

DBT Distress Tolerance

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Hello, and welcome to UHCL Counseling Centers online Dialectical Behavioral Therapy skills group titled “All the Skills”.

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, or DBT, is an empirically supported therapy. DBT is influenced by the philosophical perspective of dialectics, which means two things can seem opposite or can both be true and coexist at the same time. In DBT the core is to build acceptance and change together so there are sets of acceptance skills as well as change skills. Skills are further divided into four skill modules. These modules are mindfulness, emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and distress tolerance. It's our hope that in teaching you DBT skills you will be able to live in the moment, develop healthy ways to cope with stress, manage your emotions, and improve your relationship with others. Today's module is on distress tolerance or ways to cope with stress. As we review our module today, please feel free to pause, rewind, or fast forward the video as necessary, or to review it as many times as desired.

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We'll give up the outline for our module for today. After reading this video, you'll know what distress is from a DBT standpoint, when to use your distress tolerance skills, we'll talk about your physiological skills, and lastly will end with accepting reality and how this can benefit from minimizing suffering and distress.

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Let's begin with the definition of crisis and what distress means in the context of distrust tolerance. Examples of distress include pain, suffering, ache, discomfort, anxiety, woe, misery, trouble, unhappiness, despair, sorrow, worry, or angst. You see, if we're using the definitions that we've just come up with to explain what distressed tolerance is, you might notice that distress tolerance is all about being able to put up with and accept painful or uncomfortable situations. This is important to note. The skills today, the skills of distrust tolerance, are not about trying to solve the problem. It is also not about liking or agreeing with the pain or situation that you are in. This skills in this module are designed to simply get you through painful situations without making the situation worse. It is impossible for a person to go through life without ever experiencing pain and we should be in agreement that at some point our lives we will have to cope with distress and pain. In some instances this is physical pain, like breaking a bone or stubbing a toe. And other instances this may be emotional pain, like sadness or anger. We can't always predict we're going to stub our toe or when we're going to feel angry and because of this unpredictability, we usually fall back to the coping strategies we used in the past to deal with pain, and of course, hope they work. Often, if the pain we are experiencing is particularly intense, occurs frequently, or comes on quickly, we can become overwhelmed by the distress and attempt to deal with the pain or suffering in ineffective or unhealthy ways. This is an attempt to try to make the pain go away as quickly as possible. The problem with this occurs is that many of the strategies we use when we're shooting overwhelmed can actually worsen our problems in the long term and take us from what we want our reaction to be.

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Some examples of these unhelpful strategies include isolating ourselves from others to avoid the situation, ruminating on past problems, pains or mistakes, becoming aggressive towards others, self harming behaviors, engaging in discussion, or risky behaviors, avoiding pleasant activities as a form of self punishment or even resigning oneself to living with ongoing pain. Do we think that we make good decisions when we're in high emotional mindset or highly distressed? Likely not. And this is where distressed tolerance strategies can be so helpful. They allow us to sit together and accept an uncomfortable or stressful situation without creating a bigger problem until we're in the right state of mind to be able to effectively deal with the cause of our distress.

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So, to summarize the goals of this module, the goals of distress tolerance, are survive our crisis situations or things that causes suffering and accepting reality. Not liking it, but accepting it to be able to get to a place where we can later fix the problem; If possible.

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Let's review our first distress tolerance skill. The STOP skill. Stop stands for Stop, Take a break, Observe, and then Proceed mindfully. Let's break this down piece by piece. First, we pause, freezing. Our emotions may tell us to do something differently. We want to pause for a second. Think back to any emotional regulation module myths and any ideas of "I have to do this, or I should do this". If you are unaware of what emotional regulation module myths are, we encourage you to see the module titled "emotional regulation".

Take a step back, take a break. Let go and take a deep breath. This can be in a specific count or just one deep breath.

Following your deep breath, observe both internally and externally. What do you feeling on the inside in this moment? On the outside? What do you notice in your surroundings or in your situation? Once you have these details, when you've taken a step back, you've paused and you're observing your surroundings.

Let's proceed mindfully. One acts with awareness and intentionality. Consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people's thoughts and feelings in the situation. Consider your wise mind. Will, your actions be effective? If I proceed with this plan, will it make the situation better or worse?

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Alternatively, after we've used our stop skill and if we're unsure and time permits. Of course, keeping in mind that time must permit, we can use some basic problems solving distress tolerance skills. For example, we can observe and name our urges to act in these moments of crisis or suffering. What are the pros to this? What will be the cons to doing this? We can create the opposite act. For example, if I want to do this and I did it, what would be the pros? Would be the cons? If I do not do this, what would be the benefit of not doing it or the con of not doing it? If time permits, this can be excellent in pairing up with the stop skill.

