

COPING & DISTRESS TOLERANCE PACKAGE

COPING

- Coping strategies
- Coping skills
- Self-care ideas
- Self-care, stressors, and protective factors assessments
- Positive self-talk
- Social support
- Relaxation techniques
- Grounding techniques

MINDFULNESS

- Overview
- Exercises
- Letting go

DISTRESS TOLERANCE

- Skills
- Opposite action
- Distress improvement activities
- Action plan
- Building happiness
- Writing

SELF-HARM AND SAFETY PLANNING

- Alternatives to self-harm and distraction techniques
- Alternative thoughts and actions
- Safety plan

Types of coping strategies

1. **appraisal-focused:** Directed towards challenging one's own assumptions, adaptive cognitive.

*occur when the person modifies the way they think,

for **example:** employing denial, or distancing oneself from the problem. People may alter the way they think about a problem by altering their goals and values, such as by **seeing the humor in a situation:** "some have suggested that humor may play a greater role as a **stress moderator** among women than men

Types of coping strategies

2. **problem-focused:** Directed towards reducing or eliminating a stressor, adaptive behavioral

People using problem-focused strategies try to deal with the cause of their problem. They do this by finding out information on the problem and learning new skills to manage the problem. Problem-focused coping is aimed at **changing or eliminating the source of the stress**. The three problem-focused coping strategies identified by Folkman and Lazarus are taking control, information seeking, and evaluating the pros and cons.

Types of coping strategies

3. **emotion-focused:** Directed towards changing one's own emotional reaction

- involve releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, managing hostile feelings, meditating or using systematic relaxation procedures. Emotion-focused coping "is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress3

Matching the Situation and Stressor

Situation

Controllable



Coping Response

Problem-Focused

- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Seeking information
- Goal setting

Uncontrollable



Emotion-Focused

- Venting/talking to others
- Reframing the situation
- Journaling
- Exercise/relaxation
- Meditation/spiritual practices
- Pleasurable activities

Coping Skills



Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping Strategies

Adaptive:

positive reinterpretation and growth

seeking instrumental social support

active coping

restraint

acceptance

suppression of competing activities

planning

Examples:

- » try to learn from the experience
- » search for the positive

- » look for advice from others who have had similar experiences
- *talk to someone who can do something concrete

- » concentrate on efforts to do something about it :
- *taking action to deal with the problem

- » hold off from doing anything too quickly
- » avoid making it worse by acting too soon

- » accept that it has happened and can't be changed
- » learn to live with it

- » focus on dealing with the problem and, if necessary, let other things slide
- » put aside other activities to concentrate on this

- » make a plan of action
- * try to develop a strategy of what to do

Maladaptive

mental avoidance

disengagement

focusing on and venting emotions

Examples

- » turning to other activities to take mind off things
- » sleep more than usual

- * give up trying
- » reduced amount of effort to solve problem

- » getting upset and letting emotions out
- » expressing emotional distress

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| seeking emotional support | » look for sympathy from others
» talk to others about feelings |
| alcohol/drug use | » using alcohol/drugs to feel better
» drank alcohol to think less about it |
| denial | » saying "this isn't real"
» refuse to believe its happening |

(Taken from "*Suicide prevention – a Resource Handbook for Youth Organisations*", produced by National Youth Federation, National Suicide Review Group and Suicide Resource Office, South Eastern Health Board, Dublin, Ireland, 2003.)

99 Coping Skills

1. Exercise (running, walking, etc.).
2. Put on fake tattoos.
3. Write (poetry, stories, journal).
4. Scribble/doodle on paper.
5. Be with other people.
6. Watch a favorite TV show.
7. Post on web boards, and answer others' posts.
8. Go see a movie.
9. Do a wordsearch or crossword .
10. Do schoolwork.
11. Play a musical instrument.
12. Paint your nails, do your make-up or hair.
13. Sing.
14. Study the sky.
15. Punch a punching bag.
16. Cover yourself with Band-Aids where you want to cut.
17. Let yourself cry.
18. Take a nap (only if you are tired).
19. Take a hot shower or relaxing bath.
20. Play with a pet.
21. Go shopping.
22. Clean something.
23. Knit or sew.
24. Read a good book.
25. Listen to music.
26. Try some aromatherapy (candle, lotion, room spray).
27. Meditate.
28. Go somewhere very public.
29. Bake cookies.
30. Alphabetize your CDs/DVDs/books.
31. Paint or draw.
32. Rip paper into itty-bitty pieces
33. Shoot hoops, kick a ball.
34. Write a letter or send an email.
35. Plan your dream room (colors/furniture).

