



DBT Distress Tolerance Skills

What is DBT?

Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) is a type of cognitive-behavioral therapy. Its main goals are to teach people how to live in the moment, develop healthy ways to cope with stress, regulate their emotions, and improve their relationships with others. DBT can help people who have difficulty with emotional regulation or are exhibiting self-destructive behaviors.

What is a distress tolerance skill?

Distress tolerance is a person's ability to manage actual or perceived emotional distress. It also involves being able to make it through an emotional incident without making it worse. Learning distress tolerance skills can make a very positive difference in your ability to handle difficult emotions.

Radical Acceptance

In life, we will run into problems that are out of our control. Radical acceptance refers to a healthy way of thinking when running into these situations. Opposed to wishing things were different, radical acceptance is accepting the situation as is, even if you do not like or condone it. Learning to accept problems out of our control in turn will decrease emotional distress.

Example Situation: Your partner decides to leave your relationship

Typical Thinking:

I can't believe this, what went wrong? What did I do wrong?

They can't be doing this to me!

Radical Acceptance:

I am hurt by this decision and it might be painful to work through, but I accept that my partner no longer wants to be in this relationship.

Template for Radical Acceptance

Situation	Typical Thinking	Radical Acceptance

Self-Soothing

When we are hurt, physically or mentally, we all hope and seek to simply feel better. Self-soothing is a way in which treat ourselves to begin feeling better, so that we can move past any kind of negativity and pain we may be feeling. This can be done utilizing each of your 5 senses.

Example-

Vision: Go for a walk at your favorite park

Hearing: Listen to your favorite song, or sit in nature

Touch: Take a hot bath or shower, or get a massage

Taste: Drink your favorite tea or coffee, or make your favorite meal

Smell: Light a candle or smell your favorite essential oil

My Self-Soothing Plan

Vision	
Hearing	
Touch	
Taste	
Smell	



Distraction (A.C.C.E.P.T.S.)

Negative feelings are not forever. They will usually pass, or at least lessen in intensity over time. At times, it can be valuable to distract yourself until the strong emotions subside. The acronym “A.C.C.E.P.T.S.” serves as a reminder of this idea.

Activities: Engage in an activity that requires thought! This could be a project, a hobby, talking with a friend, and so forth.

Contributing: Focus on what you can contribute! Maybe this means making a friend a birthday card or volunteering. Get creative!

Comparisons: Compare your situation to a time you were in distress or had it worse. If you are doing better than you were a year or two or five years ago, make that comparison. After all, you have survived 100% of your hardest days!

Emotions: Do something that will create a competing emotion. Are you sad? Watch a funny show or reach out to your friend who has the best jokes! Nervous? Make a playlist of soothing songs you can relax to!

Pushing Away: Build a “wall” between yourself and the situation. Imagine yourself pushing it away. If it comes up, tell it to go away. Refuse to think about the situation until a better time and space to process it.

Thoughts: If your emotions take over, try and draw yourself back to your thoughts and utilize distracting ones. Count to 10, read a book, write in your journal. Try and keep your thoughts away from your pain.

Sensations: Find safe physical sensations to distract you from the negative emotions. Hold an ice cube, give yourself a massage, take a hot shower. Any strong physical stimulus like this can kind of jog loose your connection to your pain and distract you from it.

