

CHAPTER 14

Survival and Acceptance

Emotions can be painful, and if you sometimes suffer from intense and overwhelming sadness or anger, it's important to learn how to experience your emotions skillfully. Otherwise, when you're deep in emotion you may engage in impulsive behaviors that make things worse—overeating, binge drinking, or cutting yourself—and will keep you from your goals.

Distress tolerance skills are designed to help you bear pain skillfully (Linehan 1993). This doesn't mean to get rid of it. Many of my clients are disappointed when we first discuss distress tolerance when they learn that I don't have a method of ridding their lives of pain. But they also quickly understand the importance of these skills when they grasp the truth of the statement, "Pain is inevitable." Living in this life means that we're all subject to bruised knees, bumped heads, and broken hearts.

Distress tolerance can be broken down into two major and equally-important categories: *crisis survival skills* and *acceptance skills*. Because I know of so many very specific ways to help you get through crises, I'll spend most of this chapter listing crisis survival skills. At the end of the chapter I'll say a few words about acceptance and willingness, and the importance of learning from pain.

The following skills will help you tolerate your pain or change the source of the pain and buffer yourself against it, so you become more emotionally resilient.

Crisis Survival Skills

From the following list, check off situations that are crisis situations for you, including emotions you feel in a crisis:

- Fired from job
 - Significant other leaves you/breakup of romance
 - Work colleague gets credit for a your idea or your work
 - Stood up for a date
 - Fail a test at school
 - Child runs away from home
 - Someone disapproves of your behavior
 - Spending the weekend alone
 - Overate
 - Didn't exercise
 - Feeling lonely
 - Sad
 - Bored
 - Embarrassed
 - Scared
 - Angry
 - Other: _____
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Crisis Survival Strategies

Crisis skills are concrete, tangible activities you can engage in when you find yourself in crisis and it isn't possible at that moment to change things for the better. These skills can help you survive bad situations without making them worse. Each is related to what we've already established about emotional resilience and intelligence. These are strategies for getting your whole self engaged in skillful responses to situations. One of the best is to use *distractions*.

You can distract yourself in many ways, so the following are just suggestions. In each group of activities, you will surely think of many others. Here are my basic suggestions when you're in crisis:

- Get physically or mentally active
- Reach out to other people
- Remind yourself that things could be worse
- Use opposite emotions
- Use "setting aside" thoughts
- Energize your thinking
- Seek out powerful physical sensations
- Soothe yourself

Get Active

Find things to do that can preoccupy you, or require your full attention and so pull your mind out of distressing thoughts and keep you from dwelling on how bad things are.

- Work out with weights
 - Do yoga
 - Build a model
 - Attend a religious service
 - Go window-shopping
 - Play computer games
 - Play solitaire
 - Meet a friend for a game of chess
 - Attend hearings in public courts
 - Go to a museum
 - Chop wood
 - Landscape
 - Clean your home
 - Make a to-do list
 - Read a book
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- Make a meal for a friend or a loved one
 - Go on a date
 - Plan for the future
 - Write a mission statement for your life

- Memorize a poem or quotations
- Practice a foreign language
- Send e-mail
- Search the Internet for information about emotions
- Organize your closet
- Do your homework
- Make a list of people you want to send holiday cards to
- Write letters to friends, family, politicians
- Write a letter to the editor
- Debate an issue with someone
- Visit shut-ins
- Take inventory of your wardrobe
- Write about the way you would like your life to be

Give of Yourself

- Do volunteer work (library, hospital, church, etc.)
- Donate money to a cause you believe in
- Write a note of appreciation or encouragement to someone you know
- Send a thank-you note to someone
- Start a petition for a cause or political issue you think is worthy
- Meet someone for a meal, and pay the check when they don't expect it
- Bake goodies for someone
- Send out cards to loved ones
- Visit someone who is sick
- Make a meal for a friend or two
- Throw a surprise birthday party
- Send flowers anonymously
- Buy someone a subscription to their favorite publication
- Take a friend to a spa
- Buy a gift certificate for someone else
- Pick flowers for someone

- Say prayers for the well-being of others
- Make a card from scratch and send it
- Write a letter of reference

Remember, It Could Be Worse

No matter how bad things get, they could always be worse. Is that a cliché? Yes, and it's true. For those of who can walk, it's nice to have legs that we take for granted, for those who can't walk but can see it's nice to have sight. For those who are blind at least they have hearing. For those who are deaf and blind at least they can learn to communicate with those around them, as Helen Keller proved. And at least she had her freedom and wasn't imprisoned for her political or religious beliefs, as has happened to other people. It can be always be worse.