36. Hug a pillow or stuffed animal.
37. Hyperfocus on something like a rock, hand, etc.
38. Dance.
39. Make hot chocolate, milkshake or smoothie.
40. Play with modeling clay or Play-Dough.
41. Build a pillow fort.
42. Go for a nice, long drive.
43. Complete something you've been putting off.
44. Draw on yourself with a marker.
45. Take up a new hobby.
46. Look up recipes, cook a meal.
47. Look at pretty things, like flowers or art.
48. Create or build something.
49. Pray.
50. Make a list of blessings in your life.
51. Read the Bible.
52. Go to a friend's house.
53. Jump on a trampoline.
54. Watch an old, happy movie.
55. Contact a hotline/ your therapist.
56. Talk to someone close to you.
57. Ride a bicycle.
58. Feed the ducks, birds, or squirrels.
59. Color with Crayons.
60. Memorize a poem, play, or song.
61. Stretch.
62. Search for ridiculous things on the internet.
63. "Shop" on-line (without buying anything).
64. Color-coordinate your wardrobe.
65. Watch fish.
66. Make a CD/playlist of your favorite songs.
67. Play the "15 minute game." (Avoid something for 15 minutes, when time is up start again.)
68. Plan your wedding/prom/other event.
69. Plant some seeds.
70. Hunt for your perfect home or car on-line.
71. Try to make as many words out of your full name as possible .
72. Sort through your photographs.
73. Play with a balloon.
74. Give yourself a facial.
75. Find yourself some toys and play.
76. Start collecting something.
77. Play video/computer games.
78. Clean up trash at your local park.
79. Perform a random act of kindness for someone.
80. Text or call an old friend.
81. Write yourself an "I love you because..." letter.
82. Look up new words and use them.
83. Rearrange furniture.
84. Write a letter to someone that you may never send.
85. Smile at least five people.
86. Play with little kids.
87. Go for a walk (with or without a friend).
88. Put a puzzle together.
89. Clean your room /closet.
90. Try to do handstands, cartwheels, or backbends.
91. Yoga.
92. Teach your pet a new trick.
93. Learn a new language.
94. Move EVERYTHING in your room to a new spot.
95. Get together with friends and play Frisbee, soccer or basketball.
96. Hug a friend or family member.
97. Search on-line for new songs/artists.
98. Make a list of goals for the week/month/year/5 years.
99. Face paint.



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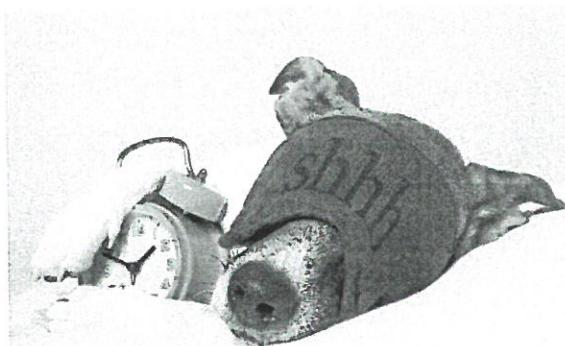
64 Ideas For Self Care When Life Gets Hard

BY KATHERINE HURST

When you're running low on energy, carrying too many burdens or just not feeling very resilient, it's vital that you nurture yourself in order to replenish your resources. If you need some inspiration, look to any one (or more) of these 64 quick and effective ways to practice self care.

1. Spend time with a parent or mentor—someone who makes you feel protected and inspired.
2. Volunteer to help a cause that means something to you.
3. Listen to music from one of the happiest periods of your life.
4. Practice a mindfulness exercise, even if it's just deep breathing.
5. Light some candles and enjoy a nice glass of your favorite wine.
6. Think of three positives associated with your current hardships.
7. Take a hot shower for at least 10 minutes, then change into some soft, clean clothes.
8. Do some creative writing—imagine a fantasy scenario, and lose yourself in it.
9. Go to bed early and make sure you get at least a full 8 hours of sleep.
10. Make an appointment to see a therapist. Even just one session of unburdening yourself could make a difference.
11. Say out loud "Nothing lasts forever. This too shall pass."
12. Visualize a beautiful, calm location and spend 10 minutes imagining you're there right now.
13. Keep your hands busy with a repetitive activity like knitting, sewing or solving a puzzle.
14. Write down ten things in your life that inspire gratitude.
15. Sketch something, whether it's an elaborate drawing or just a doodle of patterns that appeal to you.
16. Go for a hike.
17. Plan a day trip and take photographs of 10 things you see that inspire you.
18. Look into local retreats where you can meet like minded people and escape from society.
19. Watch YouTube videos of cute animals.
20. Hug someone you love (friend, family member or partner) for 12-15 seconds—studies show this boosts immune system function and prompts the release of calming hormones.
21. Do some yoga—even just five minutes of very basic positions can help you feel calmer and stronger.
22. Go to a café, order your favorite delicious coffee (or some other kind of luxury drink), and read a book or magazine.
23. Find any reminders of bad times, and get rid of them—they're only adding negativity to your space.
24. Slowly file, buff and paint your nails, then massage soothing cream into your hands.
25. Make a playlist of uplifting songs, and know you can tune in to it whenever things get rough.
26. Let yourself cry if you need to—holding it back tends to make people feel worse instead of better.
27. Challenge yourself to write down 100 things you love about life. This is easier than you might think!
28. Just say "no" if someone is asking you to do something that feels too much.
29. Recreate a favorite date or day out with your partner or a good friend.

- 30. Take a full day (even if you have to call in sick) and just take care of yourself.
- 31. Eat a square of dark chocolate, which is proven to lower the levels of certain stress hormones.
- 32. Skip your household chores for a full day.
- 33. Watch several episodes of your favorite TV show, back to back.
- 34. Empty out your wardrobe, and donate old, ill-fitting or unappealing clothes to charity.
- 35. If you need to make a tricky decision, create a list of pros and cons.
- 36. Head for the gym and sweat out your stress with a serious workout.
- 37. Head to a beautiful, quiet place and watch the sun set. Bonus points if you can find somewhere by the water.
- 38. Dance to your favorite songs, and really put your whole body into it!
- 39. Watch a movie that is guaranteed to make you laugh.
- 40. Go cycling or running in a beautiful place (you'll get the endorphins flowing and expose your mind to natural beauty).
- 41. Get your favorite comfort food and savor it without any guilt—you deserve it.
- 42. Go for a drive with your music turned up loud. Sing along if you like!
- 43. Switch off from the internet for a full day.
- 44. Go shopping and treat yourself to one little item that you don't really need but that represents caring for yourself.
- 45. Take a long, slow walk, listening to some of your favorite relaxing music on your headphones.
- 46. Reset your brain and revitalize your energy stores by taking a 15-20 minute nap.
- 47. Plan a weekend away, whether it's by yourself or with some people whose company you love.
- 48. Make a cup of tea and just sip it in quiet stillness.
- 49. Cook a healthy meal that's packed with delicious, fresh vegetables.
- 50. Deliberately externalize your feelings of stress, sadness or frustration in a journal entry.
- 51. Interact with your pet, or go to a place where you can touch some animals (e.g. a petting zoo or cat café).
- 52. Pick up the phone and call someone who gets you.
- 53. Reorganize your workspace, getting rid of clutter. Research shows that this helps to declutter your mind too.
- 54. Smile at yourself in the mirror—you'll be surprised at how quickly the smile becomes genuine.
- 55. Read a good book (under a blanket if it's cold, or lazing in the sun if it's warm outside).
- 56. Offer to walk someone's dog for them.
- 57. Play a sport, or sign up to learn a new one—it's good for your social life and great for pent-up frustration.
- 58. Watch some trashy TV or read a trashy magazine—sometimes, we all need a little escapism.
- 59. Book a massage, a manicure, or a facial. If you can afford it, book all three!
- 60. Plan a night out (or a night in) with your favorite people.
- 61. If you are religious or spiritual, spend some time praying.
- 62. Take a hot bath with Epsom salts.
- 63. Sit by a river and watch the movement of the water.
- 64. Paint something—it can be as abstract or realistic as you like!



