Distress Tolerance
Crisis Survival Strategies

Distress tolerance is about frustration tolerance. Frustration tolerance means being able to hold frustration and stress without engaging in negative, problematic, or destructive behavior. Having frustration tolerance is an essential life skill for everyone in order to tolerate and SURVIVE a situation when the situation cannot be changed right away. These skills will help you to get through bad situations without making them worse. Frustration tolerance is accomplished by balancing acceptance and active strategies.

Active Strategies include focusing on problem solving and/or effective ways to cope and manage. Skills that are useful to actively solve problems and difficulties are:

1. Self-soothing  
2. ACCEPTS distractions  
3. IMPROVE the moment  
4. Pros and Cons

Acceptance Strategies include being able to say “no,” being disappointed, or not getting what you want immediately. These strategies are very helpful when active strategies don’t work. These skills include:

1. Radical acceptance  
2. Half smile  
3. Willingness
Self-Soothe

This skill is about self-soothing when you are having a bad day or dealing with a lot of stress. Self-soothing provides comfort and reassurance. This is a way to be nurturing, gentle, and kind to yourself. It can help you stay grounded in your body and in the present moment. It can also serve as a distraction from the difficulties you are dealing with.

The Self-Soothe skill is about using ALL FIVE of your senses to soothe yourself when stressed:

**Self-soothe with vision by:**
Light a candle and watch the flame, look at beautiful flowers or art, stargazing, nature or bird watching, clean one part of your room/house to look nice, fix your nails to look pretty

**Self-soothe with hearing by:**
Listening to music, can be calming or invigorating music, hear the birds chirp and sounds of nature, sing a favorite song, learn to play an instrument

**Self-soothe with smell by:**
Wear a new perfume or lotion, light a scented candle, back cookies, bread or cake, smell the roses, walk in a wooded area and breathe the fresh smells of nature, take a deep breath before eating your food

**Self-soothe with touch by:**
Take a bubble bath, put clean sheets on the bed, pet an animal, put lotion on your body, sink into a really comfortable chair, put on a silky or fuzzy piece of clothing, hug someone, brush your hair for a long time

**Self-soothe with taste by:**
Have a favorite drink tasting each sip, sample flavors in an ice cream store, suck on a piece of candy, chew bubble gum, really taste the food you eat, eat something sour
I can self-soothe with **vision** by:

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I can self-soothe with **sound** by:

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I can self-soothe with **smell** by:

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I can self-soothe with **touch** by:

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_________________________________________________________________________

I can self-soothe with **taste** by:

_________________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________
Pros & Cons

Make a list of the pros and cons of tolerating distress. Make another list of not tolerating distress, that is, of coping by hurting yourself, abusing drugs, or doing something else impulsive.

Focus on long-term goals, the light at the end of the tunnel. Remember times when pain has ended. Think of the positive consequences of tolerating distress. Imagine in your mind how good you will feel if you achieve your goals, if you don’t act impulsively.

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<tr>
<th>Pros of tolerating distress</th>
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<th>Pros of NOT tolerating distress</th>
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Use a list of Pros and Cons to help decide decisions. You can use it for decisions, such as should you end a relationship or take a new job. This is also helpful to assess feelings related to change, such as the pros and cons of attending DBT or taking medication.

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<th>Pros of ___________________</th>
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Radical Acceptance

This skill is about identifying what you have control over, what you don’t have control over, and knowing the difference between the two. There are many things in life that are out of your control, including people and the environment. What you do have control over is yourself. You can control your thinking, feelings, impulses, and behaviors.

Radical Acceptance is about being skillful by letting go of things you cannot control in order to focus your energy on what you can control: Yourself.

Radical Acceptance is empowering and life enhancing. It is not approval or resignation. It doesn’t mean that you have to like what is happening. It is accepting that reality is what it is. Then you can focus on being who you need to be and acting how you need to act to be as effective as possible.

What are some things you do not have control over (even if you wish you did)?

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What are ways you can remind yourself about what you do have control over?

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How can you use radical acceptance in your life on a regular basis?

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