Think about the ways it could be worse and be grateful that it's not worse than it is. Also comparisons can reveal to us others who are going through some of the same issues and challenges and may be doing as well as we are. We can take comfort in knowing that we're not alone. This can dispel the idea that the world and the cosmos are out to get us, since much of what befalls us also befalls others. And then there are those who are facing similar challenges but are coping less well. We can take pride and comfort that we're doing relatively well compared to some folks. The idea isn't to gloat over others, or to feel bad about being a bratty spoilsport when others with less seem more mature. Look at what is instructive about each comparison, and how they promote your well-being and move you to increase your wisdom in living with your emotions.

- Compare yourself to others who have less money than you do
- Compare yourself with those who are coping the same or worse than you
- Watch soap operas or daytime talk shows
- Read stories about people who have lost everything
- Watch news stories about catastrophes, loss, and accidents
- Compare yourself with those who are homeless
- Be thankful for what you do have

Create Opposite Emotions

It's important here to choose activities that create emotions other than those that you're feeling. So if you're sad, do things that make you feel upbeat or happy. The choices will be personal, and may be quite idiosyncratic. When I'm feeling low for example, I like to listen to a wide range of music: Vivaldi, *The Four Seasons*; Mozart, *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*; Wagner, *Flight of the Valkyries*; and—for a change of pace, as it were—Nancy Sinatra singing "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'."

- Read emotional books or stories that trigger different emotions
- Listen to emotional music such as anthems, hymnals, fight songs, or anything uplifting
- Watch inspirational and emotional movies
- Read joke books
- Read funny greeting cards
- Read inspirational literature
- Read how-to books
- Read religious and spiritual literature

"Setting Aside" Thoughts

Use your imagination or thoughts to interrupt your current thoughts if they are distressing, or are restarting intense negative emotion. Telling yourself that your problems will still be around later may make this easier (in case you're worried they will disappear). Cut yourself some slack for now. You don't have to worry about your worries not being around to worry about. Give yourself a break from troubles.

- Mentally leave your distressing situation
- Intentionally block out distressing thoughts
- Think about pleasant things
- Remember happier times
- Think about people who have been kind to you
- Censor your rumination
- Think about an activity that you enjoy such as tennis, golfing, camping, painting, etc.
- Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the problem
- Think about the successes of friends, children, family that make you smile
- Imagine that you're in a beautiful location, surrounded by lush trees and bright flowers
- Put your problems in an imaginary box, and place that box on an imaginary shelf
- Think about future plans for work, writing, marriage, etc.

Energize Your Thinking

Use other thoughts to crowd your short-term memory. This can derail obsessing and negative thinking related to distress, anger, or depression. For example, if you're having steady thoughts about something that went wrong (a breakup, being fired, etc.) and these thoughts are feeding into emotional dysregulation, think about something that really engrosses your attention. Try to think about things that really take up your brain space as it were. Think about pleasant times, do mental exercises—whatever works.

- Count to 10, 50, or 100
- Watch something engrossing on TV
- Read a suspenseful novel or mystery
- Work crossword or jigsaw puzzles
- Work logic problems
- Try to understand obscure poetry
- Look at a piece of art and try to understand the artist's conception
- Read in a foreign language
- Count tiles in a floor or a ceiling
- Write out your solution to a political or social problem
- Read biographies
- Memorize and recite prayers, poetry, or songs
- Memorize facts about topics that interest you
- Use the Internet to build a resources file
- Try to remember every detail of a beautiful day you had
- Try to recall the features of faces you haven't seen in while

Seek Powerful Sensations

Strong physical sensations can interfere with the physiological component of your current negative emotion and thereby short-circuit the emotional process. As you know from earlier chapters, emotions prime your body for action. So if you can interfere with the current emotion as it's priming you can prevent emotional overheating and interrupt chains of behavior and feeling that could otherwise lead to impulsive acts.