What's Draining You?

Take Time for Your Life, by Cheryl Richardson

All of us have limited energy, and people who live stressful lives are usually running close to empty. Eliminating what drains you allows you to make space for what is really important.

Most people have at least 75% of their mental energy tied up in the types of distractions listed below. Check any of the following that drain your energy.

Relationships

- There are people in my life who continuously drain my energy.
- I have unreturned phone calls, e-mails, or letters that need to be handled.
- I have an unresolved conflict with a family member.
- I lack quality friendships in my life.
- I feel a void in my life created by the lack of a romantic partner.
- There is someone I need to forgive.
- There is a relationship I need to end.
- There is a phone call I dread making, and it causes me stress and anxiety.
- I'm currently involved in a relationship that compromises my values.
- I miss being part of a loving and supportive community.

Environment

- My car is in need of cleaning and/or repair.
- My wardrobe needs updating and/or alterations.
- I'd like to live in a different geographic location.
- I have appliances that need repair or upgrading.
- My home is not decorated in a way that nurtures me.
- My closets and/or basement are cluttered and need to be cleaned.
- Repairs need to be done around my home or apartment.
- My home is cluttered and disorganized.
- I miss having more beauty reflected in my environment.
- I watch too much television.

Body, Mind, and Spirit

- I eat food that's not good for me.
- Something about my physical appearance bothers me.
- It's been too long since I've been to the dentist.
- I do not get the sleep I need to feel fully rested.
- I'd like to exercise regularly but never seem to find the time.
- I have a health concern for which I've avoided getting help.
- I have emotional needs that consistently go unmet.
- There are books that I'd love to read but never seem to find the time for.
- I lack personal interests that are intellectually stimulating.
- I lack a spiritual or religious practice in my life.

Work

- I no longer enjoy my job and have a hard time showing up each day.
- My work is stressful and leaves me exhausted at the end of the day.
- My office is disorganized, my desk is a mess, and I have trouble finding what I need.
- I'm avoiding a confrontation or conflict at work.
- I tolerate bad behavior from a boss or coworker.
- I am not computer literate, and it gets in the way of my productivity.
- I lack the proper office equipment that I need to do my job well.
- My work does not allow me to express my creativity.
- I know I need to delegate specific tasks but am unable to let go of control.
- I feel overwhelmed with the amount of information that enters my life in the form of mail, books, magazines, and e-mail.

Money

- I have tax returns that are not filed or taxes that are not paid.
- I pay my bills late.
- I spend more than I earn.
- I don't have a plan for my financial future.
- My credit rating is not what I'd like it to be.
- I do not have a regular savings plan.
- I do not have adequate insurance coverage.
- My mortgage rate is too high, and I need to refinance.
- I have debt that needs to be paid off.
- My will is not up to date.

List below the top five items you have checked to immediately focus on to restore your energy and improve the quality of your life.

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

Protective Factors



Protective factors are things that contribute to mental health, and allow a person to be resilient in the face of challenges. Someone with a lot of protective factors—such as strong relationships and healthy coping skills—will be better equipped to overcome life's obstacles.

Many protective factors are out of your control. For example, genetics, the neighborhood where you grew up, and family cannot be changed. However, plenty of factors can be controlled. You choose the people in your life, how to cope with problems, and how you'll spend each day.

By focusing on what you can control, and building upon those protective factors, you will improve your ability to cope with many of life's challenges.

🛡 My Protective Factors

Instructions: Review each of the following protective factors, and mark the scales to indicate how well you are performing in each area.

Social Support

- ability to talk about problems
- people to ask for practical help (e.g. a ride if car breaks down)
- feelings of love, intimacy, or friendship



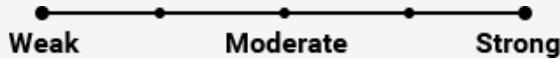
Coping Skills

- ability to manage uncomfortable emotions in a healthy way
- awareness of one's own emotions, and recognition of how they influence behavior



Physical Health

- adequate exercise or physical activity
- a balanced and healthy diet
- medical compliance (e.g. taking medications as prescribed)



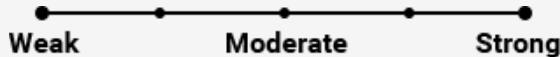
Sense of Purpose

- meaningful involvement in work, education, or other roles (e.g. parenting)
- understanding of personal values, and living in accordance with those values



Self-Esteem

- belief that one's self has value
- acceptance of personal flaws, weaknesses, or mistakes
- belief in ability to overcome challenges



Healthy Thinking

- does not ruminate on mistakes, personal flaws, or problems
- ability to recognize personal strengths and weaknesses rationally



Protective Factors

Instructions: Refer to the protective factors on the previous page to answer the following questions.

