

SECTION 2.
DISTRESS TOLERANCE

Creating a Better Day

Objective

To identify meaningful and enjoyable activities and schedule at least one activity each day for a week.

You Should Know

Activities offer healthy distractions, allowing you to enjoy yourself and create alternatives to ineffective behaviors. Planning your day so that it includes pleasurable and meaningful activities will lift your mood and bring purpose to your life. Begin by writing down activities that will make any day more meaningful.

Make a list of pleasurable activities, including activities you used to enjoy that you have stopped doing.

An activity that expresses my values: _____

An activity that always makes me smile: _____

An activity that relaxes me: _____

An activity that connects me with people I care about: _____

An activity that makes me think: _____

An activity I enjoy but I never have time for: _____

An activity that brings back wonderful memories: _____

A spiritual activity that makes me feel connected to a higher power: _____

An activity that is always fun: _____

Other activities that are meaningful to me:

What to Do

Commit to doing one pleasurable activity each day. Schedule it, including what, where, when, and with whom. Include the level of distress you experience prior to the activity, and then after you engage in the activity, where 1 = little or no distress to 10 = extreme distress or overwhelm.

Day	Distress Level (1–10)	Activity (Include Details)	Distress Level (1–10)	Notes
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe what it was like for you to practice an enjoyable activity each day.

Did you find this exercise challenging? Explain.

Describe whether or not your distress levels decreased as the week progressed.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Distraction as a Distress Tolerance Skill

Objective

To use distraction to distance yourself from overwhelming and distressing situations.

You Should Know

When fear, anxiety, anger, and other distressing emotions are overwhelming, you may act on harmful urges like overeating, abusing alcohol, or otherwise harming yourself. Or, you may redirect your pain to your relationships by provoking arguments, lashing out, or withdrawing from communication.

Distraction is a tool that can be used to create distance from a distressing situation, enabling you to avoid immediately responding in ways that are not healthy, productive, or desirable. Distraction does not suggest you push away or avoid strong feelings and experiences. Instead, it provides the space to soothe yourself so you can deal with the issue at another time, when you are feeling less overwhelmed.

What are the typical ways you respond to distress currently?

What undesirable or unhealthy behaviors do you engage in when you are upset?

What to Do

If you are engaging in undesirable behaviors to cope with distressing situations, here are some suggestions of pleasurable activities you can try instead.

- Call or text a friend or a family member.
- Play with your pet.

- Take a hot bath.
- Go for a walk or take an exercise class.
- Listen to music.
- Read a book or write in a journal.
- Spend time outside in nature or do some gardening.
- Give yourself a manicure.

What other pleasurable activities do you enjoy?

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) uses the acronym ACCEPTS to categorize distracting behavior. It stands for:

Activities - Engage in activities that bring you pleasure. Exercise, watch a funny video, play video games, go to a movie; schedule pleasurable events.

Contributing - Do something kind for yourself or someone else. Volunteer at a food bank or animal shelter, or visit a sick friend.

Choices or Comparisons - Compare yourself to those less fortunate than you. Or, think of a time in the past when you were happy or content.

Emotions - Choose events that create different emotions than the ones you are currently feeling. If you are angry, listen to soothing music. If you are sad, watch a comedy.

Pushing Away - Put some distance between you and the situation. Physically leave (walk away) from the situation, or block the thoughts from your mind for a few minutes.

Thoughts - Keep your mind busy by engaging in activities that require your concentration, such as counting, doing household chores, or completing a crossword puzzle.

Sensations - Engage in activities that make you feel present in your body, such as taking a hot or cold shower, getting a massage, listening to a recording of nature sounds, or watching a video on relaxation techniques.

For the next week, record any distressing situations that you encounter and what you did to distract yourself at the time, using one of the ACCEPTS behaviors.

Situation	Emotions / Thoughts	Behavior I Would Normally Choose	Distraction	Emotions / Thoughts Following Distraction

Reflections on This Exercise

What ways of distracting yourself were the most successful? Explain.

What was difficult about distracting yourself when you were in distress?

Describe a challenging situation where using distraction would have been helpful for you.

Who can support you in identifying and using distracting behaviors?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Visualizing a Safe Place

Objective

To reduce overwhelming emotions by visualizing a place where you feel safe and calm.

