “No!”
- Refuse to think about the painful situations.
- Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while.
- Deny the problem for the moment.
- Other:

With other Thoughts:

- Count to 10; count colors in a painting or poster or out the window; count anything.
- Repeat words to a song in your mind.
- Work puzzles.
- Watch TV or read.
- Other:

With other Sensations:

- Squeeze a rubber ball very hard.
- Listen to very loud music.
- Hold ice in your hand or mouth.
- Go out in the rain or snow.
- Take a hot or cold shower.
- Other:
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 8

(Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6–6b)

Self-Soothing

A way to remember these skills is to think of soothing each of your FIVE SENSES.

With Vision:
- Look at the stars at night.
- Look at pictures you like in a book.
- Buy one beautiful flower.
- Make one space in a room pleasing to look at.
- Light a candle and watch the flame.
- Set a pretty place at the table using your best things.
- Go people-watching or window-shopping.
- Go to a museum or poster shop with beautiful art.
- Sit in the lobby of a beautiful old hotel.
- Look at nature around you.
- Walk in a pretty part of town.
- Watch a sunrise or a sunset.
- Go to a dance performance, or watch it on TV.
- Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of you.
- Take a walk in a park or a scenic hike.
- Browse through stores looking at things.
- Other: ____________________________

With Hearing:
- Listen to soothing or invigorating music.
- Pay attention to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling).
- Pay attention to the sounds of the city (traffic, horns, city music).
- Sing to your favorite songs.
- Hum a soothing tune.
- Learn to play an instrument.
- Burn a CD or make an iPod mix with music that will get you through tough times. Turn it on.
- Be mindful of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other.
- Turn on the radio.
- Other: ____________________________

With Smell:
- Use your favorite soap, shampoo, aftershave, cologne, or lotions, or try them on in the store.
- Burn incense or light a scented candle.
- Open a package of coffee and inhale the aroma.
- Put lemon oil on your furniture.
- Put potpourri or eucalyptus oil in a bowl in your room.
- Sit in a new car and breathe the aroma.
- Boil cinnamon. Make cookies, bread, or popcorn.
- Smell the roses.
- Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.
- Open the window and smell the air.
- Other: ____________________________

With Taste:
- Eat some of your favorite foods.
- Drink your favorite soothing drink, such as herbal tea, hot chocolate, a latté, or a smoothie.
- Treat yourself to a dessert.
- Eat macaroni and cheese or another favorite childhood food.
- Sample flavors in an ice cream store.
- Suck on a piece of peppermint candy.
- Chew your favorite gum.
- Get a little bit of a special food you don’t usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice or your favorite candy.
- Really taste the food you eat. Eat one thing mindfully.
- Other: ____________________________

With Touch:
- Take a long hot bath or shower.
- 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 comfortable chair in your home.
- Put on a blouse or shirt that has a pleasant feel.
- Take a drive with the car windows rolled down.
- Run your hand along smooth wood or leather.
- Hug someone.
- Put clean sheets on the bed.
- Wrap up in a blanket.
- Notice touch that is soothing.
- Other: ____________________________

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 8A
(Distress Tolerance Worksheet 6c)

Body Scan Meditation Step by Step

Sit on a chair, or lie on your back on the floor with legs uncrossed. Put your arms in a comfortable position by your side, on your abdomen, or (if sitting) put them on your thighs palms up. Open your eyes partially to let light in. If you are lying on the floor, put a cushion under your knees if need be. Imagine your breath flowing to each part of your body as your attention gently moves up your body. Adopt a mind of curiosity and interest as you focus on each part of your body.

Focus on your breathing. Notice how the air moves in and out of your body.

- Take several deep breaths until you begin to feel comfortable and relaxed.
- Direct your attention to the toes of your left foot.
- Notice the sensations in that part of your body while remaining aware of your breathing.
- Imagine each breath flowing to your toes.
- Looking with curiosity, ask, “What am I feeling in this part of my body?”
- Focus on your left toes for several minutes.
- Then move your focus to the arch and heel of your left foot, and hold it there for a minute or two while continuing to pay attention to your breathing.
- Notice the sensations on your skin of warmth or coldness; notice the weight of your foot on the floor.
- Imagine your breath flowing to the arch and heel of your left foot.
- Ask, “What are the feelings in the arch and heel of my left foot?”
- Follow the same procedure as you move to your left ankle, calf, knee, upper legs, and thigh.
- Repeat with the right leg, starting with your toes.
- Then move through your pelvis, and lower back, and around to your stomach.
- Focus on the rising and falling of your belly as your breath goes in and out.
- Then go on to your chest; left hand, arm, and shoulder; right hand, arm, and shoulder; neck, chin, tongue, mouth, lips, and lower face; and nose.
- Notice your breath as it comes in and out of your nostrils.
- Then focus on your upper cheeks, eyes, nostrils, and scalp.
- Finally, focus on the very top of your hair.
- Then let go of your body altogether.