Which protective factor has been the most valuable to you during difficult times?

Specifically, how have you used this protective factor to your advantage in the past?

What are two protective factors that you would like to improve?

1	2
---	---

Describe how things might be different if you were able to improve these protective factors.

1	
2	

List specific steps or actions that might help to make these goals a reality.

1	
2	

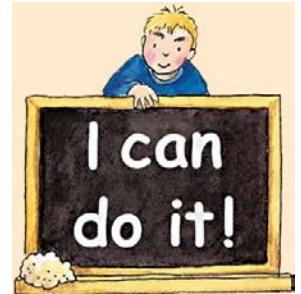
Positive Self- talk / Coping Thoughts Worksheet



Positive statements encourage us and help us cope through distressing times. We can say these encouraging words to ourselves, and be our own personal coach. We have all survived some very distressing times, and we can use those experiences to encourage us through current difficulties.

Examples of coping thoughts might be:

- Stop, and breathe, I can do this
- This will pass
- I can be anxious/angry/sad and still deal with this
- I have done this before, and I can do it again
- This feels bad, it's a normal body reaction – it will pass
- This feels bad, and feelings are very often wrong
- These are just feelings, they will go away
- This won't last forever
- Short term pain for long term gain
- I can feel bad and still choose to take a new and healthy direction
- I don't need to rush, I can take things slowly
- I have survived before, I will survive now
- I feel this way because of my past experiences, but I am safe right now
- It's okay to feel this way, it's a normal reaction
- Right now, I am not in danger. Right now, I'm safe
- My mind is not always my friend
- Thoughts are just thoughts – they're not necessarily true or factual
- This is difficult and uncomfortable, but it's only temporary
- I can use my coping skills and get through this
- I can learn from this and it will be easier next time
- Keep calm and carry on



Yes!

Write down a coping thought or positive statement for each difficult or distressing situation – something you can tell yourself that will help you get through. Write them down on a piece of card and carry it in your pocket or handbag to help remind you.

Difficult or distressing situation	Coping thought / Positive statement

Relaxation Techniques

When a person is confronted with anxiety, their body undergoes several changes and enters a special state called the *fight-or-flight response*. The body prepares to either fight or flee the perceived danger.

During the fight-or-flight response it's common to experience a "blank" mind, increased heart rate, sweating, tense muscles, and more. Unfortunately, these bodily responses do little good when it comes to protecting us from modern sources of anxiety.

Using a variety of skills, you can end the fight-or-flight response before the symptoms become too extreme. These skills *will* require practice to work effectively, so don't wait until the last minute to try them out!

Deep Breathing

It's natural to take long, deep breaths, when relaxed. However, during the fight-or-flight response, breathing becomes rapid and shallow. Deep breathing reverses that, and sends messages to the brain to begin calming the body. Practice will make your body respond more efficiently to deep breathing in the future.

Breathe in slowly. Count in your head and make sure the inward breath lasts at least 5 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of the air filling your lungs.

Hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds (again, keep count). You don't want to feel uncomfortable, but it should last quite a bit longer than an ordinary breath.

Breathe out very slowly for 5 to 10 seconds (count!). Pretend like you're breathing through a straw to slow yourself down. Try using a real straw to practice.

Repeat the breathing process until you feel calm.

Imagery

Think about some of your favorite and least favorite places. If you think about the place hard enough—if you really try to think about what it's like—you may begin to have feelings you associate with that location. Our brain has the ability to create emotional reactions based entirely off of our thoughts. The imagery technique uses this to its advantage.

Make sure you're somewhere quiet without too much noise or distraction. You'll need a few minutes to just spend quietly, in your mind.

Think of a place that's calming for you. Some examples are the beach, hiking on a mountain, relaxing at home with a friend, or playing with a pet.

Relaxation Techniques

Paint a picture of the calming place in your mind. Don't just think of the place briefly—imagine every little detail. Go through each of your senses and imagine what you would experience in your relaxing place. Here's an example using a beach:

- a. Sight: The sun is high in the sky and you're surrounded by white sand. There's no one else around. The water is a greenish-blue and waves are calmly rolling in from the ocean.
- b. Sound: You can hear the deep pounding and splashing of the waves. There are seagulls somewhere in the background.
- c. Touch: The sun is warm on your back, but a breeze cools you down just enough. You can feel sand moving between my toes.
- d. Taste: You have a glass of lemonade that's sweet, tart, and refreshing.
- e. Smell: You can smell the fresh ocean air, full of salt and calming aromas.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

During the fight-or-flight response, the tension in our muscles increases. This can lead to a feeling of stiffness, or even back and neck pain. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches us to become more aware of this tension so we can better identify and address stress.

Find a private and quiet location. You should sit or lie down somewhere comfortable.

The idea of this technique is to intentionally tense each muscle, and then to release the tension. Let's practice with your feet.

- a. Tense the muscles in your toes by curling them into your foot. Notice how it feels when your foot is tense. Hold the tension for 5 seconds.
- b. Release the tension from your toes. Let them relax. Notice how your fingers feel differently after you release the tension.
- c. Tense the muscles all throughout your calf. Hold it for 5 seconds. Notice how the feeling of tension in your leg feels.
- d. Release the tension from your calf, and notice how the feeling of relaxation differs.

Follow this pattern of tensing and releasing tension all throughout your body. After you finish with your feet and legs, move up through your torso, arms, hands, neck, and head.