Strong physical sensations may also interrupt physiological action urges, such as the urge to harm yourself or other people, to eat or drink to excess, and a host of other behaviors you may be trying to eliminate. By using your physical senses to interrupt destructive patterns, you will be engaging your whole self to change, not just your brain or will-power, but your body, too. Here are some suggestions for sensation-seekers:

- Hold ice cubes very tightly in your hands
- Eat tangy Popsicles
- Suck on or eat lemons or limes
- Take a very hot or very cold shower, or alternate hot and cold water
- Snap a rubber band on your wrist
- Drink bitter coffee
- Listen to hard and loud music
- Suck on very tart or sour candies, letting them melt in your mouth
- Squeeze stress balls
- Do isometric exercises
- Do push-ups
- Put ice or a frozen item to your forehead
- Fill a tub with very cold water, get in, and stay in till it's tepid
- Plunge your bare feet into a bucket of icy water
- Smell pungent cheeses
- Wear a heat pack or ice pack
- Bite into an onion

Self-Soothing

When you feel distressed, find a way to soothe yourself. Don't wait for others to soothe you, although you may want to think about people you can call on to soothe you later. The more things you can think of to do and practice in any given moment the better, since it's unrealistic to expect that others will always be available when you need them. To self-soothe you will want to use activities that engage one or more of the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch (Linehan 1993).

Vision

Think about all the things you can do or think you can do, or find yourself interested in making accessible to you. Focus on using your sense of sight to see beauty, peaceful scenes, and art. Order your living and work space to reduce any visual chaos or stress.

- Hang pictures on your walls
- Buy and look at a beautiful painting, print, or poster
- Buy a decorative centerpiece
- Put up seasonal decorations

- Look at trees, grass, or plants
- Look at rivers, ponds, or fountains
- Look at photo books or magazines
- Watch nature shows
- Look at art or photography books
- Look at shop window displays
- Go to the zoo and look at the animals
- Watch the sunrise or sunset
- Watch a thunderstorm
- Drive or walk around your town and look at architecture
- Paint a room in your house a soothing color
- Look at magazines
- Go look at the ocean
- Drive across a prairie or up a mountain
- Look at art books

Hearing

With the emphasis on soothing, you want to find sounds that relax you, calm you, or reassure you. Heavy metal may be great for distraction, but for self-soothing you want chamber music or ballads.

- Listen to classical music
- Listen to mellow instrumental music
- Buy a "noise" machine with nature sounds
- Play a musical instrument
- Ask a friend to play an instrument for you
- Sing to yourself
- Ask a friend to sing to you or with you
- Listen to relaxation or meditation tapes
- Listen to affirmation tapes
- Listen to books on tape
- Turn on a fan, air purifier, or anything else that makes white noise
- Listen to recordings of Gregorian chants

- Hum a tune
- Whistle
- Have a friend read to you
- Call a friend
- Call a toll-free line to hear a human voice
- Call a weather, time, and temperature line
- Call joke lines
- Read out loud

Smell

Either fill your environment with delicious or beautiful smells, or, if you can't do that then take yourself somewhere that you can experience smells that bring delight. You may find smells that trigger positive memories that will likely help you relax.

- Burn incense or scented candles
- Go to a bakery or café and stand around, taking in the smells
- Rub scented oil or lotion over your body
- Bake fresh bread or brownies
- Spray air freshener around your home
- Put on cologne or perfume
- Apply scented aftershave gel or lotion after shaving
- Apply fresh deodorant/antiperspirant
- Wash your hair with fruit-scented shampoo (strawberry, banana, etc.)
- Notice the smell of freshly cut grass
- Take a whiff of pungent cheese (Limburger, Gouda, blue cheese)
- Build a fire in your fireplace, notice the smell
- Use air freshener plug-ins
- Smell flowers
- Go to wooded area and notice the smells
- Sample perfumes and colognes at local department store
- Smell fresh laundry

Touch

Remember that you're human, and as a human you need touch like everyone else. Touch is very nurturing and it triggers endorphins to release in your body, giving you a sense of well-being and connection to others. Touch is also a form of communication and can be social, but if you are alone there are strategies to use touch.

