

DBT Distress Tolerance Skills: Helping the Clients Through the Tough Times (and Yourself)

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Overview

Goals of distress tolerance skills

Teaching the Skills

- Distraction
- Self-Soothing
- IMPROVE the moment
- Pros and Cons

Clinical applications

- For clients
- For yourself

What is a Crisis?

A crisis is when you have a serious problem but you can't solve it (at least not now).

In a crisis, there is a pressure to solve the problem and it is difficult to stop trying.

In a crisis, emotions are high so the problem is distressing and having high emotions generally makes things worse.

A crisis is short-term.

- If it is happening all the time, it isn't a crisis, *it's your life!*

Can you Solve the Crisis?

If yes, **SOLVE IT**

- Stick with it, don't take your eye off the ball, and do what it takes.

If no (or not right now), **STOP** trying to solve it

- Trying to solve something you can't will often make it worse and send your emotions through the roof.
- Focus on distress tolerance skills during an unsolved crisis.

These skills taught in this webcast are designed just for an *unsolved* crisis.

Distress tolerance skills are for...

Clients

face many stressors

- Housing
- Money
- Drugs and alcohol
- Dangerous neighborhoods or bus lines
- Trouble finding and keeping work
- Long waits for social services
- Medical problems and chronic pain

Clinicians

face many stressors

- Large caseloads
- Difficult clients
- Hearing many traumatic stories
- Inability to help their clients
- Lack of time or resources to help their clients
- Frustrating interactions with social services
- Unhelpful rules or regulations
- Paperwork

Distress tolerance is surviving without making the situation worse.

Tolerating distress is not solving the problem.

- There are other skills for problem-solving.



Remember

- Don't hit your head on a brick wall by trying to solve a crisis that can't be solved now.
- Figure out another way to solve the problem.
- Then practice distress tolerance until that other way can work.

Distress tolerance is surviving without making the situation worse.

Tolerating distress is not removing – or sometimes even reducing – distress.

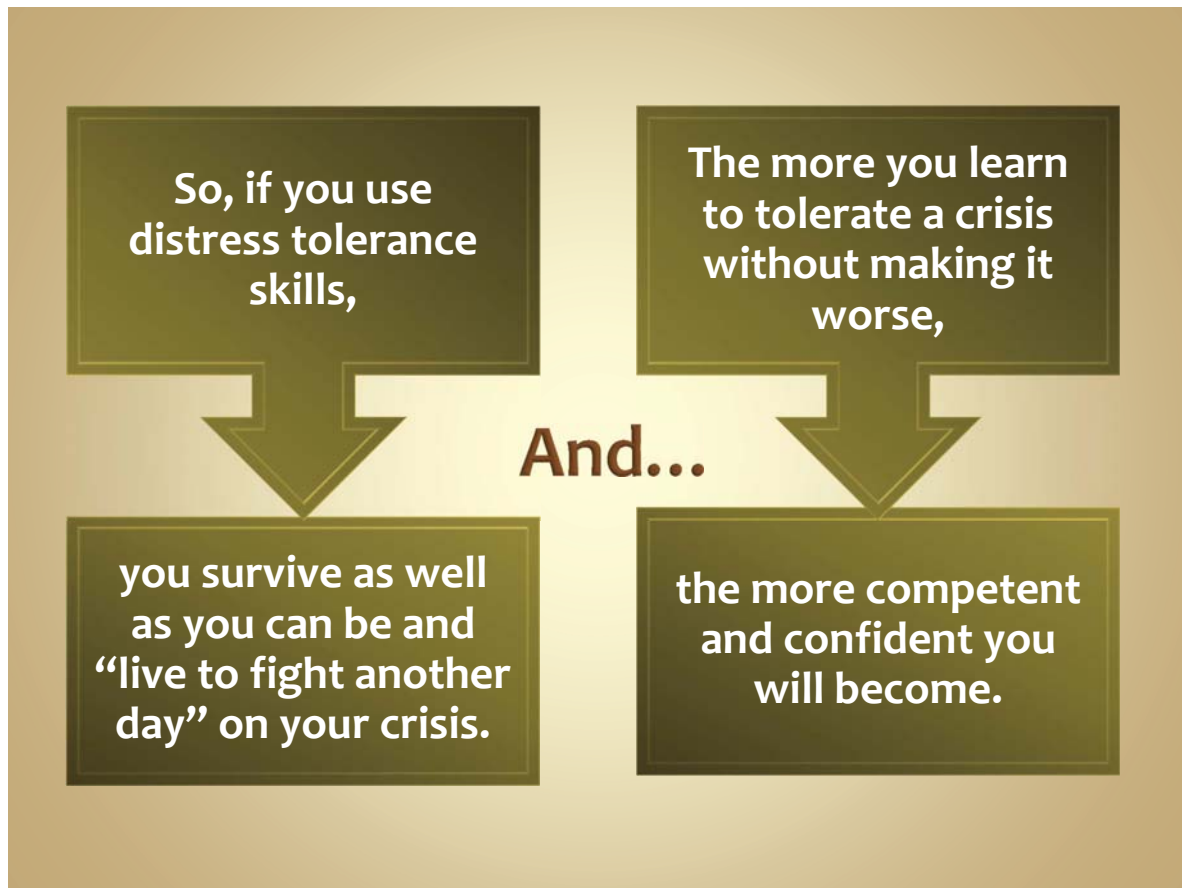
- There are other skills for reducing emotions.



