

**Montclair State DBT Skills Training Program
Summary of Skills and Practices for Clients**

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Why Skills?

Problems

Being involved with the criminal legal system, you may encounter all sorts of problems, with links to your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They can give rise to misery and distress.

These **Problems** can include

- lack of flexibility.
- problems with others.
- loneliness.
- being too judgmental.
- not paying attention.
- not understanding what makes you or others do what they do.
- feeling empty.
- not being able to keep your feelings in check.
- acting on your feelings even when doing so is not effective.
- acting too quickly.
- addiction.
- being stubborn.
- having trouble accepting reality (what is).

This is not to say that if you experience problems like these that you are always to blame or the cause of them. The environment you are going back to may be at fault. But you will often have to solve these problems anyway.

In the face of problems, you can:

- **Solve Problems** with **Relationship Skills** or the **Problem-Solving Skill**.
- **Change How You Feel About Problems** with **Emotion Regulation Skills**.
- **Tolerate Problems** with **Tolerate Distress Skills** and **Mindfulness Skills**.
- **Stay Miserable** about them by using **No Skills**.
- **Make Problems Worse** by using **No Skills**.

DBT Skills

Dialectical Behavior Therapy, or **DBT**, teaches the skills you will need if you decide not to stay miserable or make your problems worse.

Dialectical means thinking flexibility.

Behavior means what you do: thinking, feeling, and taking actions.

Therapy means a system for improving your life.

Therapy often involves two people. One of them is more experienced in the system and believes it helps people to live a life worth living. The other person is less experienced in the system but is open to seeing if they can learn the system to make their life better.

Read the skills explanations multiple times and think about how you can apply them to your life. Also talk about them with other people. For example, your therapist, family and friends, your probation officer, a personal mentor, and a spiritual guide.

Why Skills? Practice

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread **Why Skills?** on your own at least once this week.
2. Memorize the 5 options for responding to **Problems**. Think of an example for how you have used each option in the past and write it down. Think of an example for how someone in your life has used each option in the past and write it down. Think if you can come up with any other ways of responding to a problem. Talk with someone in your life about the 5 options and ask if they can think of any other ways of responding to a problem. Journal about if you or someone else could think of any other options.
3. Talk with a probation officer, lawyer, therapist, teacher, personal mentor, or someone who offers you spiritual guidance about how the concepts of **Skills, Dialectical, Behavioral, and Therapy** apply to other areas of life, such as education or religion. Journal about the conversation.
4. Think of the following **Problems**. On one side of a piece of paper, write down examples of how each may be a problem for you. Then on the other side of the page, write down how that area would look like for you if you turned it into a strength.
 - History of committing crimes
 - Your personality
 - Attitudes, thoughts, or beliefs
 - Friends or associates
 - Use of drugs or alcohol
 - Education or work
 - Family or romantic partner
 - Use of free time

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Learning Skills

Chains

People usually do certain things because of what happened before they did it, what happened after they did it last time, or what they saw others do.

You can understand something problematic that you keep doing in terms of links on a **Chain**, like a bicycle chain. The **Chain Skill** has you draw from left to right:

- your **Vulnerability Factors** (like being angry, hungry, lonely, or tired) →
- the **Prompting Event** (like the first flick of dominoes) →
- a sequence (in any order) of your body sensations, thoughts, feelings, actions, and events, called **Links in the Chain** →
- your **Problem Behavior** →
- the **Consequences** to you and other people or things in the short-term and long-term
- **Harms** of your problem behavior that may need to be **Repaired**.

You can remember the **Links in the Chain** as the grades you can get in school but skipping “D”: **ABCEF**

- **Actions:** Things you do.
- **Body Sensations:** What you feel in your body.
- **Cognitions:** Another word for thoughts.
- **Events:** Situations or what others do.
- **Feelings:** Another word for emotions.

It is often true that we are not fully to blame for all our problem behaviors. Sometimes situations or other people are more to blame.

But we at least play a part. And we do have a lot of personal power no matter what our situation is or what other people do to us. Sometimes we also need others to help us out. Like help from a therapist, mentor, or spiritual guide.