- Get a massage
- Hug someone
- Hug a tree
- Go for a swim
- Take a long and luxurious bath
- Rub oil or lotion all over your body
- Put clean sheets on your bed and climb in
- Put on silk pajamas or underwear
- Take a long hot shower
- Notice how the wind feels blowing across your face and body
- Massage your hand, foot, arm, or leg
- Give or get a back rub
- Rub your temples and forehead
- Squish your toes in mud
- Walk barefoot through sand, mud, or grass
- Soak your feet in warm water, a pool, or a stream
- Go skinny-dipping
- Hold hands

Taste

When you're feeling distressed, it's wise to avoid too much sugar, caffeine, and alcohol. Sugar or caffeine can make you edgy, and alcohol can impair your judgment and impulse control, making you more vulnerable to the negative emotional state you might be experiencing. So pay attention to your needs, your body, and your medical issues. Know what will soothe you, instead of trigger you.

- Slowly eat your favorite food, savoring every bite
- Slowly and mindfully drink a warm drink, feeling its warmth entering you
- Eat hot toast
- Eat peppermint or cinnamon candy, slowly

- Drink chocolate milk
- Chew your favorite gum, or try a new one
- Have some heated water with lemon squeezed into it
- Drink herbal tea
- Drink warm milk
- Have a bowl of your favorite soup
- Make a salad with green leafy lettuce, green and black olives, onions, and feta cheese
- Have an ice cream cone or make an ice cream sundae
- Sample foods at your local deli

Obstacles to Self-Soothing

When some people are first introduced to the idea of self-soothing, they find the skills very hard to do. That's because they're basically convinced that either they don't deserve to experience soothing, or that it's a selfish practice. They may feel guilty even thinking about being kind and gentle to themselves. If this is the case for you, it's important to identify any thoughts that might interfere with your self-soothing. Guilt around this will be an obstacle, and obstacles can be overcome.

On the following list of beliefs, check all the obstacles of thought you identify with as your own, or add others at the end of the list. After you're done, consider other practical obstacles on the resources list and what you can do to get around them.

Belief Obstacles

- I don't deserve to feel good
- I don't deserve compassion or kindness, even from myself
- Self-soothing is a wasteful indulgence
- I shouldn't have to soothe myself
- I don't really know what self-soothing is
- I don't think soothing will help me
- I don't have time for self-soothing
- Whenever I try to self-soothe
- I think others should soothe me
- If others don't soothe me I shouldn't soothe myself
- A man might say: self-soothing is for women
- I can't stand the shame I feel when I self-soothe

- I can't soothe myself
- If I try to self-soothe I'll just become angry or sad
- Other: _____

Self-Cutting: Phoebe

When I met her, Phoebe had been cutting herself for nearly ten years. She started in middle school and continued into her college years. Whenever she became emotionally escalated she found the pain unbearable, and got relief in cutting. This seemed very strange to her friends and family, and to some therapists she worked with. They couldn't imagine the degree of relief it brought for her.

When Phoebe began to address her cutting in DBT, she discovered that cutting gave her relief and distraction from her emotional pain. The secondary fallout for her was a sense of shame for losing control, and from the realization that her friends and family saw her cutting as manipulative or bizarre. As she worked in DBT, she reached a point of willingness to try practical methods to interrupt the old patterns that preceded and followed her episodes of cutting.

As she increased her awareness to sensations, Phoebe began to recognize sooner when she had urges to cut and started to use ice to interrupt them. She was incredulous when I first recommended this, but I explained that strong physical sensations often "short-circuit" the usual feelings preceding cutting. They also powerfully interrupt thoughts associated with cutting, and by doing so ultimately interrupt strong negative emotions.

After months of going back to this practice over and over again, she began to notice that she didn't have to cut and that in fact, her urges for cutting became diminished. She did have lapses and did cut. But instead of writing herself off as a failure, she compared cutting episodes with situations in which she didn't cut and realized that not only was she gaining more control over herself, but also that she preferred the results of not cutting to cutting. She continued in her success as she also added other skills such as observing and describing, breathing, and acts of self-soothing.

Phoebe learned that much of what triggered her intense emotional experiences wasn't entirely a result of her inherent weaknesses. She often left issues alone until they had become larger-than-life. So she began to tackle interpersonal problems head-on and practiced assertiveness, which led to her problems becoming more manageable. She still had problems, but they were different in scale.

In about six months Phoebe nearly eliminated her cutting. Within a year she was able to look back at least four months solid without any self-mutilating behaviors. She now says she has gone a whole year without cutting and continues to use her DBT skills to the best of her abilities.

