

Calming the Emotional Storm: Distress Tolerance Skills

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Objectives

Participants will learn the two sets of DT skills:

- Reality Acceptance Skills:
 - Radical Acceptance: what it is and how to get there
 - Willingness versus Willfulness
- Crisis Survival Skills:
 - Distracting, Self-soothing, IMPROVE the moment and TIP skills
 - Pros and Cons & Urge Management

Distress Tolerance

This module involves two sets of skills: the first teaches people skills that help them survive crisis situations without making things worse.

The second set of skills are reality acceptance skills, which are longer-term skills to help prevent crises from arising – I'm teaching you these ones first ☺

Distress Tolerance

The second set of skills helps people to accept reality, rather than continue to fight it, which creates painful emotions:

1. Radical Acceptance

- "It is what it is"
- "Acceptance" does NOT mean approval
- RA reduces the amount of suffering in our lives

Distress Tolerance

2. Turning the Mind

- This is how we radically accept: you notice you're fighting reality; and you turn your mind back to acceptance
- The "Internal Argument"

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➤ Four steps to RA:

1. First step is deciding to practice this skill
2. Next, making the commitment to yourself: as of this moment, I'm going to work on accepting this situation
3. Notice when you're not accepting, but fighting reality
4. Turn your mind back to acceptance

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Techniques to help your client get to Radical Acceptance:

1. Breathing
2. Taking an open posture
3. Half-Smile

Radical Acceptance: Problems Clients Often Encounter

- ACCEPTANCE DOES NOT MEAN APPROVAL!!!
- "Doesn't acceptance mean that I'm giving up or being passive?"
- "How can I accept that I will be alone for the rest of my life?"
- "How can I accept that I'm a bad person?"
- "Some things in life are just too awful to accept"

Radical Acceptance

Don't just practice RA with "big", painful situations; daily practice helps us to be more accepting of the "little" things that will occur in our daily lives that trigger fighting reality and emotional suffering; for example:

- Being stuck in traffic
- The weather
- Waiting in line
- Distracting noises during session

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Willingness versus Wilfulness

Wilfulness is refusing to do your best with what you've got; sitting on your hands and refusing to try; giving up; "whatever"

Willingness is being open to the possibilities, doing your best to act skilfully; playing the cards you're dealt

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When life gets difficult, our clients will often become wilful and want to resort to old habits rather than try to use skills – they (and we) need to accept that wilfulness has arisen and do their best to be more willing; you can't find wilfulness with wilfulness!

You can teach your clients the same 3 techniques to get to RA to help them get to willingness; also: "What's the threat?"

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Crisis Survival Skills:

If there is a problem that can be solved,
SOLVE IT! These skills don't fix problems,
they help clients SURVIVE without making
the situation worse.

Distracting skills are not meant to be used
long-term; distracting in the long-term isn't
distracting, it's AVOIDING.

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Definition of a "Crisis":

- Stressful event or traumatic moment
- Short-term
- Want it resolved NOW

(I use the term "crisis" more loosely – having
an urge to do something that's likely going to
make the situation worse or have some kind
of negative consequences)

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Examples of Problem Behaviors:

Suicidal behaviors
Self-harm
Drinking/using drugs
Binge eating/purging/restricting
Shopping/spending
Gambling
Gaming
Pornography/Sexual Addiction
Aggressive behaviors (e.g. punching walls,
yelling & screaming at family members)

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What do clients do already to help themselves cope in more effective ways?

What else could they be doing? – importance of making a list of their own distress tolerance skills; personalize it!

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TIP Skills:

1. "TIP" the temperature of your face (mammalian dive reflex)
2. Intense exercise
3. Paced Breathing (PNS)
4. Paired breathing and PMR
5. Forward Bend (baroreceptors activate PNS)

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Distracting Skills:

- Activities (e.g. TV, reading, walking, Zentangle)
- Contribute to others (e.g. volunteer, do something kind for someone else)
- Comparisons (e.g. to others, to yourself)
- Emotions (e.g. TV, music)
- Pushing Away (with imagery)
- Thoughts (ie. Generate neutral thoughts, such as counting, singing a song, etc.)
- Sensations (e.g. take a bath, elastic band, ice)

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Self-soothing with the senses:

1. Sight (e.g. flowers, clean room)
 2. Hearing (another person's voice, nature, music)
 3. Touch (e.g. clean sheets, pets)
 4. Taste (e.g. herbal tea, a favourite food, mint)
 5. Smell (flowers, perfume, etc.)
- Helpful during a crisis, and also as general self-care
 - Note that some people over-use this; others feel guilt and so tend to avoid self-soothing; the challenge with both instances is to help the client find balance.

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IMPROVE the Moment:

Imagery – imagine a situation that's better than the one you're currently facing

Meaning – find meaning in your experience

Prayer – talk to your higher power (ie. God, the universe, your wise mind)

Relaxation

One thing in the moment

Vacation – take one, but not to your detriment!

Encouragement – cheerlead yourself

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Pro's and Con's Exercise

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Pros of Drinking

- Escape
- Helps to relax
- Easy

Pros of NOT Drinking

- Feel good about self
- Have to use skills
- Positive for rel'ps

Cons of Drinking

- avoidance
- expensive
- guilt and shame

Cons of NOT Drinking

- it's hard
- have to use skills
- no quick relief

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Pro's and Con's: four columns; written out ahead of time while in Wise Mind

- Four columns instead of two gives the client a broader perspective
- Written engages the frontal lobes
- Can then be used as a reminder as to why the person doesn't want to act on the problem behaviour
- Consider short-term as well as long-term

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Urge Management: What to do when crisis strikes

1. Rate the intensity of the urge from 0 (no urge) to 10 (intense urge)
 2. Set a timer for 15 minutes.
 3. In the meantime...
 - Mindfully distract yourself with distracting and self-soothing
 - Read your pro's and con's list
- When your 15 minutes is up, re-rate your urge

Overview of DBT Skills

There are four modules in DBT:

1. Core Mindfulness Skills
2. Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills
3. Emotion Regulation Skills
4. *Distress Tolerance Skills*

The DT skills are typically the second set of skills I teach in group; remember flexibility and adaptability of DBT!

Thank You!

To inquire about group or individual consultation,
please email me at sherivandijk@rogers.com