Missing Links

You can also understand why something that you should have done or hoped to do did not happen with the **Missing Links Skill**. Ask yourself if it was because

- you did not know how to do it?
- you did not remember how to do it?
- you were not willing to do it?
- a chain caused you not to do it?

As soon as you answer yes to one of these questions, stop and solve that problem. The **Problem-Solving Skill** is explained in the **Emotion Regulation Skills** pages.

Solutions

You can use all the other skills in this guide to change your chains or missing links. If you can cut the links of a bicycle chain, the whole chain will fall apart. The change process is similar. Changing the elements of your chain or a missing link will stop negative patterns from repeating.

Your therapist can help you determine which skills might be useful for addressing a chain or missing links. With practice, you will also get good at figuring out lots of effective solutions for problem chains or missing links.

Learning Skills Practice

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread **Learning Skills** on your own at least once this week.
2. Think of a recent time you did something positive (“green light”) or neutral (“yellow light”). On a piece of paper, sketch out the **Chain** leading up to it and what happened after because of it. Make sure to write out the **Behavior, Prompting Event, and ABCEF Links**, in that order.
3. Think of a recent time you did something risky (“red light”). On a piece of paper, sketch out the **Chain** leading up to it and its consequences. Be sure to write out, in this order, the **Problem Behavior, Prompting Event, Vulnerability Factors, ABCEF Links**, and short-term and long-term **Consequences** for both you and other people. Circle the consequences that were harmful to you and underline the consequences that were harmful to other people. Write out ideas for how to **Repair** the *actual Harms*.
4. Using your risky (“red light”) **Chain**, draw lines and write ideas for positive (“green light”) things you could have done instead to respond to or cope with the **Prompting Event**, each **Vulnerability Factor**, and each **ABCEF Link**.
5. Think of a recent time you did not do something that was needed, that you hoped you would do, or that you said you would do. Ask yourself the **Missing Links** questions in order and write out your answers. Stop when your answer to a question shows what got in the way. Write down ideas for how to solve the issue that got in the way. You can also ask someone in your life for ideas.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Flexible Thinking Skills

Dialectic

There are at least two sides in any argument. There are also at least two choices that can be made for any decision. This means that there is always conflict and confusion about what is true or right. This is called a **Dialectic** (“die-uh-leck-tic”).

Someone who has a flexible view of the world notices, welcomes, and steps into these paradoxes of life. They assume that if you look closely enough, two competing ideas can often both be true. This is called “**Both-And**” thinking.

People who have an inflexible or rigid view of the world always go to one side or the other and will not budge. This is called “**Either-Or**” thinking.

Dialectical Solution

Because flexible thinkers see the world with both-and thinking, they are not threatened by confusing choices. This is because they know the trick is always the same. They get flexible and slide back and forth between two truths until they come up with a creative solution. This solution might take bits and pieces from both truths. This is called a **Dialectical** (“die-uh-leck-tic-al”) **Synthesis** (“sin-thuh-sis”) or **Dialectical Solution**.

However, with every new solution comes a new opposing truth. And on and on goes the pattern of life.

Important Dialectics and Solutions

Important Dialectics are:

- **Acceptance** versus **Change**
- **Emotions** versus **Logic**
- **Doing** versus **Doing Nothing**
- **Spoiling Yourself** versus **Denying Yourself**

Solutions to These Dialectics are:

- The Serenity Prayer: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, *and* the wisdom to know the difference.” In other words, allowing yourself to both have an intense desire for something other than what you have, *and* totally accepting just what you have in your life right now. **Mindfulness Skills** and **Tolerate Distress Skills** focus on the **acceptance** side of things, *and* **Emotion Regulation Skills** and **Relationship Skills** focus on the **change** side of things.

- Making decisions and taking actions based on reason *and* taking into account your values and how your emotions always go up and down.
- Doing what is needed, including reviewing the past and planning for the future, *and* just “being” in the current moment.
- Spoiling yourself only a little bit *and* allowing yourself to feel very satisfied.