You Should Know

During times of distress, you may feel the urge to engage in unhealthy behaviors to cope with your thoughts and feelings. Visualization techniques can be effective in soothing you and reducing stress because your brain cannot distinguish between real or imagined moments of peace and calm. As you become more relaxed, it gets easier to manage your emotions in a healthier, more constructive way.

What You Should Do

During the 'Safe Place Visualization' you will focus on a real or imaginary place where you feel relaxed, safe, and peaceful. The first step is to identify such a place. It can be a beach, forest, house of worship, spa, or an imaginary setting such as a house in the clouds or your own private island. If a safe place does not come to mind, select a soothing color instead and follow the steps below.

What safe place did you choose? _____

How does this safe place make you feel? _____

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit without being disturbed or distracted. Follow the instructions below.

- Take several long, slow breaths and close your eyes.
- Imagine you have entered your safe place, and use all of your senses to explore it.
- Using your imagined sight, observe what the space looks like. Notice details, including colors, brightness, and the objects around you. Are you alone, or are others with you? Are there other living things there, such as animals or plants? Take a few moments to enjoy your surroundings.
- Next, imagine the soothing sounds around you: a soft breeze, chirping birds, ocean waves, a purring cat, or relaxing music. Focus on one sound that is especially pleasing and continue listening for a few seconds.
- Then, focus on your imagined sense of smell. If your setting is outside, inhale the scent of fresh air or flowers. If your setting is inside, observe the smell of firewood, food cooking, or incense burning. Notice the pleasurable aromas for several seconds.
- Next, touch the imaginary objects around you. If you are outside, notice the calm breeze or warm sun on your skin, grains of beach sand in your hand, or the garden vegetables you are

growing. If you are inside, feel the chair or rug you are sitting on, the warmth of a roaring fireplace, or the soft fur of a dog you are petting. Take a few seconds to enjoy the sensations.

- Lastly, focus your attention on your sense of taste. What comforting food or drink are you enjoying? Is it sweet, spicy, or salty? Hot or cold? Take a moment to savor the flavors in your mouth.
- Take a few moments to relax in your safe place, using all of your senses. Notice how calm and peaceful you feel in this place. Remember that you can return here anytime you experience distress.
- Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes when you are ready.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe any changes in your levels of distress during or after this exercise.

What emotions did you notice as you sat quietly and visualized your safe place?

How can you use this exercise to calm yourself when you experience overwhelming emotions?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Rehearsing Values-Based Behavior

Objective

To identify your values and turn them into action to effectively manage challenging situations.

You Should Know

When you encounter stressful situations, your emotions can take over and make it hard to find solutions. You may keep repeating the same arguments with a spouse or family member because you are too angry or hurt to come to a resolution. Or, you may want to start dating again after a breakup, but worry about the rejection and hurt you might experience.

By reminding yourself what is important to you – your values – it can be easier to manage life’s challenges. Values are the principles, ethics, or standards that make your life meaningful. Your values are what you consider to be important or beneficial, and may include things like being a good parent, practicing a religion, or serving your community. Choosing behavior that is based on values instead of emotions enables you to react to stressful situations in a way that reflects who you are, instead of what you feel.

Review this list of values and rank the top 3 that are most important to you.

- Having a good relationship with a spouse or partner.
- Starting a new romantic relationship.
- Having a close relationship with your parents or siblings.
- Parenting.
- Having good friends.
- Living in a safe and comfortable home.
- Advancing your education or training.
- Having a fulfilling career or advancing your career.
- Experiencing financial security (decreased debt, increased savings).
- Engaging in hobbies and interests that enrich your life.
- Practicing your faith through spirituality or religion.
- Engaging in community service or civic engagement to make a difference.
- Being physically healthy and fit.
- Being emotionally healthy and strong.
- Engaging in self-care, including making time for yourself.
- Other _____

My top three values:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Creating a Life Based on Your Values

Now that you have your top three values, think of one measurable intention or goal for each of them. For instance, if you chose 'Education' as one of your top three, your intention could be "go back to school to complete my bachelor's degree."

Next, list a few realistic action steps to help you reach your goal. For example, if you want to go back to school, your steps might include "request my transcript" and "apply for financial aid."

Value #1 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps: _____

Value #2 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps: _____

Value #3 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps: _____

It is common to feel resistance when you try to turn your values into action. You may second-guess your abilities, worry about being judged by others, or feel shame. By identifying the negative thoughts and rehearsing solutions to overcome them, you will have more confidence to meet your goals.

