

Distress Tolerance: TIPP

adapted from a concept by Marsha Linehan

When we experience overwhelming emotions, our bodies respond by engaging the fight/flight/freeze response. Pay attention to what your body is telling you and use TIPP to regulate your physical responses to intense emotional states. When you find yourself overwhelmed by emotions in Emotional Mind, review these TIPP skills and try each until you are able to return to Wise Mind and restore physical balance.

Temperature

Pay attention to your body. Is your heart racing? Is your breath rapid and shallow? If so, you may be overheating. If necessary, cool down by taking a cool bath or going someplace cool. If possible, you may also hold an ice cube in your hand or eat or drink something cool. On the other hand, if you're feeling lethargic it could mean that your temperature is too cool. In such a case your heart rate is abnormally slow, and you don't feel like moving or doing anything. If this is the case, you can take a hot shower, put on more clothes, or cuddle under a blanket. Notice your body right now. How is it responding to the environmental temperature? When using this skill to modify your body temperature, remember to avoid extremes. Too much cold can make your blood pressure drop, and too much heat can make it rise. If you have any sort of medical condition affecting your blood pressure, skip this step or consult with your health care provider before proceeding.

Intense Exercise

Cardiovascular exercise encourages the production of beta endorphins, leading to a decrease in stress and an increase in positive moods. When engaging in exercise, do something aerobic like going for a rapid walk or a jog around the neighborhood, skipping rope, going for a swim, or just standing in place doing jumping jacks. Ten to fifteen minutes is usually enough to do the job.

Paced Breathing

Increased heart rate, flushed face, dry mouth, sweating, and shallow, rapid breathing tend to accompany episodes of overwhelming emotion. If this is happening to you, focus on your breathing by slowing down your rate of inhaling and exhaling. Try starting with inhaling for a count of 4, then holding for a count of 2, then exhaling for a count of 4. Gradually increase the count until you feel your heart rate slowing.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

If you are experiencing extreme emotions, your body responds by engaging your fight/flight/freeze response. If you notice these physiological changes happening to you, you can try progressive muscle relaxation by doing a brief body scan meditation. It may help to tense and release each muscle as you go. Start with the top of your head and make your way along your entire body, finishing with your toes.