**DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I**

**Crisis Survival Strategies**

Skills for tolerating painful events and emotions when you cannot make things better right away.

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DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I
Crises Survival Strategies (continued)

DISTRACTING

A useful way to remember these skills is the phrase

"Wise Mind ACCEPTS"

With **Activities:**
Engage in exercise or hobbies; do cleaning; go to events; call or visit a friend; play computer games; go walking; work; play sports; go out to a meal, have decaf coffee or tea; go fishing; chop wood, do gardening; play pinball.

With **Contributing:**
Contribute to someone; do volunteer work; give something to someone else; make something nice for someone else; do a surprising, thoughtful thing.

With **Comparisons:**
Compare yourself to people coping the same as you or less well than you. Compare yourself to those less fortunate than you. Watch soap operas; read about disasters, others' suffering.

With opposite **Emotions:**
Read emotional books or stories, old letters; 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, marching songs, "I Am Woman" (Helen Reddy); going to a store and reading funny greeting cards.

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.

Or push the situation away by blocking it in your mind. Censor ruminating. Refuse to think about the painful aspects of the situation. Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while.

With other **Thoughts:**
Count to 10; count colors in a painting or tree, windows, anything; work puzzles; watch TV; read.

With intense other **Sensations:**
Hold ice in hand; squeeze a rubber ball very hard; stand under a very hard and hot shower; listen to very loud music; sex; put rubber band on wrist, pull out, and let go.

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I:
Crises Survival Strategies (continued)

SELF-SOOTHE

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

FIVE SENSES

With Vision:
Buy one beautiful flower; make one space in a room pretty; light a candle and watch the
flame. Set a pretty place at the table, using your best things, for a meal. Go to a museum
with beautiful art. Go sit in the lobby of a beautiful old hotel. Look at nature around you.
Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars. Walk in a pretty part of town. Fix
your nails so they look pretty. Look at beautiful pictures in a book. Go to a ballet or other
dance performance, or watch one on TV. Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of
you, not lingering on any.

With Hearing:
Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to invigorating and exciting music. Pay attention
to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling). Sing to your favorite songs.
Hum a soothing tune. Learn to play an instrument. Call 800 or other information numbers
to hear a human voice. Be mindful of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in
one ear and out the other.

With Smell:
Use your favorite perfume or lotions, or try them on in the store; spray fragrance in the air;
light a scented candle. Put lemon oil on your furniture. Put potpourri in a bowl in your
room. Boil cinnamon; bake cookies, cake, or bread. Smell the roses. Walk in a wooded
area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.

With Taste:
Have a good meal; have a favorite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate (no
alcohol); treat yourself to a dessert. Put whipped cream on your coffee. 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. Really taste the food you eat; eat one thing mindfully.

With Touch:
Take a bubble bath; put clean sheets on the bed. 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 really comfortable chair in your home, or find one in a luxurious
hotel lobby. Put on a silky blouse, dress, or scarf. Try on fur-lined gloves or fur coats in a
department store. Brush your hair for a long time. Hug someone. Experience whatever
you are touching; notice touch that is soothing.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I:
Crisis Survival Strategies (continued)

IMPROVE THE MOMENT

A way to remember these skills is the word

IMPROVE

With Imagery:

Imagine very relaxing scenes. Imagine a secret room within yourself, seeing how it is decorated. Go into the room whenever you feel very threatened. Close the door on anything that can hurt you. Imagine everything going well. Imagine coping well. Make up a fantasy world that is calming and beautiful and let your mind go with it. Imagine hurtful emotions draining out of you like water out of a pipe.

With Meaning:

Find or create some purpose, meaning, or value in the pain. Remember, listen to, or read about spiritual values. Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find. Repeat them over and over in your mind. Make lemonade out of lemons.

With Prayer:

Open your heart to a supreme being, greater wisdom, God, your own wise mind. Ask for strength to bear the pain in this moment. Turn things over to God or a higher being.

With Relaxation:

Try muscle relaxing by tensing and relaxing each large muscle group. Start with your hands and arms, going to the top of your head, and then working down. Listen to a relaxation tape; exercise hard; take a hot bath or sit in a hot tub; drink hot milk; massage your neck and scalp, your calves and feet. Get in a tub filled with very cold or hot water and stay in it until the water is tepid. Breathe deeply; half-smile; change facial expression.