Here’s an example of Ariana, who rehearsed her values-based behavior to address a stressful situation at her job.

Ariana has been very frustrated with her coworker, Jack, who is a member of her project team. While Jack is a hard worker, he often leaves the office before finishing his tasks so he can pick up his child from daycare. Ariana often stays late to complete Jack’s portion of the project, which includes spreadsheets – a task she hates. She has reacted by either speaking rudely to Jack or ignoring him for hours at a time. Jack has been angry and defensive in return. Their manager has noticed the tension between them and told them to find a workable resolution.

Ariana identified “career” as one of her top values. Her career intentions include “being a problem-solver” and “being dependable.” She thought about how she could use her value and intentions to improve her relationship with Jack, while reducing the stress she felt about her projects and workload. She also realized she often feels uncomfortable confronting others and typically reacts with frustration, anger, and avoidance. She felt disappointed in herself for not acting more professionally.

Ariana rehearsed explaining her feelings of frustration to Jack and apologizing for her behavior. She practiced asking Jack what she could do to alleviate his workload while being equitable with their responsibilities. She thought about suggesting ways to help Jack prioritize his tasks so he could work on the spreadsheets himself – leaving Ariana with some of his tasks that were less demanding. She also thought about small tasks she could delegate to Jack to make her own workload more manageable. She visualized a more collaborative and pleasant office environment for both of them.

What to Do

Now it is your turn to rehearse your values-based behavior. Think of a situation where you want to act and react with your values, not your emotions.

Describe the situation. Where are you? Who you are with? What are you and others doing and saying?

Which value and intentions have you identified to respond to this situation?

What steps will you take to turn those intentions into action through your words or efforts?

Notice the thoughts and feelings that come up for you; for example, you might have a fear of failure or feel anxious. Then, choose to simply accept them. What thoughts and feelings do you feel? Can you accept them? Explain.

Imagine successfully completing your goal while rising above those emotions. How do you feel?

Visualize others reacting positively to your actions. What does that look like?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Pausing During a Distressing Situation: The REST Technique

Objective

To pause during a distressing situation so that you can identify healthier ways of managing your emotions to avoid reacting impulsively.

You Should Know

When confronted with distressing situations, it can be challenging to remember healthy coping strategies you have learned. It might seem easier and feel more natural to return to unhealthy habits than to identify helpful techniques to manage your emotions. When you take a step back from an emotionally upsetting situation, it gives you the opportunity to examine the situation more objectively. As a result, you are more likely to choose healthier solutions and coping techniques.

Think of a recent situation when you experienced upsetting emotions and responded by acting impulsively or resorted to harmful urges. Then, answer the questions below.

Describe what happened during this situation.

Describe your emotions during this situation.

Describe how you reacted.

How did you feel afterward?

What to Do

The following strategy, which uses the acronym **REST**, lays out the steps to help you pause, clear your head, and then determine a helpful plan of action to address the situation. By encouraging you to briefly shift your attention from emotions and urges to facts and solutions, REST can be used as the first step in changing your unhealthy habits.

Relax: Take a “time out” from the situation to focus on your well-being. Go for a walk, take a hot bath, call a supportive friend, or even just take some deep breaths or count to ten.

Evaluate: Identify the facts within the distressing situation. Notice how you feel physically and emotionally. Observe what other people are doing and how they are reacting. Identify any threats to your safety.

Set an intention: Create a goal or plan to address the situation. This could mean choosing a coping skill, asking someone for help, calling a family meeting, or negotiating with others.

Take action: Put your plan into action with intention and awareness. While you may not necessarily resolve the situation, this action will be more effective than the impulsive behavior you would have otherwise carried out.

You might need to repeat some or all of the REST steps during a particularly overwhelming or upsetting situation. But with practice, it can become a new habit to help you manage your emotions and cope in healthier ways.

Using the distressing situation you described on the previous page, imagine how you could have responded differently using REST.

What could you have done to **Relax** during this situation?

If you had **Evaluated** the facts of this situation, what could you have noticed or learned?

What **Set intention** or plan could you have used?

If you had **Taken action** based on that intention, what could have happened?

How would your response or reaction have been different?

The key to the REST strategy is to identify the moment when you will choose how to react to an upsetting situation: either with harmful habits or with healthier coping skills. Here are some indicators that can help you identify that moment:

- You feel an intense negative emotion that usually results in avoidance or becoming confrontational.
- You are suddenly in physical or emotional pain.
- You notice the urge to act impulsively with a harmful behavior, even if there is no obvious reason.