Don't expect distress tolerance skills to make you "feel better".

- The fact is that you often may feel better, but that is not the purpose of the skill.
- The skills are so you won't make the situation worse.
- If the skills prevent the crisis getting worse but don't make you feel better, **DON'T STOP!** If you do, things may get worse.





So what are the Distress Tolerance skills

- Distract
- Self-Soothe
- IMPROVE the moment
- Pros and Cons

Distraction is deliberately turning your attention away from the crisis.

Remember,
wise mind
ACCEPTS

Activities

Contributing

Comparisons

opposite **E**motions

Pushing away

Thoughts

Sensations

Distracting with...

Activities

Use an activity that fits the moment or what you would be doing if you weren't distressed

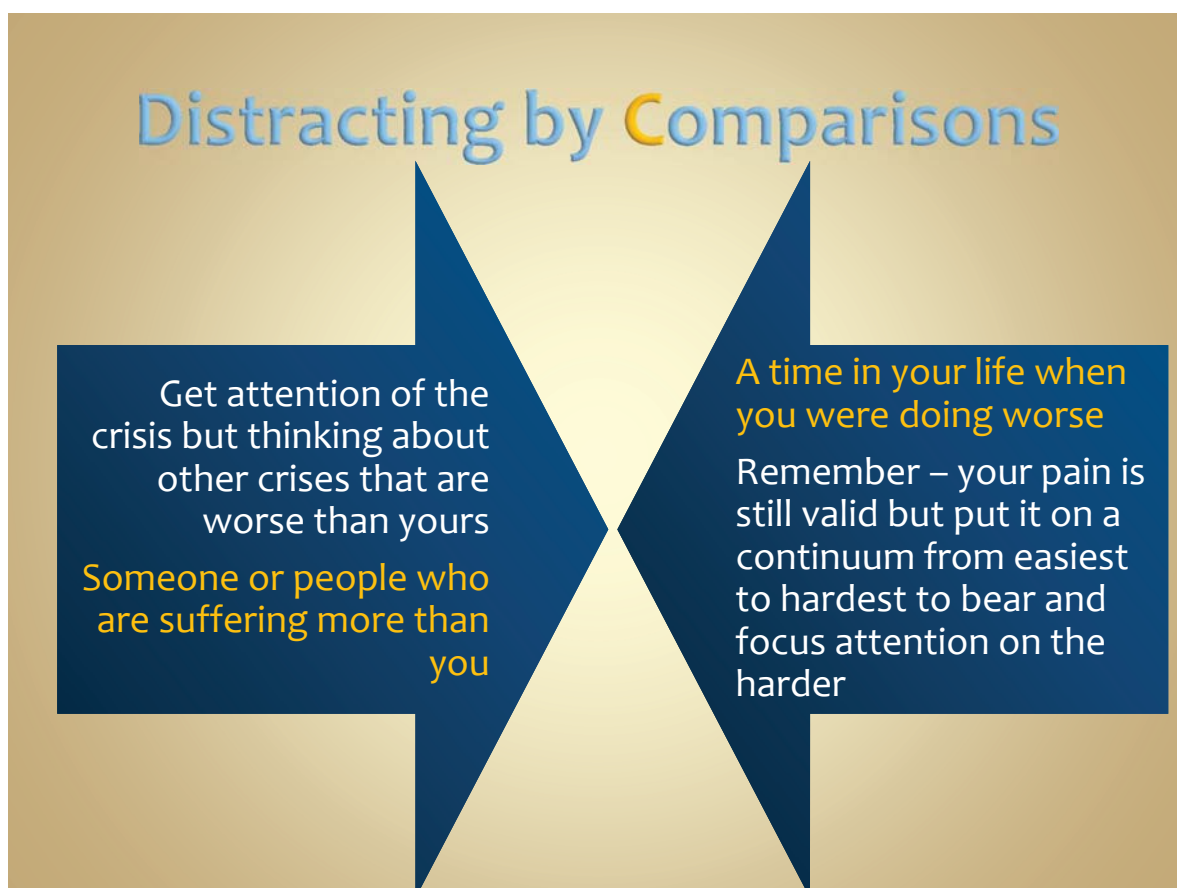
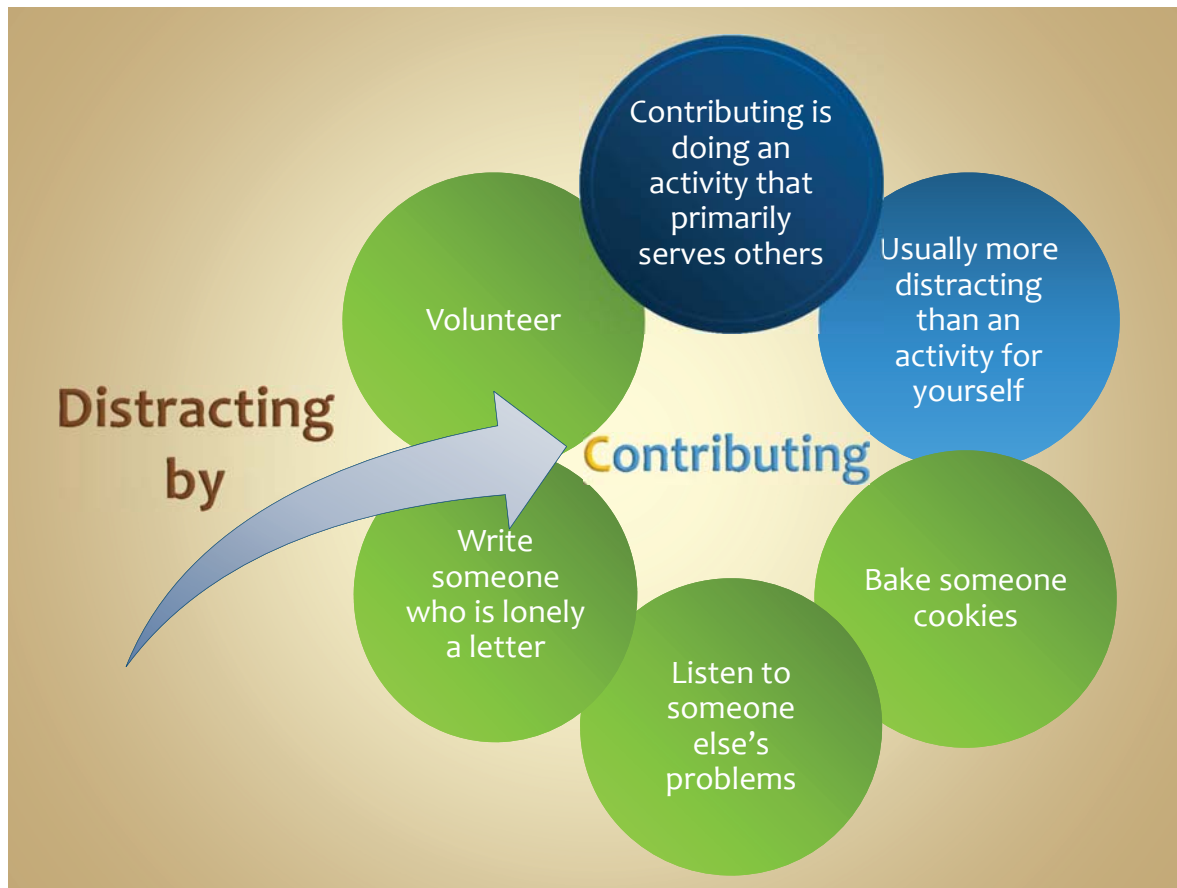
Sports or exercise

