DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

These are skills that help people going through difficult events. Just like learning anything new, it takes practice to feel comfortable with using new skills. So, Practice! Practice! Practice! Not all of these skills work for all people, so if you find one not useful, go on to the next. These may help relieve the stress one faces when going through a traumatic event, therefore preventing other problems down the road. It is important to nurture and care for yourself during this time.

Distract:
1. **Activities** – Hobbies, cleaning, call or visit a friend, games, drink warm fluids.
2. **Contributing** – Do something for someone else.
3. **Comparisons** – Compare your own problems with those of others, read the paper, watch soaps, think of disasters of others and your own better situation.
4. **Opposite Emotions** – Read emotional books (novel) or watch emotional movie (making sure either is OPPOSITE to current emotion), watch cartoons, seek religious material and music, listen to peppy music.
5. **Pushing Away** – Leave situation mentally, build an imaginary wall between self and situation, censor ruminating, put situation on the shelf, box it up.
6. **Other Thoughts** – Count to 10, count colors in surroundings, do puzzles, watch TV.
7. **Other Intense Sensations** – Hold ice, squeeze ball, take hot shower, listen to loud music, snap elastic band on wrist.

Self Soothe:
1. **Vision** – Look at flower, light a candle and watch flame, go out and watch stars, look at beautiful pictures, be mindful of all sights- not lingering on any.
2. **Hearing** – Listen to beautiful, soothing, or exciting music, listen to sounds of nature, sing, hum, play instrument, call 800 numbers to hear human voice – be mindful of sounds, letting them go in one ear and out the other.
3. **Smell** – Perfume, lotion, scented candles, oil furniture, potpourri, boil cinnamon, bake cookies, chew gum, suck on a peppermint, smell flowers, walk in wooded area and breathe mindfully.
4. **Taste** – Have a good meal, favorite soothing drink (no caffeine or alcohol), dessert, whipped cream, candy, get a special good treat, eat mindfully.
5. **Touch** – Take a bubble bath, clean sheets, pet dog or cat, get a massage, soak feet, lotion entire body, put cold compress on head, feel silky clothing/furry clothing, brush hair for a long time, hug someone, experience whatever you are touching, notice touch that is soothing.

Improve the Moment:
1. **Imagery** – Imagine relaxing scenes, imagine secret room inside yourself and see how it is decorated – go in and close the door, 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 like water out of a pipe.
2. **Meaning** – Find purpose or meaning in pain, read about, remember or listen to spiritual values, focus on positive aspects of situation and repeat them over and over, make lemonade out of lemons.
3. **Prayer** – Open the heart to great wisdom, and higher power – either God or your own wise mind. Ask for strength to bear pain in the moment.
4. **Relaxation** – Tense and relax muscle groups starting with hands and arms going to top of head then working down, listen to relaxation tape, exercise hard, take hot bath, drink hot milk, massage neck, scalp, hands, calves, breathe deeply, half-smile, change facial expression.
5. **One Thing in the Moment** – Focus entire attention on what you are doing right now, keep in the very moment you are in, stay in the present, focus entire attention on physical sensations that accompany tasks that require little thinking, such as walking, doing dishes, playing sports, cleaning, be aware of how body moves, do awareness exercises.

6. **Vacation** - Go to bed for 20 minutes, pull up covers, lie around with magazine or newspaper, get in bed and eat chocolates while reading, unplug the phone, take one hour break from things that must be done.

7. **Encouragement** – Cheerlead yourself: “I can stand it!”; “It won’t last forever”; “I will make it out of this”; “I’m doing the best I can!”

8. **Pros and Cons** – List pros and cons of tolerating the distress, list pros and cons of NOT tolerating distress such as hurting self or others, using drugs or alcohol, doing something impulsive. Focus on long-term goals; remember times that the pain has ended. Imagine how good you will feel if you don’t act impulsively. Remember what has happened in the past when you have acted impulsively.

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**Observe Breath:**

1. **Deep Breathing** – Lie on your back, focus on the movement of stomach, allow stomach to rise and bring air into lower half of lungs, continue for 10 breaths.

2. **Counting Breath** – Sit comfortably and as you inhale be aware: “I am inhaling.” As you exhale, be aware: “I am exhaling.” Do this for a count of 10 and then start again.

3. **Following the Breath** - Sit comfortably; inhale from abdomen: “I am inhaling normally.” Exhale in awareness: “I am exhaling normally.” Continue for three breaths. On fourth breath, extend the inhalation: “I am breathing in a long inhalation.” “I am breathing out a long exhalation.” Continue for three breaths. Now, follow breath carefully, aware of every movement of stomach and lungs. Follow the entrance and exit of air: “I am inhaling and following the inhalation from beginning to end.” Do the same with exhalations. Continue for 20 breaths, wait 5 minutes and start again.

4. **Sit Comfortably** - Half smile, follow breath, inhale and exhale very lightly: “I am breathing in and making the breath and body light and peaceful; I am breathing out while my mind and body are at peace.” Continue according to tolerances, stop gently, massage muscles in calves.

**Half Smile:**
Accept reality as it is. Relax by letting go or tensing then letting go face, neck, shoulder, and half smile with lips slightly upturned with relaxed face, teeth apart, serene facial expression. Remember, the body communicates to the mind!

**Awareness:**
Be mindful of the position of your body, focus on breath, be aware of purpose of positions or no purpose, focus on where body touches an object, and focus entire attention on sense of connection.

**Radical Acceptance:**
Acceptance is the only way out. It does not judge things as good or bad; it just acknowledges that which cannot be changed.

**Turning the Mind:**
Make a commitment to accept reality. Repeat this over and over again.

**Willingness over Willfulness:**
Do what is needed in the situation. Act from a wise mind, and be aware of your connection to the Universe.