Letting Go with Mindfulness

Letting Go Scale



Not at all

Completely let go

This approach involves learning how to use mindfulness to let go of worrisome or negative thinking. The purpose of this worksheet is to record your practice of using mindfulness when distressing thoughts occur. Use the **Letting Go Scale** to rate how well you are able to 'let go' of negative thoughts. You may need to refer to other Mindfulness information sheets.

Day/Date	Letting Go Rating Before	Describe what happened when you engaged in Mindfulness. What was difficult or easy about letting go of the negative thought, what techniques did you use to practice mindfulness, what feelings did you notice?	Rating After

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Basic Steps:

- 1) Ask yourself, **what am I experiencing right now?** What thoughts are around, what feelings, sounds, and body sensations? Allowing yourself to just acknowledge and observe these experiences without trying to change them or answer the thoughts back. Spend 30 seconds to 1 minute just doing this.
- 2) Now bringing **your focus of awareness to your breath**, focusing on the sensations of your breath as it moves back and forth in your belly. Bind your awareness to the back and forth movements of the sensations in your belly from moment to moment, and let all thoughts go. Spend about 30 seconds to 1 minute doing this.
- 3) Now **expanding your awareness to sensing your whole body breathing**, being aware of sensations throughout your body. If there are any strong feelings around, try saying to yourself "whatever it is, it is OK, just let me feel it." Allow yourself to breathe with the feelings, acknowledging and letting go of any bothersome thoughts. Maybe saying to yourself, "let go" on each out breath. Continue doing this for about 1 minute.

- 4) After finishing the previous steps, **complete the table** and rate how much you were able to let go of the negative thought.

Distress Tolerance Skills

Radical Acceptance

Sometimes you'll run into a problem that's simply out of your control. It can be easy to think "This isn't fair" or "I shouldn't have this problem", even though those ways of thinking only make the pain worse.

Radical acceptance refers to a healthier way of thinking during these situations. Instead of focusing on how you would like something to be different, you will recognize and accept the problem or situation as it is. Remember, accepting is not the same as liking or condoning something.

Learning to accept the problems that are out of your control will lead to less anxiety, anger, and sadness when dealing with them.

Situation	
Typical Thinking	Radical Acceptance
"This isn't fair—I did everything right! I was the best one there. They can't do this to me."	"It's frustrating that I didn't get the job, but I accept that they felt someone else would be a better fit."

Self-Soothe with Senses

Find a pleasurable way to engage each of your five senses. Doing so will help to soothe your negative emotions.

Vision	Go for a walk somewhere nice and pay attention to the sights.
Hearing	Listen to something enjoyable such as music or nature.
Touch	Take a warm bath or get a massage.
Taste	Have a small treat—it doesn't have to be a full meal.
Smell	Find some flowers or spray a perfume or cologne you like.

Distress Tolerance Skills

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

Negative feelings will usually pass, or at least lessen in intensity over time. It can be valuable to distract yourself until the emotions subside. The acronym "A.C.C.E.P.T.S." serves as a reminder of this idea.

Activities	Engage in activities that require thought and concentration. This could be a hobby, a project, work, or school.
Contributing	Focus on someone or something other than yourself. You can volunteer, do a good deed, or do anything else that will contribute to a cause or person.
Comparisons	Look at your situation in comparison to something worse. Remember a time you were in more pain, or when someone else was going through something more difficult.
Emotions	Do something that will create a competing emotion. Feeling sad? Watch a funny movie. Feeling nervous? Listen to soothing music.
Pushing Away	Do away with negative thoughts by pushing them out of your mind. Imagine writing your problem on a piece of paper, crumpling it up, and throwing it away. Refuse to think about the situation until a better time.
Thoughts	When your emotions take over, try to focus on your thoughts. Count to 10, recite a poem in your head, or read a book.
Sensations	Find safe physical sensations to distract you from intense negative emotions. Wear a rubber band and snap it on your wrist, hold an ice cube in your hand, or eat something sour like a lime.

Opposite Action

In Module 1, you identified your particular escape methods. Below is a table summarising the opposite actions for each distress escape method we have covered. Look through the table and circle the opposite action box corresponding to your particular escape method(s). There is also a box at the bottom for if you engage in a particular escape method that we have not covered in these Modules. If this applies to you, maybe you could try to think of what the opposite action would be.

Drop Escape Method	Do Opposite Action
Situational Avoidance*	Don't avoid situations that distress you. Instead gradually face these situations and stay in them, until you have ridden through the distress. Remember to reward your efforts when you are done, by doing things that are active or soothing .
Reassurance Seeking or Checking	Minimise or eliminate reassurance seeking or checking behaviours. Try to cope independently with the distress you feel, riding through these feelings without resorting to checking things or seeking the reassurance of others. Remember to reward your efforts when you are done, by doing things that are active or soothing .
Distraction & Suppression	Don't push away distressing feelings. Instead allow and experience these feelings. Remember to reward your efforts when you are done, by doing things that are active or soothing .
Alcohol or Drugs	Don't numb the distress by using alcohol or drugs. Instead allow and experience these feelings. Also do things that are active or soothing , rather than withdrawing from life.
Binge eating	Don't numb the distress by binge eating. Instead allow and experience these feelings. Also do things that are active or soothing , rather than withdrawing from life.
Excessive sleep	Don't numb the distress by using sleep. Instead allow and experience these feelings. Also do things that are active or soothing , rather than withdrawing from life.
Harmful Releases	Self-soothe and be active in the moment, rather than harming yourself.

* **Note:** This module deals with general avoidance driven by not wanting to feel emotional distress. If you identify very strongly with your avoidance being specifically related to social situations, or fear of having a panic attack or fear of having a serious health problem, then you may want to look at the 'Shy No Longer', 'Panic Stations' and 'Helping Health Anxiety' Information packages respectively to target these specific problems.

