

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT 1: Crisis Survival Strategies (cont.)

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, starting 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 nonmental 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 1: Crisis Survival Strategies (cont.)

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.

ACTIVITY

When you are worried, things that you cannot see change on the inside of your body. Your heart starts to beat fast, and your stomach might start to hurt. This isn't dangerous, but it feels bad. To get things to go back to normal on the inside, you need to burn off some of the extra energy that is making your body feel strange. The best way to do this is to get involved in something active and fun.

See if you can run up and down the stairs four times before your brother counts to 100.

Roll up a sock and play catch with your dad.

Hop on your bike and ride around the block.

You might not feel like running around because you feel sort of sick and not at all energetic or playful. But being active will help to re-set your system and make things feel normal again on the inside. So talk back to the worry, and then get moving.

DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT I: Crisis Survival Strategies (cont.)

SELF-SOOTHING

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.

From Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder by Marsha Linehan. ©1993 The Guilford Press.

Visualization Techniques

Visualization techniques involve identifying pleasant, relaxing scenes and retrieving them as a self-soothing strategy (Schwartz, 1995). Some clients experience the world in predominantly visual terms and respond especially well to techniques of this type. They will say quite clearly, "Visualization works better for me than any other skill." I find that there are two main types of visualization. One is "reality-based" and the other "fantasy-based." An example of a reality-based scene is the following:

At the Ocean

Close your eyes. . . . Imagine yourself leaving the area where you live . . . leave the daily hassles and the fast pace and demands behind. . . . Imagine

yourself taking an easy ride down back roads to the beach. . . . It is a pleasantly warm day and a relaxing day to drive. As you ride along, you can tell you are getting closer to the beach. The windows in the car are down and you can to smell the salt air and hear the sound of the ocean coming closer. . . .

Find a place on the road to the beach to stop. It is a pleasantly warm near the beach, with just-enough of a breeze to make the warmth feel comfortable rather than hot. You get out of the car and begin walking down a path toward the beach, between sand dunes and high grasses that blow back and forth in the breeze. . . . Be aware of your surroundings. . . . Be aware of the pleasant feeling of warmth, a slight wind, and the fresh smell of the ocean. . . .

Now you are out of the dunes and onto the beach. . . . You discover that you have the beach to yourself. . . . Find yourself a pleasant spot where the sand is clean and soft and dry. Lay down your large towel and get settled. Feel the sun resting on you, pleasantly warming you. You feel more and more relaxed.

You can hear the ocean gently breaking on the shore. Occasionally you hear birds call in the distance. The breeze cools you. Before long you feel totally relaxed . . . calm . . . at peace with the world and yourself. This place is your own and you can return to it anytime you want to feel relaxed and at peace.

An example of a fantasy-based scene is the following:

Becoming Water

For this exercise you are asked to imagine that on a pleasantly cool day you are walking up a gently rising mountain. You are going on this hike alone. You have plenty of time to yourself and are feeling relaxed. There is a light breeze and the temperature in the air is just right.

After some time hiking up the path, you reach a large pool of water. On the far end of this pool is a stream that flows down the mountain. You decide to enter this pool of water and find that the water temperature is just right for you, neither too warm nor too cool. You lie down in the water, allowing the water to surround you. You just float and your breathing becomes more and more relaxed. Being in the water is calming and refreshing and soothing.

After some time you have an unusual, pleasant experience. You find that the water surrounding you is so relaxing and peaceful that you feel as if you are becoming more and more like the water and less and less yourself. Your sense of your own body temporarily dissolves as you become more and more water-like. This experience, although unusual, is a pleasant one. You feel more and more relaxed and at peace, as you can let everything go.

As you become more and more like water, you begin to drift through the pool as water. By now you are no longer yourself. For the time being—a brief time—you have become fully water. As water you drift through the pool and down into the stream. As water you flow gently and smoothly down the moun-

tain in the stream bed. As water you flow by and around smooth stones and water plants. You flow around tree roots and pebbles. You flow over sand and around boulders. As water, you stop nowhere and rush nowhere.

Eventually you come to the end of the stream and enter another pool. This pool is like the other: calm and pure and pleasantly refreshing. While in this pool, you slowly begin to resume your normal shape as a person, a human being. You are less and less water and more and more yourself. Finally, you are fully yourself again and are water no more. You get up from the pool and walk back on the land. You feel refreshed, calm, and relaxed.

Some clients strongly prefer scenes that are feasible and derived from their personal experience; others enjoy something more imaginary and fantasy-based. A few individuals seem to like both.

I prefer to introduce visualization in treatment by using a real-world example such as "At the Ocean." If the client finds it relaxing and useful, I then suggest that the client develop his or her own "ideal" scene. This can be done initially during a session, with the client identifying a type of scene and the clinician helping to elicit details. In some instances, the client dictates a scene to the therapist, who types it up verbatim so that the client can take it home at the end of the session. An audio recording is also a good idea.