Hobbies or using your talents

Be with other people and **DON'T** talk about the crisis

Watch a movie

Go to the zoo, park, beach



Distracting by Emotions

When we are distressed, one or two negative emotions dominate the scene

Figure out an emotion different from the negative one you are feeling and try and bring it on

- If angry, watch a comedy
- If scared, watch someone daring
- If sad, listen to upbeat music

Distracting by Pushing Away

This means deciding that something cannot be dealt with now and putting it out of your mind

Imagine putting it on a shelf, in a time-release safe, in another room

Imagine a Lucite wall between you and the problem so you may be aware of it but you are cut off

Imagine the “volume” of the problem being turned down

Distracting with Thoughts

The idea is to fill your brain with other thoughts, so there is no room for the crisis

- Sing song lyrics you don't quite remember
- Do the times tables to a number you have to calculate
- Decide what profession everyone on the bus does
- Imagine decorating your future home

Distracting with Sensations

This is
THE BEST
strategy to
get unstuck
when you are
very
distressed

Mobilize your body and it will bring your mind and emotions with it

- Put your face in ice water or hold ice
- Run up and down stairs
- Take cold shower
- If you are inside go outside or if you are outside go inside

Self-Soothing

What would you do if you lived with a loved one going through a crisis?

How would you soothe them?

That is what you want to do for yourself

Don't make a situation harder by being more uncomfortable than required

For instance, don't wear tight shoes to the dentist

Self-Soothe with Five Senses

Vision

Decorate your space, go somewhere inspiring

Sound

Music, soothing voices, nature sounds

Smell

Cooking, lavender, the beach

Touch

Comfortable clothes, pet animal, foot massage

Taste

Favorite food, hard candy or mint, good cup of coffee

IMPROVE the moment

Skills to
accept pain
and reduce
suffering

Imagery

Meaning

Prayer

Relaxation

One thing in the moment

Vacation

Encouragement

Imagery

Picture a
place you
feel

Happy

a beach, a
hike, with
friends

Safe

place far
away, place
with locks

Relief

like when
the crisis will
be solved

Relaxed

on a warm,
comfortable
couch

Meaning

What can this crisis
or tolerating this
crisis do for you?
What will you get
out of this?

What are your core
beliefs or religious
traditions?