Facing Your Feelings

Distress Improvement Activities	
Activate	Soothe
Exercise	Have a good meal
Walk	Have a nice snack
Jog	Favourite drink (non-alcohol)
Gym	Have a picnic
Weights	Light a candle
Exercise class	Look at beautiful art or scenery
Boxing	Watch the stars
Cleaning	Go to a beautiful place
Washing	Soothing or invigorating music
Dishes	Enjoy sounds of nature
Vacuuming	Singing
Dusting	Be aware and let sounds come and go
Gardening	Favourite perfume
Cooking	Favourite lotion
Call a friend	Enjoy smells of nature or flowers
Go out to lunch, dinner, a coffee	Bubble bath
Shopping	Shower
Favourite movie	Massage
Favourite book	Pat dog or cat
Favourite music	Soak feet
Favourite TV show	Brush hair
Books/movies/music that create a different emotion	Do nails
Magazines	Imagine a relaxing scene/safe place
Newspaper	Imagine coping/distress flowing away/distress passing
Games	Create meaning/purpose from distress
Puzzles	Read/think of your spiritual values
Volunteer somewhere	Focus on any positive aspects in your life
Give someone a present	Pray
Do something thoughtful	Relaxation tape
Make something for someone	Tense and release muscles
	Slow breathing
	Count to 10
	Smile
	Laugh out loud
	Take a break (stay in bed for 20mins)

Adapted from Linehan (1993).

My Distress Tolerance Action Plan

My Triggers (external or internal)

My Warning Signs (feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, urges or actions)

My Commitment to Dropping Escape Method(s) & Doing the Opposite Action

Accepting My Distress (personalised mindfulness of distress script)

Recognise & Allow Emotion:

Watch Emotion:

Be Present:

Deal with Emotional Comebacks:

Note: remember if the distress I experience is extremely intense unbearable emotional pain, such that I am currently unable to apply the acceptance strategies, then skip ahead to the next step of 'improving'. This is particularly relevant for people who engage in self-harm, or drug and alcohol use to manage their distress, as it is more important to avoid engaging in behaviours that are damaging to myself.

Improving My Distress (active & soothing distress improvement activities, words of self-encouragement, problem solving if relevant)

Note: remember that if I am dropping the following escape methods – situational avoidance, reassurance seeking or checking, distraction & suppression – then it is best to leave doing any distress improvement activities until after I have faced the distress and experienced it naturally subside. In this way the distress improvement activities become a reward for approaching rather than avoiding my distress.



Writing as therapy

Writing is often an integral part of therapy, such as using thought record sheets and mood or activity diaries. Additional therapeutic techniques that involve writing may be helpful at particular times. There are many benefits to writing, including 'getting it out of our head', seeing things from another perspective, a part of exposure work (distressing memories), or externalising the problem – perhaps even just putting words on paper seems to really help. You might choose to set a time limit for your writing.

Rainy Day Letter to Self

Some people find it helpful, when they're feeling well and able to cope with daily life, to write a letter to themselves, to read when they're not feeling so good, or are struggling to cope. The well, stable and strong you, writes a letter to the more vulnerable you.

If you don't feel you're ever in a good enough place to write a letter in this way, you could try imagining that you are feeling well, strong and able to cope, or perhaps older and wiser, and write a letter from the future, to your present more vulnerable self, offering guidance and support for how to get to that better place.

You might decide that you can read this letter at certain times, when you're feeling a certain way, or when you're struggling with particularly dark thoughts.

In your letter, include:

- What helps you feel better at those times
- What you've found that helped in the past
- Guidance on what you need to do (e.g. talk to someone, do something, be with others)
- Advice on what not to do – as you know from experience that it doesn't help you in the long run
- Your personal strengths and resources
- What you need to know at that time
 - I understand, I've been there, I care, others care – even though it might feel like they don't, you can get through this, you've done it before, remind yourself to use particular techniques to help get you through, "it will pass"
- Be compassionate, caring, supportive, understanding, encouraging to your vulnerable self



Writing your story



It can often be helpful to write down what's happened to you, either over your lifespan, or perhaps a particular distressing memory. Take some time, when you won't be disturbed, and write down everything you can remember about that time. Get it all on paper. Once it's there, you might choose to rearrange it so that it reads like a chronological story, as it happened. You might choose to write it as a story, or in note form, using bullet points with a brief description. The more you can write, the better. You can build it up over time.

Describe the circumstances, the ages and size of people involved. Perhaps consider the bigger picture – what was going on not only for yourself but for others involved too. Describe what you felt, thought and did at that time.

This helps to put the story together (it's often fragmented in our memories), helps get it out of our heads, and often enables us to see a different perspective on what happened.

Once it's on paper, we can read it through as often as we need to, in order to put the memory in its proper place – as a story, a memory, from the past, that belongs in the past.



Letters to others

Sometimes it's helpful to write a letter to others, perhaps about what you really think or feel about them or what they did that hurt you so much, or to express how much you appreciate someone, or want to say sorry, or that you want to forgive. You might want to wait a while, and perhaps discuss with your therapist or a wise friend, before deciding whether it's a good idea to actually send the letter (if the person is still alive and known to you), or you might choose to deal with it differently.

Some people find it helpful to (go outside and) burn the letter, watching the smoke rise up, particularly if the person has died. Or just imagine the letter arriving at its destination, the person reading it, and seeing the reaction you want them to have. Or maybe it's enough just to have written it, so another option may be shredding it, or watching it slowly disintegrate whilst soaking in water.

