

How to tolerate distress.

Relevant to: Depression:  Anxiety:  Irritability/Anger:  General emotional control: 

Inevitably, life is sometimes distressing so it is important to develop our ability to tolerate distress, and there are several ways of doing so:

The wise mind **ACCEPTS**:

- **Activities:** TV, music, tasks that need doing, magazines and books, get in touch with a friend, watch a film, play computer games, cook ...
- **Contribute:** Do something for somebody else, volunteer ...
- **Comparisons:** with now and when you've felt different; others less fortunate; other people coping as well or less well than you ...
- **different Emotions:** Create other emotions, maybe from radio, television, music, reading ...
- **Push away:** Put the painful situation out of your mind temporarily ...
- **Thoughts:** Do something that attracts your thoughts differently, puzzles, reading, the lyrics of a song ...



Self soothe: Use all your senses, for example:

- Take a bath or shower, pet your pet, change your clothes, have physical contact.
- Rock yourself gently, do some stretches, yoga, dance.
- Find your favourite place and focus on what it looks like; people watch: look at photos or a photo-magazine.
- Listen to helpful music, pay attention to it.
- Mindfully hear the noises in the environment, birds, traffic etc.
- Smell your favourite scent, baking, coffee, flowers.
- Mindfully taste your favourite food or drink (not alcoholic).



Accepting reality, by for example:

- Breathe mindfully and be in the moment.
- Half smile.
- Mentally rehearse what you would do if you really did accept reality as it is.
- Be mindful: allow the world to be what it is - and participate in it fully.



And you can IMPROVE the moment:

The **IMPROVE** acronym offers a menu of possibilities to consider, to improve the moment:

- **Imagery:** can take you away from the current unpleasant situation into an altogether nicer place.
- **Meaning:** make sense of the moment by trying to find meaning in it.
- **Prayer.**
- **Relaxing activities:** do something that usually calms you.
- **One thing in the moment:** we only have to survive the current moment; no need to worry about the past or future!
- **Vacation from adulthood** for up to a day. Let others care for you!
- **Encouragement:** talk to yourself as you would like to be spoken to!



Suggested project.

Look carefully through all the measures described on this sheet and enthusiastically apply all those you think might possibly be helpful.

Mythbuster

Myth: Distress is just part of life, there is nothing you can do when it hits you. Not so. Distress may certainly be part of life, but there is a lot we can do to make it manageable.

Acknowledgement.

The information on this sheet is largely based on the work of Marsha Linehan, author of Dialectical Behavior Therapy.