“What doesn’t kill
you makes you
stronger”

“God doesn’t give
me more than I can
handle”

“This too shall
pass”

Prayer

Use and connect to the religious or spiritual
traditions that are meaningful to you

Examples

Serenity Prayer

May I be filled with loving kindness.
May I be well.
May I be peaceful and at ease.
May I be happy.
Ancient Tibetan Buddhist meditation

Relaxation

The goal is to reduce suffering by removing physical stress from the body

Progressive relaxation

- Tighten each part of your body fully for 5 seconds and then completely relax it
- Start at toes and work through full body

Walk, yoga, other exercise that relaxes your muscles

One thing in the Moment

Bring all of your attention to what is happening right in this moment

A lot of distress is not in the present – it is in the past or is anticipated for the future

Let go of thoughts about the past and future

Describe (in your mind, out loud, in writing) what you notice in this moment to bring your attention just to now

Vacation

A vacation is when you deliberately step away from your life to do something more relaxing, fun, or peaceful

Take a small vacation to tolerate the distress

- Don't talk to anyone for an hour
- Go to bed and forget the rest of the day
- Decide everyone can do without you for a while
- Get take out rather than cook

Key, as with all vacations, is plan it *ahead of time* and have a "return ticket"

- Otherwise you are running away!

Encouragement

Goal is not to be "Pollyanna" about your troubles but encourage yourself to stick with it and tell yourself you will succeed

Be your own cheerleader

- "I can do it"
- "Only 3 more days... 2 more... 1 more..."
- "I have been through worse and I can do this too"

Similar to positive self-talk

Pros and Cons

| | Pros | Cons |
|----------------------------------|------|------|
| Making it worse by: _____ | | |
| Tolerating distress by: _____ | | |

Scenario: 10pm Sun night and you found an eviction notice on your door

| | Pros | Cons |
|---|--|--|
| Making it worse by: <i>getting drunk</i> | -get to relax -won't have to think about it | -won't be able to function tomorrow when have to call guy back |
| Tolerating distress by: <i>self-soothing</i> | -get some relaxation -will be clear minded tomorrow | -will be worried all night -probably won't sleep |

Scenario: Thurs afternoon and you have a new referral a lot like last 3 who dropped

| | Pros | Cons |
|---|---|--|
| Making it worse by: <i>just go through the motions</i> | -don't have to focus when tired -don't get my hopes up | -self-fulfilling prophesy -person will think you don't care |
| Tolerating distress by: <i>IMPROVE with meaning, prayer, and encouragement</i> | -feel proud of the quality of my work -have hope -treatment more likely to work | -takes a lot of effort -may be disappointed (again) |

Do Pros and Cons at your best moment and make list for darkest moment.



If you are at your darkest moment, you will not be able to see the pros and cons at all clearly

**So those are the DBT
Distress Tolerance skills.**

***Not new ideas –
just conceptualized and
organized in systematic way.***

Few Tips

Make sure the distress tolerance skill is close to the intensity of the distress

- If you have the urge to die, ironing is probably not going to help!

Make sure the timing of the skill matches the situation

- Distracting with Sensations is a great way to get started but doesn't last; so if crisis is long, pair with Activities or Contributing
- Distracting with Thoughts lasts for minutes to maybe an hour – good for the bus, traffic, staff meetings, or the line at the DMV
- Take a “vacation” for as long as time allows

Few Tips

Any Distress Tolerance skills overused can make things worse

- Soothing by taste is not a good idea if you are a compulsive eater or are gaining weight
- Take too many vacations, you don't get anything done
- Distracting by watching a DVD TV series or reading novels can take over your life

Avoid Distraction when it is avoidance

- Often people see distraction - getting your mind off it - as the only way to cope when you can't do anything about the problem
- Sometimes you need to stay with the problem such as staying in class or on the worksite or with your children (or with your clients)
- Be sure to learn Self-Soothing and IMPROVE as much as Distract for this

Practice DBT Distress Tolerance skills

Teach
yourself
before
teaching
your
clients



**And, most of all, practice them
when your distress is high so you
can tolerate your crises too...**

Thank you.