A Better Future



Sometimes, when we're feeling really hopeless, believing things can never change, it can be helpful for us (or have a trusted someone else) to write an account describing us in a desired future, maybe in one, five or many years from now. Someone who's been depressed, anxious, in debt, unemployed and unable to support their family financially – may write (or have written by someone else) a letter describing them finding a satisfying job, getting on with colleagues, positive feedback from the management about how you're getting on at that time, bringing home the money your family needs in order to cope, and even put some aside for a holiday. Describe how the family relationships are so much better.....

Random Writing – The Mind Dump

It can be helpful to just write down whatever comes into our heads, perhaps for a certain period of time – 10 minutes or half an hour. It may read as nonsense, and that's okay. That's how our minds work. Write down all the random, apparently nonsensical words and sentences, anything that comes to mind. You might include brief descriptions or sketches of any images that come to mind. Don't change or edit anything. Simply write.



You might then look back and see if there's anything there worth spending time thinking about, or you might decide that it's okay to just leave it there, on the paper. You can choose what you then do with the paper – to keep or destroy it, and how to do that.

Keep a notepad with you



If you have trouble sleeping, it can be useful to have a notepad and pen or pencil on your bedside table, so you can jot down any worries that come to mind, and tell yourself you can deal with or pay attention to them in the morning. Carrying a notepad in your handbag or pocket means you can write down anything, anytime.

Keeping a Journal

You can write, whatever you want to write, every day, or whenever you need to, your thoughts, feelings, responses. These can be intensely private, what you wouldn't share with anyone else. Write at times when you feel just okay, when you feel great, and times when you're really distressed or struggling to cope. It helps to put things in perspective, get it out of your head and onto paper (or on a computer), and means you can look back on it at another time, if that would be helpful – to see how you coped, that things can and will be better, that you can survive, that this will pass.



Alternatives to Self-Harm and Distraction Techniques

These are some ideas for helping people delay or avoid self-harm that you might wish to consider – *they've all been suggested by people who self-harm*. Some ideas might seem ridiculous, but others might work. Different people find that different things help, and it isn't failure if you try something and it doesn't help. You will be able to add things which you have discovered.

Expressing Feelings



Letting it out PHYSICALLY

- Scream as loud as you can
- HIT a cushion / punch bag / throw a cushion *against a wall*
- **Smash** a water melon
- Kick a football against a wall
- **Squeeze** ice really hard
- Squeeze a stress ball
- **Tear up** a newspaper/phone directory
- Play loud music and dance energetically – be as wild as you like
- Draw on the place you want to cut with red marker pen, fake blood or watered down food colouring
- *Write words* on yourself with a red marker pen
- Spend some **energy** - go for a walk/swim/go to the gym/ride a bike/go running



Trying to work out how you're feeling...

- Ask yourself "Do I feel ANGRY? 'Do I feel anxious?' 'What about?'
- Ask yourself 'What would the razor blade say if it could talk to me?'
- **Write a letter** to someone you're angry with (hurt by etc.) saying how you feel (No need to send it.)
- Write a list of your **achievements**
- Write a letter to yourself saying 'I love YOU because....'
- **Make a list** of things you're thankful for
- Make a **wish** list



Talking about it....

- Talk to a **friend**
- Call the Samaritans or other helpline (see page 5)
- Allow yourself to **cry** (if you can)



Using your *Creativity*

- Draw / paint / collage / paper mache / finger paint / sculpt in clay - to express what you want to do or what you are feeling
- Write a poem / **story** / song / joke / autobiography / parody / musical
- Write a **DIARY** / journal or read old diaries (unless there might be triggers)
- Go to myspace.com and write an online journal
- **Scribble** a word again and again to say how you're feeling e.g. 'lonely', 'angry'
- Deface a magazine (preferably your own)
- Paint with **red paint** using your fingers
- Draw yourself in MS office
- Write a message in a self-harm newsgroup on the internet
- *Take some photos*
- Play an **instrument** / Sing to music as LOUD as you can
- Put on music which expresses how you are feeling
- Write out the **soundtrack** to your life if it were a film
- Imagine a colour which expresses your feelings then change it in your mind to another colour
- Make a **memory box** / scrapbook
- Write an **alternative** ending to a story
- Watch a foreign language channel and make up your own interpretations
- **Create** your own cartoon characters / legends
- Create a **SECRET CODE**



Comforting Yourself...

- Have a bath or **shower**
- Stay in bed
- Use aromatherapy oils
- Eat **chocolate** (or whatever)
- Have an 'emergency box' with whatever helps you cope
- Buy something special
- **Massage** your hands / arms / feet (or the area you want to harm)
- Stroke a pet / cuddle a teddy
- Smoke a cigarette
- Ask a friend to hold you
- Paint your nails / Have your hair done
- Have a *cup of tea*
- Rock / hug yourself
- Give yourself a henna tattoo
- **Meditate** / yoga

DISTRACTING yourself



Leisure Activities

- Watch television / video / DVD
- **Play** on a computer
- Go on the internet
- Learn a new skill (juggling / making balloon animals)
- Do puzzles / play chess / make your own puzzles
- Origami / Scobidous / make jewellery
- Sew / knit
- Go through a *photo album*
- Design a **dream** house
- Have a debate
- Build a **Card** house
- Make a paper chain of the days its been since you last cut (add a new one every day)
- Find out how to put 8 queens on a chessboard without any of them being able to kill each other (There are 92 possible ways to do this)
- Make a T-shirt
- Look for pictures in the **clouds**



GETTING OUT AND ABOUT.....

1. Sweep the path
2. Wash your **car**
3. Do some gardening
4. Go for a drive
5. Go to an **arcade** or playground
6. Make a kite/fly a kite
7. Get on a train and go to the sea
8. Look at constellations



Being Productive.....