Resources Obstacles

- I don't have a lot of money
 - I don't have a lot of time
 - I don't have lotions, creams, candles
 - I don't have transportation
 - I don't have a big bathtub
 - I can't go to a spa
 - I don't know where to go to self-soothe
 - I lack privacy at home
 - Other: _____
-

Problem: I don't have a lot of money.

Solution: Work with what you have at home or your neighborhood.

- Use your bathtub or shower for your soothing bath or shower. Even if you don't have bubble bath or bath crystals, soaking in a tub of hot water relaxes the muscles and feels wonderful.
- Do a load of laundry, including bedclothes. Put them on your bed right from the line or the dryer and climb into bed as soon as possible to feel the clean, warm sheets.
- Clean your home or bedroom. When you're done, sit and look at the peace that order can bring to you.
- Massage your feet, hands, and legs. Check out a book on massage from your local library so you learn professional techniques to use on yourself.
- Cook a can of soup and let the aroma waft through your house. Be mindful to the delicious smell.
- Look at the trees, grass, plants, or flowers in your yard or park. Observe and describe how looking at these soothes you.
- Use your local library to look at picture books and magazines.
- Walk near or into restaurants, cafés, or bakeries, taking in the smells of foods and coffee.

Problem: I don't have a lot of time.

Solution: You must make time. These skills are too important to you to just let them go without trying. People who never get around to exercising often say, "I have no time." But then those who do exercise regularly say, "I don't have time to exercise, but I make

the time anyway." The same is true for all these skills, as a matter of fact. No one *has* time, but everyone can *make* time.

- Write self-soothing practices into your day planner, scheduling soothing sessions. List soothing activities that you will, or have, put into your planner.
- Put specific self-soothing activities on your to-do list.
- Make verbal commitments to others that you will practice specific skills each day.
- Cut back on other activities (e.g., too much TV or video games). Make a list of activities that you do too much. List specific TV programs you will give up.
- Set up agreements with a therapist or friend to report to after you practice self-soothing.
- Begin with brief but specific practices; start with fifteen minutes. Later, plan a whole day.

Problem: I don't have transportation.

Solution: Look for things you can do without transportation. Make a list of things you can do at home, use public transportation if that is available in your area, or ask friends and family for an occasional ride.

Make an Emergency Self-Soothing Kit

You can't always predict when an emotional emergency will strike, but you know that it will happen inevitably, so make preparations now. All of the distraction and soothing techniques mentioned above help to get thoughts going somewhere other than deeper into rumination, and they get the body and brain forcibly reoriented.

I often urge my clients to make a sort of "emergency kit" that includes items that they have found effective to get through a crisis without making it worse. They put a basket, box, or bag around the house where they can easily access these things. (It's important to be able to find the kit easily, because it's hard to think calmly when you're exceptionally angry or in great turmoil.)

Here's an example of what you might place in such a kit:

- Lilac or almond body lotion
 - Classical CD
 - Rabbit's foot or worry stone
 - Incense
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- A few chocolates
 - A tacky tabloid newspaper

After creating your soothing kit, making some other changes around your home can also help you be prepared. This is especially important if you struggle with self-harm

behaviors, such as cutting. You will want to strongly grab your body's and brain's attention so you might emphasize strong physical sensations.

Think about any items that you have available to you, or that you can afford to put together. Some of the ideas may not suit you, but don't disregard them. They came from people going through much of the same thing as you. Be willing to try something new. Remember, distress tolerance isn't about solving life's deepest and most profound problems; it's about surviving intense emotional crises without making things worse.

Put a few ice cubes in sandwich bags. When you begin to feel very dysregulated go to the freezer, grab a bag of ice, and squeeze tightly. Sandwich bags will keep dripping to a minimum, but if you don't care about having some water on the floor, try holding the ice without the baggies.

Keep lemon concentrate or lemon juice available in the fridge. Lick, drink, or directly taste these without diluting them. They can be quite potent in flavor, and be strong distractions. You can also cut up some fresh lemon, lime, or grapefruit wedges and put them in a plastic container in your fridge. When necessary, get them out, bite down into them, and feel those taste buds come to life!

Keep frozen cranberries, blueberries, or strawberries on hand. Get them out and chew slowly, feeling the cold and noticing as the tart or sweet flavors explode in your mouth. Keep orange Popsicles handy, and use them the same way.