Now, think of a recurring situation that causes you overwhelming or distressing emotions and harmful urges (for example, a confrontational family member, an unreasonably demanding boss, an overdue mortgage, etc.). Describe the situation below.

How can you use REST to address this situation next time it happens?

R: _____

E: _____

S: _____

T: _____

During what other recurring situations could the REST technique be helpful?

Reflections on This Exercise

How has this exercise increased your ability to identify healthier coping skills and solutions to distressing situations? Explain.

Which of the REST steps did you find easiest to do? Explain.

Which of the REST steps did you find most challenging? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Radical Acceptance

Objective

To use radical acceptance to tolerate overwhelming emotions in a difficult situation.

You Should Know

No matter how you live your life, there will always be situations and events that cause great sadness, anger, or frustration. You may wish to avoid these painful and sometimes overwhelming emotions, but avoiding them is not helpful.

What would happen if you accept things as they are – without trying to change, escape from, or eliminate them? What would happen if you refocus your attention on what you can do *NOW*? This is called radical acceptance – accepting even the most difficult situations the way they are rather than trying to avoid them.

When you practice radical acceptance, you acknowledge the current or past situation without judgment, and without criticizing yourself or others.

Why should you practice radical acceptance?

You may have heard the saying “The only way out, is through.” This means you must go through the pain in order to get to the other side of it.

Remember:

- Rejecting things that make you uncomfortable does not make them go away.
- Pain is a signal that something is wrong.
- A refusal to accept reality can keep you trapped in sadness, shame, anger, or other painful emotions.
- In order to successfully change something in your life, you need to accept it first.

Here is the example of Kendra, who struggled with the infidelity of her husband for years before she practiced radical acceptance:

Kendra and Jon were married for 16 years when she noticed he seemed to be losing interest in her. Jon was always going away for weekends and even when he was home, his mind seemed to be in another place. He was constantly on the computer and texting people, but Kendra was afraid to ask him what was going on.

Kendra told her sister and her best friend that she thought Jon was having an affair. She wondered if she should try and spy on him or even hire a private detective. She started thinking about Jon and what had happened to their marriage all of the time. She felt guilty, angry, and worried about what would happen to her children if they divorced. The only

thing that would quiet the voices in her head was taking a few drinks and she did this every night.

Using radical acceptance, Kendra learned to acknowledge her feelings rather than giving them power over her or trying to avoid them. She stopped blaming herself and even stopped blaming Jon. Once she could accept that this was a difficult situation (but a common one), she contacted a marriage counselor and asked Jon to go with her to a session.

What You Should Do

There are several steps to practicing radical acceptance:

- Stay in the present moment and pay attention to the emotions you are experiencing.
- Remind yourself the unpleasant reality cannot be changed.
- Remind yourself that the past or present reality is shaped by numerous factors, decisions, and events that took place over time.
- Practice accepting with your mind, heart, and body. This can include relaxation techniques, mindful breathing, prayer, or visualization.
- Listen to your body's sensations (tension, tightness, etc.) as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow disappointment, sadness, or grief to surface.
- Recognize that life, even when it is painful, can be worth living.

There are also statements you can say to yourself that may be helpful during this practice:

- "I can't change what's already happened."
- "It's impossible to change the past."
- "The present is the only moment I can control."
- "This situation is the result of countless other decisions and actions."

Now, consider radical acceptance as it relates to your own experiences. Think of a recent situation that you found distressing, and answer the following questions.

Describe the situation.

What were the past events that led to this situation?

What role did you play in causing this situation?

What role did others play?

What did you have control of in this situation?

Where did you lack control in this situation?

How did you respond to this situation?

How did this response affect your thoughts and feelings?

Did you avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings?

How could the events have played out differently if you had practiced radical acceptance?

Now, practice radical acceptance on a current situation that is causing you distress. Describe the situation.

What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?

What can you do to help you accept this situation?

Did you notice any shift in your thoughts and feelings about the situation after practicing radical acceptance? Describe those changes.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Coping Thoughts

Objective

To better manage difficult emotions and challenging situations by using coping thoughts.

You Should Know

Using “Coping Thoughts” will help you soothe yourself and calm your emotions when you are experiencing distress. You might be burdened by a constant stream of mind-generated negative or self-critical thoughts, seemingly on autopilot. You might worry you are stuck with those voices and there is nothing you can do about it. However, you can change negative thought patterns. You can practice making a new inner “recording” through using this technique.

