

Coping Skills in times of distress

These are 4 easy-to-use and approachable skills that can be used in moments of intense emotional pain and crises. These can be especially useful when we get the urge to engage in self-harm or destructive behaviors (i.e. substance use, cutting, procrastination or avoidance). If there is an emergency, please contact your care team first and if it is life-threatening, call 911.

Skill 1: Reality Acceptance

Distress level: 2-4

When to use: When you want to reduce suffering and increase sense of freedom

How to use: Start by accepting your life in the moment using the following:

- **Radical acceptance:** Complete and total openness to the facts of reality, letting go of resistance and willfulness (Doesn't mean you have to like the facts, just acknowledge!)
- **Half smiling:** Turn the corners of your mouth upwards to mimic a partial smile
- **Willing hands:** Turn your hands so that your palms are facing up on your lap or sides of your body



Skill 2: Self Soothing

Distress level: 5-7

When to use: When you want to reduce vulnerability to emotion mind and to decrease impulsive feelings of action

How to use: Use the 5 senses to distract and soothe the mind and body.

- **Sight:** Pinterest collage, look at soothing art
- **Touch:** Self massage, heated blanket, pet an animal
- **Sound:** Nature sounds, ASMR, calming music
- **Smell:** Candles, fresh air, essential oils
- **Taste:** Warm drinks, eat slowly, sour candy



Coping Skills continued

Skill 3: TIPP

Distress level: 8-10

When to use: To reduce emotional arousal by changing body temperature, to prevent other harmful behaviors.

How to use: When emotions become too intense, try:

- **T**ipp your temperature: Submerge your face in ice water for 30 to 60 seconds; or take a hot shower or bath
- **I**ntense aerobic exercise: Get your heart rate up for 20-30 minutes
- **P**aced breathing: Slowly breath in through your nose for 4, hold for 4 and exhale from your mouth for 6 seconds
- **P**aired muscle relaxation: Focusing on one muscle group at a time, tighten each muscle for 5 seconds, then release



Skill 4: STOP

Distress level: 9-10

When to use: When you have an urge and want to decrease impulsivity.

How to use: Use the acronym STOP, which stands for:

- **S**top
- **T**ake a step back
- **O**bserve
- **P**roceed Mindfully



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