These are all examples of things my clients have tried for themselves and taught me about. Whatever items you select, make sure you know where to find them. Place them where they make sense to you to go and look. You take a bubble bath in the bathroom; so don't put the bubble bath soap in the garage.

Develop a Crisis Network

It is important that you find outside help rather than always trying to shoulder your burdens alone. For periods of crisis, you will want to have professionals, friends, and family available to you by phone or pager who are willing to provide support and intervention as appropriate and according to role.

For example, you will expect a therapist who provides crisis coverage after hours to provide professionally trained and informed intervention. Your friends and family aren't your mental health providers. It's best to establish that with your network members up front. Be sure that you understand what you can expect from each member so you don't become needlessly frustrated with laypeople who can't provide professional services.

On the flip side, if you have professionals available, either your own therapist or by way of a local crisis line, understand that these individuals can't be your friends. So if the professionals engage you with a style that seems "clinically distant," remember that your goal in a crisis is to get help, not to develop friendships. You'll also want to discuss your need for crisis support up front, inviting each willing member of your network to participate in their respective capacity, according to the nature of their relationship to you.

Flexibly and compassionately let these people change their minds later. If your network members communicate a desire to change their status, for whatever reason, be willing to graciously let them do so. Thank them for having been supportive to you and ask if

there are other ways they can be generally supportive, such as sharing meals together, going to movies, and so forth. This kind of non-crisis support goes such a long way in reducing stress and dysregulation that it may over time assist you to prevent crises.

Network Members

Here are some suggestions for potential members of your crisis network:

- Primary therapist
- Supportive/secondary therapist
- Group or ancillary therapist
- Case manager
- Physician
- Clergy
- Spiritual director
- Teacher/educator
- Twelve-step sponsor
- Friend from support group
- Coworker
- Your local crisis line and/or warm line
- Sibling
- Aunt/uncle
- Cousin
- Fellow student
- Other relatives
- Friends or acquaintances

Guidelines for Crisis Help via Phone

If you have a therapist who provides after-hours crisis coverage, arrange to call them first. If you don't hear from your therapist within one hour (or whatever the two of you agreed on), call your local city or county crisis line.

Tell the crisis-line worker whether or not you have a therapist, that you want to resolve the crisis, and that their support will be helpful. Accept the crisis worker's advice

and instructions. If you don't know your local crisis-line number, call information, check your local directory, or ask your therapist.

If you're experiencing severely exacerbated symptoms of an existing mental disorder such as increased hallucinations, paranoia, or elevated mood as in the case of bipolar disorder, that may greatly compromise your safety or the safety of others, call your local crisis line, hospital, or 911 for an evaluation. You may require medication adjustments, immediate environmental support and safety, or perhaps a sub-acute/respite stay for stabilization. Some cities and provinces provide transportation if you're without your own or incapacitated.

If you have already injured yourself or are in a medical emergency, call 911 immediately.

If you're experiencing unmanageable distress and are contemplating suicide (thinking about ending your own life), and are in a situation where you might complete suicide, call 911 and/or follow protocols agreed upon between you and your therapist. Anyone without a therapist should call 911 under these circumstances.

Working with Crisis-Line Workers

I've been a crisis-line therapist, and I can tell you from experience that callers who were able to take the following steps were more effective at reaching a fairly quick resolution about what to do. Following these guidelines won't ensure that your crisis will immediately abate, but it will increase your chances for effective outcomes that more closely match your goals for increased skillful living. Not every region will have the same resources, and not every region will have all kinds of crisis lines. You may need to call two counties over, or rely entirely on 911, or make alternate plans.

Whether the crisis line you call is staffed by mental health professionals or volunteers, the following guidelines can help you make the most effective use of your phone call.