In treatment sessions or on their own, clients have generated wonderful examples of visualizations, including scenes in the mountains or meadows, sitting in a tulip field, swimming with dolphins, floating on a raft on pond, fly fishing, flying in a glider, etc.

Clients who like the more fantasy-based scenes have generated examples such as flying like a bird or soaring like a condor, floating in clouds, becoming the surf or wind, etc. Either way, clients are more apt to feel a sense of ownership if they develop their own examples.

Visualization can be combined with mindful breathing. Some clients get themselves settled and breathe mindfully for several minutes before retrieving a pleasant scene. Mindful breathing that focuses on counting or "letting go" can get stale with time and visualization can provide a fresh focus.

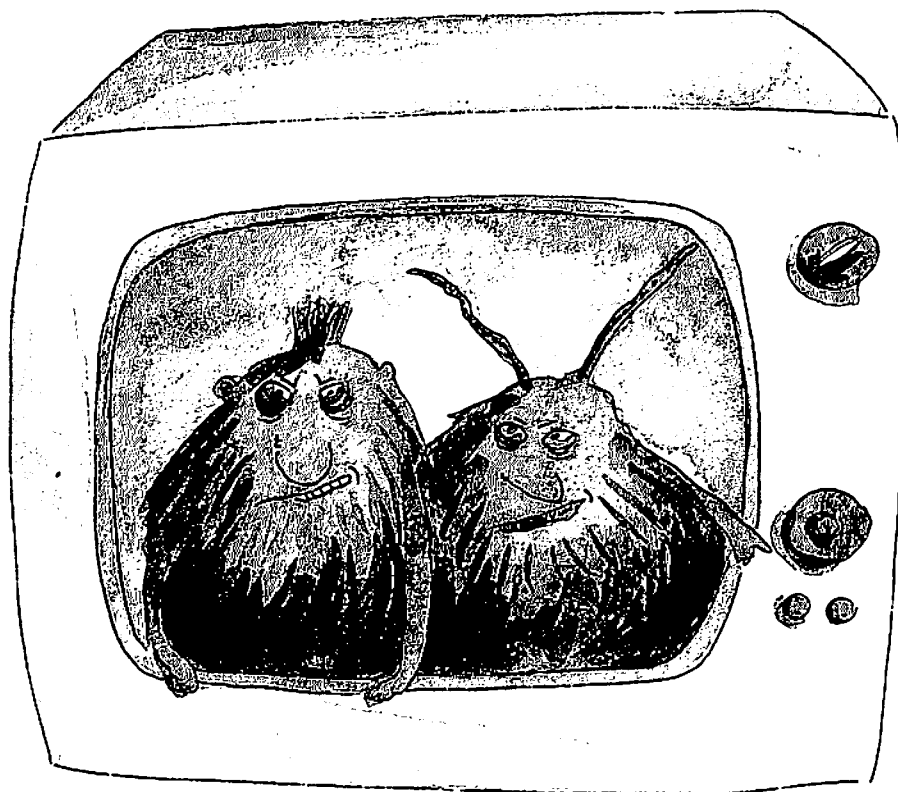
Rarely, clients develop scenes that are not soothing but counterproductive. For example, I discovered that one client was imagining scenes of violence—which he stated he found quite soothing. I questioned the appropriateness of these scenes and shaped him in the direction of more prosocial content (e.g., listening to guitar music in a cafe). Pastoral scenes would not work for this client; he had never been out of the city. The point is that it is important to monitor the scenes clients are using, lest they go astray into negative or destructive content.

Now that your body is ready, let's think about your brain. When you're worried, thoughts about the worry take up all of the room in your mind. These worry thoughts keep you feeling bad, even if you have already tried to relax your body.

People might tell you to just not think about the worry, but as you know, that is really hard to do. It's like the worry is being shown on a giant-screen TV in your brain. You can't not watch!

But, you **CAN** change the channel.

You already know how to change the channel on a real TV. Now you're going to learn how to change the channel in your mind.



Begin by choosing a memory.



Choose one of your most special memories. You probably have a few. Special memories are usually from happy times, when you were having lots of fun or when you succeeded at something that was hard. Maybe you hit a triple in a softball game. Maybe you got to choose your dog from a whole litter of squirming puppies.

Think of a memory that makes you feel really good inside. Remember as many details as you can. What were you wearing? How did the air smell? What could you hear? How did you feel? What did you see?

When you practice remembering your special memory, you'll notice that the memory makes you feel better. Just thinking about your favorite memory will help you feel the way you felt that day. It takes practice, but soon you'll notice that you don't just remember feeling happy or excited or proud, you actually feel that way.

And guess what? Feeling happy or excited or proud crowds out the worry! It changes the channel off a worry station and onto one you'd much rather be watching.

Set aside five minutes each day to practice this quiet way of re-setting your system. In the beginning, practice at a time when you aren't busy worrying.

Get your body ready by tightening and relaxing your muscles. Breathe deeply five times (remember to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth). Then picture your favorite memory in as much detail as you possibly can.