What to Do

First, write down some of the typical negative, self-critical thoughts that arise when you are in distress. Be as honest as you can and try not to hold back. There is nothing wrong with you for having these thoughts – it might hurt to look at them closely, but bringing them into awareness will help you.

Next, review the list of possible coping thoughts you can say to yourself if you are in distress.

- Everyone makes mistakes.
- Nobody’s perfect.
- Nothing bad is happening right now.
- I’m going to be OK.
- This too shall pass.
- I can ride out this uncomfortable feeling. It won’t last forever.
- My feelings come and go.

- I can take care of myself.
- My feelings are not bad. They are just feelings.
- I'm a survivor. I can survive this too.
- I can feel anxious and still get through this.
- I am a good person.
- This situation is only temporary.
- I am a strong person.
- I will be able to figure this out.
- I can take my time to decide what to do next.
- I don't have to know the answer right now.
- I have the courage to face my difficult feelings.
- This doesn't feel good, but it won't kill me.
- I can change my thoughts if I want to.
- I was hurt in the past but I am working on healing now.
- I am worthy of love and respect.
- I am someone who can cope with difficulty.

Add your own coping thoughts here:

Pick a few of these coping thoughts to practice using when you are in distress or dealing with difficult emotions. Make a copy of your list that you can review at any time – on a note card, on your phone or device, and so on.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now, practice using coping thoughts for one week. Complete the following chart, then answer the questions. Make copies of the chart if necessary.

Date	Situation/Trigger/ Negative Thought	Your Emotions/ How Did You Feel?	Coping Thought Used	What Was the Result?

Measuring the Intensity of Your Emotion Against the Level of Threat

Objective

To measure the intensity of your emotions against the actual level of the threat to react appropriately to distressing situations.

You Should Know

When there are threats of danger or harm, emotions like anger or anxiety can warn you that something is wrong and you need to take action. There are times, however, that your emotional reactions to situations surpass the actual level of the threat. This can make it more difficult to manage your emotions and respond to the situation in healthier ways.

Because emotions are not facts, sometimes there might be little correlation between the intensity of your emotions and the actual threat level. Assessing whether your emotions accurately reflect your level of risk or danger can help you determine the healthiest course of action/reaction.

What You Should Do

First, think of a recent distressing or overwhelming situation. Describe what happened here.

How did you respond to the situation? Describe.

Rank the intensity of the emotions you experienced during the situation, from 1 to 10, with 1 = low distress, to 10 = high distress).

Intensity level: _____

Why did you rate it that number?

Next, rank the situation's *actual* level of threat or harm to your safety, health, or well-being, with 1 = low level of danger or harm, to 10 = high level of danger, harm, or damage.

Intensity level: _____

Why did you rate it that number?

Now, compare the two rankings. Which number is higher: the intensity of your emotions or the actual threat?

If the emotion ranks higher than the threat level, identify a skill you could have used to help you avoid acting on your impulses or urges. This can include distracting yourself through pleasurable activities, self-soothing through meditation, or asking for help from someone you trust.

What actions could you have taken to manage your emotions in healthier ways?

If your emotion is equal to, or lower than, the level of threat, identify an action you could have used to improve or change that situation, including problem solving or negotiating.

What activities could you have chosen to improve or change the situation?

Next time you encounter a situation where you experience overwhelming or distressing emotions, answer the following questions.

Describe the situation. What happened? Who were you with? How did you feel?

Rank the intensity of the emotions you experienced during the situation, from 1 to 10, with 1 = low distress, to 10 = high distress.

Intensity level: _____

Why did you rate it that number?

Next, rank the situation's actual level of threat or harm to your safety, health, or well-being, with 1 = low danger or harm, to 10 = danger, harm, or damage.

Intensity level: _____

Why did you rate it that number?

Now, compare the two rankings. Which number is higher: your emotions or the threat?

If the emotion ranks higher than the threat level, identify a skill to help you avoid acting on your impulses or urges. This can include distracting yourself through pleasurable activities, self-soothing through meditation, or asking for help from someone you trust.

What actions will you take to manage your emotions in healthier ways?

Who can support you with these healthy actions?

If your emotion is equal to, or lower than, the level of threat, take action to improve or change that situation, including problem solving or negotiating.

What activities will you choose to improve or change the situation?