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Next there are several physiological skills that we can utilize. A helpful acronym for this is TIP skills. What we want to do are to reduce our extreme emotions and we can do this through physiological changes because the mind and body are so connected.

We can begin by tipping the temperature. For example, making a room colder or warmer can take our mind away from our suffering, and allow us the chance to pause and reflect, to really utilize that step, that stop skill.

Intense exercise can also change your mood and reduce extreme emotion fluctuation.

Paced breathing, similar to the deep breaths used in the stop skill. You can follow along with your breathing or adopt a natural rhythm. Whatever works best for you.

You can also take a moment to pair this with the muscle relaxation. This can be guided or self-led. Allowing yourselves to enjoy the moment, relax, and then proceed accordingly as necessary.

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Let's return to our third set of skills our accepting reality skills. This is called radical acceptance from a DBT standpoint. So, for radical acceptance, we need to understand that freedom from suffering requires acceptance from within of what is; letting yourself go completely with what it is, instead of fighting reality. Pain creates suffering, only when we refuse or are unable to accept the pain. Deciding to tolerate the moment to use these distressed tolerance skills is an act of acceptance. And that acceptance is ultimately just acknowledging what is. To accept something is not the same as to judge it is good. Or to invite it, or to determine that we enjoy it; we're simply noticing that it is the way that it is.

So, radical acceptance. This is the only way when you cannot keep painful events and emotions from coming your way. Keep in mind these questions or these statements. Reality is as it is. So, are you able to change it, or do you need to find temporary acceptance? If this is something that we can change, let's return to problem solving and influence as we can; if this is not something you can change then this might be a moment to lean into acceptance. There are limitations on the future for everyone. Only realistic limitations need to be accepted. And lastly, as we're considering radical acceptance, we need to keep in mind that life is still worth living, even with painful moments in it. Acceptance of reality as it is requires an active choice. This is like coming to a fork in the road. You have to turn your mind towards acceptance road and away from a rejecting reality road. And doing so, we have to make an inner commitment to accept this. This commitment to accept is not equal to liking. It just turns you to the path. It is the first step. You may have to turn your mind and commit to acceptance over and over and over again. Sometimes you may have to make this commitment many times in the span of a few minutes.

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As you're listening, perhaps your mind is wondering "why radical acceptance?". There are many reasons. First, biggest changing reality first requires accepting reality. We can't work to change something if we don't acknowledge the way that it is. Second, pain can't be avoided. There is no life that is not filled with some degree of pain or suffering. It is nature's way of saying something is wrong. In turn, rejecting reality can lead to more suffering through the transformation of pain into suffering.

Refusing to accept reality or the way that things are can keep you stuck in unhappiness, bitterness, anger, sadness, shame, or other painful emotions. And while acceptance can lead to sadness, usually a feeling of calmness follows.

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The next goal we will discuss is turning the mind. It is a radical acceptance skill. To utilize it we follow this diagram. We observe that we're not accepting something in the moment, the way that something is. We reflect internally and then make that inner commitment to accept reality exactly as it is. And then, we continue to do this over and over again, always choosing to turn her mind to acceptance. If we notice that we are not, we develop a plan for catching ourselves. We drift out of acceptance. This can be an excellent time to utilize the skills from module one "Mindfulness".

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Ultimately, radical acceptance leads to readiness to enter and participate fully in life and living. We call this willingness. Willingness means cultivating a willing response to each situation. In other words, willingness is doing just what is needed in each situation, in an unpretentious way. We really want to focus on effectiveness. We want to listen very closely and act from our inner self. In essence, willingness is allowing our awareness, our connection.

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There is a difference between willingness and willfulness, and hopefully in the skills we can replace willfulness with an open, accepting willingness. Willfulness is refusing to tolerate the moment, refusing to make any changes that are needed. Giving up, doing the opposite of what works or what might be effective. Trying to fix every situation, even if some situations cannot be fixed. Insisting that one must be in control. And ultimate attachment to me in what I want right now as opposed to how the situation might actually be and what would be effective for you.

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In this module, this module for distress tolerance, we've talked about the stop skill, the tip skill, we've looked at physiological responses, discussed how ultimately refusing to accept reality as it is leads to more suffering, and talked about why we should replace willfulness with a willingness, grounded in radical acceptance. Thank you for joining us for this short module.