With One thing in the moment:

Focus your entire attention on just what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in; put your mind in the present. Focus your entire attention on physical sensations that accompany non-mental tasks (e.g. walking, washing, doing dishes, cleaning, fixing). Be aware of how your body moves during each task. Do awareness exercises.

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I:
Crisis Survival Strategies (continued)

With a brief **Vacation:**

Give yourself a brief vacation. Get in bed and pull the covers up over your head for 20 minutes. Rent a motel room at the beach or in the woods for a day or two; drop your towels on the floor after you use them. Ask your roommate to bring you coffee in bed or make you dinner (offer to reciprocate). Get a schlocky magazine or newspaper at the grocery store, get in bed with chocolates, and read it. Make yourself milk toast, bundle up in a chair, and eat it slowly. Take a blanket to the park and sit on it for a whole afternoon. Unplug your phone for a day, or let your answering machine screen your calls. Take a 1-hour breather from hard work that must be done.

With **Encouragement:**

Cheerlead yourself. Repeat over and over: "I can stand it," "It won't last forever." "I will make it out of this," "I'm doing the best I can do."

**Thinking of PROS AND CONS**

Make a list of the pros and cons of **tolerating** the distress. Make another list of the pros and cons of **not tolerating** the distress—that is, of coping by hurting yourself, abusing alcohol or 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 the distress. Imagine in your mind how good you will feel if you achieve your goals, if you don't act impulsively.

Think of all of the negative consequences of not tolerating your current distress. Remember what has happened in the past when you have acted impulsively to escape the moment.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 2

Basic Principles of Accepting Reality

RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

- Freedom from suffering requires ACCEPTANCE from deep within of what is. Let yourself go completely with what is. Let go of fighting reality.
- ACCEPTANCE is the only way out of hell.
- Pain creates suffering only when you refuse to ACCEPT the pain.
- Deciding to tolerate the moment is ACCEPTANCE.
- ACCEPTANCE is acknowledging what is.
- To ACCEPT something is not the same as judging it good.

TURNING THE MIND

- Acceptance of reality as it is requires an act of CHOICE. It is like coming to a fork in the road. You have to turn your mind towards the acceptance road and away from the "rejecting reality" road.
- You have to make an inner COMMITMENT to accept.

The COMMITMENT to accept does not itself equal acceptance. It just turns you toward the path. But it is the first step.

You have to turn your mind and commit to acceptance OVER AND OVER AND OVER again. Sometimes, you have to make the commitment many times in the space of a few minutes.

WILLINGNESS

Cultivate a WILLING response to each situation.

- Willingness is DOING JUST WHAT IS NEEDED in each situation, in an unpretentious way. It is focusing on effectiveness.
- Willingness is listening very carefully to your WISE MIND, acting from your inner self.
- Willingness is ALLOWING into awareness your connection to the universe—to the earth, to the floor you are standing on, to the chair you are sitting on, to the person you are talking to.

(over) WILLFULNESS

Replace WILLFULNESS with WILLINGNESS.

- Willfulness is SITTING ON YOUR HANDS when action is needed, refusing to make changes that are needed.
- Willfulness is GIVING UP.
- Willfulness is the OPPOSITE OF "DOING WHAT WORKS," being effective.
- Willfulness is trying to FIX every situation.
- Willfulness is REFUSING TO TOLERATE the moment.
kindled Western psychiatry's interest in the body's interaction with emotional conditions. Two other therapies that concentrate on the body and its relationship to emotional stress are Fritz Perls' Gestalt therapy and Alexander Lowen's bioenergetic therapy. Both of these therapies work closely with the mind-body relationship. Becoming aware of how your body responds to stress will give you some important information about your personal stress response that you can then use to develop a stress-management plan.

BODY INVENTORY

The following exercises promote body awareness and will help you identify areas of tension in your body.

Internal Versus External Awareness

1. First focus your attention on the outside world. Start sentences with "I am aware of." (For example, "I am aware of the cars going by outside the window, papers moving, the coffee perking, the breeze blowing, and the blue carpet.")

2. After you've become aware of everything that is going on around you, shift to focusing your attention on your body and your physical sensations—your internal world. (For example, "I am aware of feeling warm, my stomach gurgling, tension in my neck, my nose tickling, and a cramp in my foot.")

3. Shuttle back and forth between internal and external awareness. (For example, "I am aware of the chair pressing against my buttocks, the circle of yellow light from the lamp, my shoulders hunching up, the smell of bacon.")