Who can help you with these changes or improvements, or brainstorm ideas for solutions?

Reflections on This Exercise

Does ranking emotions against actual threat change the way you react to a situation? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using a Pros and Cons List to Identify the Consequences of Your Urges

Introduction to Therapists

“Creating a Pros and Cons List” is a distress tolerance exercise created by Marsha M. Linehan to be used in conjunction with other DBT therapeutic techniques. It can be helpful for clients who are aware of their harmful or self-destructive behaviors and are considering steps to reduce or eliminate them. The Pros and Cons List can be used for behaviors ranging from cutting and burning, to binge eating, to practicing unsafe sex.

The purpose of the Pros and Cons List is for clients to use it as a reminder tool before their next urge strikes, or before they act on that urge. It is geared toward clients **who are not in crisis** and who are able to take a step back to objectively identify the consequence of acting on, or resisting, those urges.

Clients who complete the list are expected to carry it with them, and to rehearse and review it repeatedly. Ultimately, the client should be able to envision the *positive* consequences of *resisting* the urge and the *negative* consequences of *acting* on the urge. They should also be able to remember past experiences when they acted on their urges, and the consequences they encountered.

Used along with distress tolerance techniques that identify healthier coping strategies, the following Pros and Cons worksheet can be an effective tool to increase awareness and begin reducing or eliminating harmful behaviors.

Using a Pros and Cons List to Identify the Consequences of Your Urges

Objective

To use a Pros and Cons List to help you identify the consequences for both acting on and resisting your harmful urges.

You Should Know

When you experience overwhelming emotions, it is easy to keep repeating the same harmful behaviors – even when you are trying to reduce or eliminate them. During times of distress, you might cut yourself, overeat, drink excessively, destroy property, or engage in other dangerous activities. By using a Pros and Cons List to identify the positive and negative consequences of your urges, you can weigh your options and identify better choices.

You should work on the Pros and Cons List when you are feeling safe and out of a crisis. Reading and re-reading a list of consequences in your own words can help you delay turning those urges into action. It can also serve as a reminder of past instances when you acted on those urges.

What You Should Do

You will complete a Pros and Cons List that examines the positive and negative effects of acting on – and of *resisting* – your harmful impulses. For instance, if you cut yourself to feel relief from difficult emotions, you will first compare the pros and cons of acting on your urge to cut. Depending on the situation, acting on the urge can also mean giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.

Then, you will compare the pros and cons of resisting the urge to cut. Depending on the situation, resisting the urge can also mean doing what needs to be done or not giving up.

Use the following chart to complete your Pros and Cons List. You can select any harmful activity to compare the pros and cons (overeating, drinking, etc.). Fill in the boxes on the chart in the following way:

- Pick one box to start. Write down everything you can think of for that category.
- Notice any shame, guilt, self-criticism, or worry that arises, and remind yourself that your feelings are just feelings.
- When you complete that category box, start on the next one.
- You might notice some overlap between category boxes. Keep writing until you feel you are done.
- Quantity does not matter. You might have 2 items in one category, and 20 in another.

- Once you have completed all four boxes, it is recommended that you carry the list with you. You can review it and rehearse it before you *experience* your next urge to engage in harmful behavior, or before you *act on* your next urge. The list can also help you remember the consequences of other times you acted on your urges.

	Pros	Cons
Acting on Harmful Urges To: _____	<i>Pros of acting on my harmful urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</i>	<i>Cons of acting on my harmful urges, giving in, giving up, or avoiding what needs to be done.</i>
Resisting Harmful Urges To: _____	<i>Pros of resisting my harmful urges, doing what needs to be done, or not giving up.</i>	<i>Cons of resisting my harmful urges, doing what needs to be done, or not giving up.</i>

Reflections on This Exercise

What thoughts and feelings did you experience as you completed the Pros and Cons List?

Were there any items on your list that surprised you? Explain.

Now, identify which pros and cons have short-term consequences (impact you today), and which have long-term consequences (impact your future).

Short-term pros:

Short-term cons:

Long-term pros:

Long-term cons:

What thoughts and feelings did you experience as you completed the short-term and long-term lists?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Riding the Wave of Your Urges

Objective

To ride out unhealthy urges and impulses using the Ride the Wave visualization technique.