Don’t worry if you notice that thoughts, sounds, or other sensations come into your awareness. Just notice them and then gently refocus your mind. Don’t worry if your mind has been drawn away from the object of your attention and you find yourself thinking about something else (it nearly always happens). Just calmly, gently, but with resolution, turn your mind back to the part of the body you’ve reached. You may need to bring your attention back over and over. You are not alone in this. It is this bringing of your attention back over and over and over, without judgment or harshness, that is the essential element of the meditation.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 9

(Distress Tolerance Worksheets 7, 7a, 7b)

Improving the Moment

A way to remember these skills is the word IMPROVE.

With Imagery:
- Imagine very relaxing scenes.
- Imagine a secret room within yourself. Furnish it the way you like. Close and lock the door on anything that can hurt you.
- Imagine everything going well.
- Make up a calming fantasy world.
- Imagine hurtful emotions draining out of you like water out of a pipe.
- Remember a happy time and imagine yourself in it again; play out the time in your mind again.
- Other:

With Meaning:
- Find purpose or meaning in a painful situation.
- Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find.
- Repeat these positive aspects in your mind.
- Remember, listen to, or read about spiritual values.
- Other:

With Prayer:
- Open your heart to a supreme being, God, or your own Wise Mind.
- Ask for strength to bear the pain.
- Turn things over to God or a higher being.
- Other:

With Relaxing actions:
- Take a hot bath or sit in a hot tub.
- Drink hot milk.
- Massage your neck and scalp.
- Practice yoga or other stretching.
- Breathe deeply.
- Change your facial expression.
- Other:

With One thing in the moment:
- Focus your entire attention on just what you are doing.
- Keep yourself in the moment.
- Put your mind in the present.
- Focus your entire attention on the physical
- Listen to a sensory awareness recording (or use Distress Tolerance Handout 9a)
- Other:

With a brief Vacation:
- Give yourself a brief vacation.
- Get in bed; pull the covers up over your head.
- Go to the beach or the woods for the day.
- Get a magazine and read it with chocolates.
- Turn off your phone for a day.
- Take a blanket to the park and sit on it for a whole afternoon.
- Take a 1-hour breather from hard work.
- Take a brief vacation from responsibility.
- Other:

With self-Encouragement and rethinking the situation:
- Cheerlead yourself: “You go, girl!” “You da man!”
- “I will make it out of this.”
- “I'm doing the best I can.”
- Repeat over and over: “I can stand it.”
- “This too shall pass.”
- “I will be OK.”
- “It won’t last forever.”
- Other:

List (and then practice) rethoughts that are particularly important in your crisis situations (e.g., “The fact that he did not pick me up doesn’t mean he doesn’t love me”):
- __________________________
- __________________________

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 9A

Sensory Awareness, Step by Step

Find a comfortable position. Staying in this position, listen to the questions below, listening for your response after each question. If you do not have a recording of these questions, you can make one for yourself (or ask a friend to make one), recording each question with about 5 seconds between each question.

1. Can you feel your hair touching your head?
2. Can you feel your belly rising and falling as you breathe?
3. Can you feel the space between your eyes?
4. Can you feel the distance between your ears?
5. Can you feel your breath touching the back of your eyes while you inhale?
6. Can you picture something far away?
7. Can you notice your arms touching your body?
8. Can you feel the bottoms of your feet?
9. Can you imagine a beautiful day at the beach?
10. Can you notice the space within your mouth?
11. Can you notice the position of your tongue in your mouth?
12. Can you feel a breeze against your cheek?
13. Can you feel how one arm is heavier than the other?
14. Can you feel a tingling or numbness in one hand?
15. Can you feel how one arm is more relaxed than the other?
16. Can you feel a change in the temperature in the air around you?
17. Can you feel how your left arm is warmer than the right?
18. Can you imagine how it would feel to be a rag doll?
19. Can you notice any tightness in your left forearm?
20. Can you imagine something very pleasant?
21. Can you imagine what it would feel like to float on a cloud?
22. Can you imagine what it would feel like to be stuck in molasses?
23. Can you picture something far away?
24. Can you feel a heaviness in your legs?
25. Can you imagine floating in warm water?
26. Can you notice your body hanging on your bones?
27. Can you allow yourself to drift lazily?
28. Can you feel your face getting soft?
29. Can you imagine a beautiful flower?
30. Can you feel how one arm and leg are heavier than the other?