Give all demographic information asked for

- Provide your name (that way, they don't have to call you "you")
- Your current physical address and location
- Home phone number, or if away from home current number at that time
- Social Security number
- Date of birth (there are age-related factors for health that are relevant in evaluation)
- Names of your primary care physician, psychiatrist, and therapist, if any
- Community mental health centers you may be affiliated with for case management
- Your insurance status (insured or uninsured), along with member number and HMO name (in case an evaluation is needed; this will speed the paperwork once you arrive to your crisis center or hospital)

- Provide information about prior hospitalizations
- Provide information on prior suicide attempts, or acts of self-harm and their outcomes
- Tell the crisis workers if you have any means of self-harm or suicide available
- Tell them any diagnosis you may carry (e.g., bipolar, PTSD, etc.)
- List any known allergies and/or medical conditions including issues of mobility (important if your crisis worker tries to provide you transportation)

Provide all relevant information about the crisis

- What precipitated the current crisis?
- What triggered your current emotions or feelings?
- Are you alone or with others?
- Whether or not you're currently injured
- If you're injured, tell them the nature of injury (laceration, overdose, asphyxiation)
- Is this a situation that can be resolved over the phone?
- Your opinion about whether you should go to a crisis center or hospital for evaluation
- Provide names of friends, family, or clergy as contacts as available

Accept help, coaching, suggestions, and instructions offered

- Be willing to go for an in-person evaluation
- Be willing to try to resolve the crisis in your environment
- Try suggestions as they are offered
- Don't "yes-but" the worker or pooh-pooh their ideas
- Don't reject their advice
- Don't judge the worker(s)
- Don't tell them they're stupid
- Don't expect the worker to take away your emotional pain
- Don't threaten the worker with suicide or self-harm
- Practice willingness over willfulness
- Participate fully in the experience

Acceptance Skills and Learning from Pain

What DBT calls *radical acceptance* is an inherent element of dialectical thinking and living. It is simply acknowledging what is before you, whether you like it or not. But acceptance isn't approval. That's a common misconception for clients who are new to DBT programs. Acceptance isn't simply putting up with misery. It is the starting point for profound change for you.

"Radical acceptance is letting go of fighting reality," writes Linehan (1993b, 102). What do we mean by "fighting reality"? An example might be the little girl who says that she will hold her breath until her parents or the world conforms to her wishes. It is both reality-rejecting and ineffective, because it does nothing but turn her face blue.

The word radical means fundamentally or foundationally. It comes from the Latin word *radix*, meaning "root." Radical acceptance is acceptance that comes from deep within you, acknowledging reality on its own terms without trying to reject it through willpower, or whining, or wallowing in misery. And, as Linehan puts it, "Acceptance is the only way out of hell" (1993b, 102). Acceptance lets you properly and accurately diagnose what is going on around you, and only when you accept in this way can you truly choose intentional and effective responses to your life. And even where certain factors can't be changed, acceptance allows you to more effectively tolerate the things that you can't change.

Dr. Viktor Frankl, a psychotherapist famous for his seminal work on Logotherapy entitled *Man's Search for Meaning*, gave a moving account of the power of acceptance as the ground for change and for building genuine hope. In his book, Frankl recounts his life as a Jew stripped of his privileged status as physician and university lecturer when the Nazis placed him in a concentration camp. In this camp he served as a physician to his fellow prisoners. He began to notice that among those who were dying and more frequently ill there was a prevalence of despair, hopelessness, and willfulness.

These sick and dying were generally people who were telling him and others about how awful it was to be in the camp, how God had abandoned them, and who ruminated on the terrible aspects of their situation. In contrast to this group, those that modeled health and required less medical attention were the prisoners who expressed hope, talked about the future beyond the camp, and who imagined reunions with loved ones or getting back to work. This second group had continued to engage in their lives and their existences such as they were, fully participating in those moments. They were willing; they said yes to their lives, and as Frankl notes, these were people who had stopped questioning life, asking what its meaning was, and instead began to respond to life, as though life had asked of them, "What will you make of me?"

I want to strongly reiterate the importance of regular practice and the idea of cultivating your practices so that they become integrated into your regular lifestyle from one day to the next. It isn't Pollyannaish to suggest that you can learn from your pain. Many people have suffered tremendously and come through it, extolling the hard truth that they gained something from their hardships. This may include insight, change of worldview, renewal of moral values, dedication to loved ones, spiritual discovery, and increased resilience. I believe the fact that so many people can learn and grow from their pain is evidence that you can too. It requires an openness of heart and mind to look at pain differently. Doing so is a skill to be learned, and to be learned it must be practiced.

Openness to the slings and arrows of life means letting pain be all that it is, without exacerbating it by judging it, or reacting to it by trying to reject its presence in your experience. This openness is what we have already talked about as willingness. Willingness to listen to pain to gain from it, to let pain become a mentor of sorts, letting it provide instruction and guidance.

I wish you the best possible outcome for all your efforts.

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