1. Catch up on **DIY** / housework
2. Cook/bake something
3. Have a clear out – give your old stuff to charity
4. Re-arrange your room/decorate
5. Read/study
6. Give your pets a bath
7. Volunteer somewhere
8. Join a class
9. Think about what you'd like to **change** about your life and make a plan



Reasoning with yourself

'When you're not feeling like self-harming, write a list of reasons to avoid self-harm. The list will be different for each person - it's whatever makes sense to you. Look at the list when you feel like harming yourself. It could include things like:

- ☆ "I've managed for two weeks without harming. I don't want to start again"
- ☆ "Once I start it's difficult to stop"
- ☆ "I'll regret the damage afterwards"
- ☆ "It doesn't help in the long run. I can harm now but I'll need to do it again in a couple of days."
- ☆ "I don't want to end up in hospital"
- ☆ "If I can hang on the need to self-harm sometimes passes"
- ☆ "There may be consequences I don't want e.g. brain damage, paralysis"
- ☆ "Self-harm affects my relationships"

1. Learn CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) or DBT (Dialectical Behaviour Therapy) techniques. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation.aspx>
2. When you're feeling good write yourself a letter you can read when you want to self-harm
3. Write down why you do not deserve to be hurt

Making yourself safe

- Try to identify things that prompt you to self-harm. If possible avoid them or prepare for them
- Avoid shops that sell things you might use to harm yourself
- Stay with a friend
- Ask GP to give you weekly prescriptions or pick up medication for two days at a time from the chemist
- Do not stockpile medication (prescribed or over the counter)

Reducing stress

- Do some relaxation exercises / listen to a relaxation tape
- Ask a friend to look after the children for a few hours
- Reduce your commitments in the next few days

Rewarding yourself for not self-harming

- Keep a chart – add a star for each day / hour you have not self-harmed
- If you do self-harm, just leave a space and start again

Delaying self-harm

- Keep things you harm yourself with in a locked cupboard or in a box with sellotape around it. It gives you time to think between wanting to self-harm and doing it.
- Phone Samaritans – arrange to ring again in an hour/ two hours and promise yourself you will not harm before then
- Use any of the suggestions for avoiding self-harm to try and delay it for a while

With many thanks to Blackpool SHUSH (Self-Help Uniting People who Self-Harm)

HELP LINES

Don't suffer in silence – there are help lines out there that can offer support...

Samaritans - Helpline 08457 90 90 90 (UK) 1850 60 90 90 (ROI)

Confidential emotional support for anyone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

You can also e-mail jo@samaritans.org for support, or write to 'Chris' P.O. Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA. Some centres also offer face to face support, usually by appointment.

Bristol Crisis Service For Women (BCSW) - Helpline 0117 925 1119

National helpline for women in distress, especially women who self-harm. Open Friday and Saturday evenings 9 pm to 12.30 am and Sundays 6pm to 9pm.

Support Line - 0208 554 9004

A confidential helpline providing emotional support to individuals of any age on any issue. Support line also has a data base of local services. Ring for helpline opening hours. You can also e-mail on infor@supportline.org.uk

Saneline - 0845 767 8000

Offers practical care and support to anybody affected by mental health problems. Open noon to 11 pm Monday to Friday, noon to 6 pm Saturday & Sunday.

42nd Street – Helpline 0161 832 0170

A mental health service in Manchester for young people aged 14 – 25. Their helpline offers support and advice, particularly around suicide and self injury. Open weekdays from 12.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

web: www.fortysecondstreet.org.uk

Nightline (for University students) National organisation of NightLine student helplines in Universities across the UK. Visit the website to find out if your Uni has one.

web: www.nightline.ac.uk

No Panic - Helpline 0808 808 0545

Support for people who experience panic attacks, and those with phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, general anxiety disorder and who are withdrawing from tranquillisers. (10 am-10 pm every day)

email: ceo@nopanic.org.uk, web: www.nopanic.org.uk

ALTERNATIVE THOUGHTS & ACTIONS

1. Dark or Distressing Thoughts	2. Alternative Thoughts	3. Alternative Actions
<i>What are the thoughts (words, images, memories) that made me feel distressed?</i>	<i>What I will tell myself (as reasonable alternatives to the distressing thoughts):</i>	<i>What I have done in the past that helped:</i> <i>My coping resources:</i>
	<i>What would I say to a close friend who was feeling this way?</i>	<i>What I will do to help calm and soothe myself:</i>
4. Call for help (if still necessary)	Coping statements, positive self-talk:	<i>What I can I do for the next 20 minutes (and give it my full attention):</i>
<i>If I still feel overwhelmed and out of control, I will I call, and/or go to:</i> <i>E.g. Friend / relative, Health professional, Helpline (Samaritans 116 123), A&E, 999</i>	<i>What can I tell myself that will make me feel better, or remind myself of good things about me, my life, the future?</i>	<i>To help me cope, I can choose to do things for 20 minutes at a time. If nothing helps, then I can go to step 4</i>

Safety Plan

STEP 1: Know When to Get Help

What are the warning signs that you are beginning to struggle with your problem? These can include thoughts, feelings, or behaviors.

STEP 2: Coping Skills

What can you do, by yourself, to take your mind off the problem? What obstacles might there be to using these coping skills?

STEP 3: Social Support

If you are unable to deal with your distressed mood alone, contact trusted family members or friends. List several people in case your first choices are not available.

Name	Contact Info

STEP 4: Seek Help from Professionals

If your problem persists, or if you have suicidal thoughts, reach out to your professional support system.

Local emergency number:	
Professional or agency:	
Suicide hotlines in the United States:	1-800-SUICIDE 1-800-273-TALK 1-800-799-4889 (for deaf or hard of hearing)