4. Practiced during your free moments throughout the day, this exercise allows you to separate and appreciate the real difference between your inner and outer worlds.

Body Scanning

Close your eyes. Starting with your toes and moving up your body, ask yourself, "Where am I tense?" Whenever you discover a tense area, exaggerate it slightly so you can become even more aware of it. Be aware of the muscles in your body that are tense. Then, for example, say to yourself, "I am tensing my neck muscles ... I am hurting myself ... I am creating tension in my body." Note that all muscular tension is self-produced. At this point, be aware of any life situation that may be causing the tension in your body and think about what you could do to change that.
4. If you adopt a daily sitting practice, you must understand that you may find there are stretches of time during which you will not want to meditate. Don’t expect that your desire to meditate will grow constantly with your practice. If you feel discouraged, be gentle with yourself and try to work creatively on ways to make your practice more comfortable. Know that these periods of discouragement will go away by themselves in time. Here are two things you can do to help maintain a schedule: Pick a regular time of the day to meditate and honor it as you would any other appointment. Find a group to meditate with—the value of finding such a group cannot be overstated.

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**Group 2: Releasing Muscular Tension**

The Inner Exploration or Body Scan

This exercise will help you to open to each part of your body, notice any sensation that is present, and let go of tension in your body.

1. Begin by becoming aware of the rising and falling of your breath in your chest and belly. You can ride the waves of your breath and let it begin to anchor you to the present moment.

2. Bring your attention to the soles of your feet. Notice any sensation that is present there. Without judging or trying to make it different, simply be present with the sensation. After a few moments imagine that your breath is flowing into the soles of your feet. As you breathe in and out you might experience an opening or softening and a release of tension. Just simply observe.

3. Now bring your attention to the rest of your feet, up to your ankles. Become aware of any sensation in this part of your body. After a few moments imagine that your breath, instead of stopping at the diaphragm, flows all the way down to your feet. Breathe into and out of your feet, simply noticing the sensations.

4. Proceed up your body in this manner with all the parts of your body—lower legs, knees, thighs, pelvis, hips and buttocks, lower back, upper back, chest and belly, upper shoulders, neck, head, and face. Take your time to really feel each body part and notice whatever sensations are present. Without forcing them or trying to make them be different, then breathe into the body part and let go of it as you move on to your next body part.

5. Go back to your neck and shoulders or any part of your body that has pain, tension, or discomfort. Simply be with the sensations in a nonjudgmental way. As you breathe,
imagine your breath opening up any tight muscles or painful areas and creating more spaciousness. As you breathe out, imagine the tension or pain flowing out of that part of your body.

When you reach the top of your head, scan your body one last time for any areas of tension or discomfort. Then imagine that you have a breathing hole at the top of your head, much like the blowholes that whales or dolphins use to breathe. Breathe in from the top of your head, bringing your breath all the way down to the soles of your feet and then back up again through your whole body. Allow your breath to wash away any tension or uncomfortable sensations.

The entire body scan can take anywhere from a few minutes to thirty minutes. Ideally, try for twenty to thirty minutes to complete a body scan each day.

loving Band Meditation

Find your posture, center yourself, and take several deep breaths.

Imagine that a three-inch-wide band encircles the top of your head. Focus your attention on the part of your head surrounded by the imaginary band. Notice the sensations. Is there any tension in your forehead? If so, try to relax it. Are there any other sensations in this area? Focus on them for a moment.

Lower the imaginary band three inches—the width of the band. Again, focus your attention on the area encompassed by the band. Really try to feel around in there. What does the back of your eyeball feel like? The right wall of your nose? How are the muscles of your upper lip set? Any tension? Try to completely relax this area of your head. Breathe deeply and whisper to yourself, “Let it go, let it all go.”

Continue to move the band down your body. Focus intently on any sensations. Wherever you notice tension, try to release it. As you do, take several deep belly breaths and relax. See if you can be aware of how the muscles feel as they relax.

When the band gets down to your torso, imagine that it goes around one arm; then across your upper body, around the other arm, then across your back. Scan a section of each arm and your torso at the same time as though they were one part. Notice the sensations where your arms are separate from your body. What do these boundaries feel like? Can you make the sensation of the boundaries less distinct so that your arms feel as though they are merging with your torso? Is there any tension in your shoulders? Your back? If so, relax these areas.