You Should Know

When you experience unhealthy urges during times of distress, you may notice fluctuations in their intensity. Urges are like ocean waves that strengthen, peak, and eventually crash. When you try to eliminate your urges, they can take longer to subside. If you give in to the impulses, they can increase in power. However, when you ride the wave of your urges like a surfer on the ocean, you can observe and accept those urges without taking any action.

What to Do

Try the following Ride the Wave visualization technique next time you have an unhealthy urge or impulse to revisit an undesirable habit. With practice, your urges will become easier to withstand, providing the opportunity for you to identify healthier behaviors to manage your emotions.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted. Focus on your breath and your body's sensations throughout this exercise. Close your eyes if you wish.

- Take a few moments to notice where in your body you experience the urge. You might observe sensations in your stomach, in your mouth, or another area.
- Focus your attention on the part of your body connected to the urge. If you notice the urge in more than one area, start with the section that feels most intense. Do you feel tension, pressure, discomfort, tingling, or warmth? It may be helpful to describe the sensations in an objective and nonjudgmental manner. ("I notice warmth and tingling in my belly.") Go through this exercise with each body part where you notice the urge.
- Pay attention to your breath for the next 1–2 minutes as you inhale and exhale deeply.
- Return your focus to the body part(s) where you feel the urge. Notice any sensations that arise. Imagine sending your breath to the areas where you feel the urge. Observe if, and how, the sensations change as you watch them. Practice this step for at least one minute.
- Imagine your urge's physical sensations are a wave. Watch the wave rise and fall repeatedly as the intensity of the sensations crest and subside. Imagine your breathing is a surfboard riding these waves. No matter how big the wave gets, or how afraid you are of falling off the board, imagine you are a professional surfer who can handle each wave as it comes. Practice this for at least one minute.
- As you ride the wave or notice sensations describe the sensations again, in an objective and nonjudgmental way ("I notice the warmth in my belly is getting cooler").
- Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes.

Describe how it felt to notice your urges without acting on them.

What physical sensations did you notice as you Rode the Wave?

What thoughts and emotions arose as you Rode the Wave?

Reflections on This Exercise

Did the intensity of your urges change as a result of the exercise? Explain.

Did the intensity of your thoughts and emotions change as a result of the exercise? Explain.

Identify an upcoming situation where using the Ride the Wave exercise will be useful.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Your Senses to Get Grounded

Objective

To notice what you see, hear, and sense in your external surroundings to “ground you” when you experience distressing thoughts and feelings.

You Should Know

When you experience difficult situations, your distressing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations may be the only things you notice. It might be challenging to focus your attention on what others are saying, or to concentrate on a task. However, the physical or mental distress you feel can be quite different from what is taking place externally, in the world around you.

By focusing on what you perceive through your senses, you can become more aware of what is happening outside of your feelings in that moment. This view helps to “ground you,” enabling you to see the situation more fully and become “present.”

The following meditation exercise shows you how to shift your attention between your internal and external experiences to increase your awareness of your senses.

What to Do

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set your timer for 10 minutes. Focus on breathing and relaxing throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Using your sense of sight, focus your attention on one object in your surroundings.
- Notice how the object looks, including size, shape, color, and other visible details. If you find your attention wandering, return your focus to the object without judging yourself.
- Shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths.
- Now focus your attention on your sense of hearing, noticing any sounds you hear. This can be a clock ticking, birds tweeting outside, or a car honking nearby. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to listening.
- Once again, shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths. Notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair, of your feet on the floor, and of your chest expanding with each breath.
- Next, focus on your sense of smell. If you do not notice any pleasant or unpleasant smells, focus on the air flowing through your nose and mouth as you inhale and exhale. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your nose.
- Return to physical sensations, scanning your body from your head to your toes and notice any tension, tingling, or pain. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to your body.

- Finally, focus your attention on your sense of touch. Reach out with your hand to touch something in your reach, or the chair you are sitting on, or your arm or leg. Notice if it is hard or soft, smooth or tough, solid or hollow. Notice how your fingertips feel as you touch the object. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your fingertips and the object.
- Take three to five long slow breaths, and refocus on yourself and your surroundings.

How easy or difficult was it to sit quietly and focus on your senses? Explain.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed during this exercise.

Describe any changes in your thoughts or emotions you noticed during this exercise.

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe a situation where this exercise might have been helpful in allowing you to see the situation more fully. Had you used this technique would you have reacted differently? Explain.

How could you use this technique to help “ground” you the next time you experience upsetting or overwhelming emotions?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