Flexible Thinking Skills Practice

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread **Flexible Thinking Skills** on your own at least once this week.
2. Anytime you think or say the words “or” or “either,” stop and catch yourself and try replacing them with the words “**and**” or “**both.**” Notice how it feels to allow for both sides of something to be true. Does anything bad happen besides maybe feeling uncomfortable or uncertain? Journal about what you notice.
3. Whenever you notice having an opinion about something, think of the opposite position too. For example, thinking you might fall back into crime vs. that you might stay free of crime. Allow yourself to be more interested in the “game” of this competition rather than the “end of the game” of a winner and a loser. *Remember:* it is more interesting to watch people playing sports than it is to watch the post-game. Then try to come up with a creative new solution to the competition. For example, some people have stopped committing crimes and now just make music or movies about the criminal lifestyle. Or they mentor people who are in trouble for crime. Finally, think of the opposite to your new **Synthesis**. For example, rapping about crime might be risky (“red light”) thinking, or mentoring those in trouble for crime might invite risky relationships into your life. Notice that now there is a new competition in need of synthesis. Journal about all your ideas during this practice.
4. Think of an issue in your life that you can both accept *AND* change at the same time. Journal about how you could creatively do both.
5. Think of a decision in your life that you can make both based on logic *AND* your values and how your emotions work. Journal about how you could creatively do both.
6. Think of ways you can just “be” in the current moment *AND* do what is needed for the next moment. Journal about how you could creatively do both.
7. Think of how you can both not give in to your wants *AND* satisfy yourself. Journal about how you could creatively do both.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Mindfulness Skills

States of Mind and Wise Mind

Why is Mindfulness useful? Because Mindfulness is the approach for **Walking the Middle Path** to access your own truth. **Wise Mind** is your inner wisdom. It gives solutions to dialectics. It is creative and flexible. It is skillful and effective. Yours might be spiritual.

Here is an example. There is truth to your logic. This is **Reasonable Mind**. There is also truth to your feelings. This is **Emotion Mind**. There is a dialectic here. **Wise Mind** is the solution. You listen to your head and your heart, *and* you come to trust your gut.

Here is another example. It is useful to do nothing and just be in the present moment. Think about it. The present moment is all that really exists. The past is forever gone, and the future does not exist yet. This is **Being Mind**. It is also useful to do what may be needed in the current moment to accomplish your future goals. This is **Doing Mind**. **Wise Mind** gives you the solution of **Skillful Means**. Walk a middle path of being more aware, more passionate, and more skillful while putting in the work, *and* let go of having to get the result you want.

What Skills

Mindfulness is the combination of a few actions and a few ways of doing them. The what and how of mindfulness can be practiced in all sorts of ways. The point is to do as much as you can mindfully.

What is Mindfulness? It is three behaviors:

- **Observing:** Using your senses (like sight, sound, touch, taste, smell) to notice.
- **Describing:** Putting words to only what you observe.
- **Participating:** Throwing oneself in to the now. Flowing with the present moment. Being one with the current experience. Going with what your inner sense or inner wisdom hints to you about the current moment.

Here is a trick to remember the three **What Skills**. See how the first letter of each of the **What Skills** form the word “**POD**”?

How Skills

The **What Skills** need to be done in a particular way to be mindful. **How** do you do them mindfully? There are three ways:

- **One-Mindful:** Observe, describe, or participate, one at a time. In any given moment (the “now”), just observe, or just describe, or just participate. Let go of distractions and turn your mind back to focusing.

- **Non-Judgment:** Do just one thing at a time without **Evaluative** (“eee-val-you-uh-tiv”) **Judgments**. Evaluations are when you judge something as good or bad, as something you like or dislike, as something that should or should not be. We evaluate things way more than is useful. Try to notice your evaluations and let go of them. There is another type of judgment that is okay to hang on to. These are called **Discerning** (“diss-ern-ing”) **Judgments**. Discernment (“diss-ern-mint”) is when you describe just the facts without then adding your evaluation. This is almost always useful.
- **Effective:** Without judgment, do one thing at a time in an effective way. Focus on goals and doing what is needed to accomplish them. Figure this out by discerning what is actually needed or will work in the situation. Stay within the rules for a normal life. Crime is not effective in the long-term. At a minimum, it carries too much risk for interfering with the human need for freedom.

Here is a trick to remember the three **What Skills** and three **How Skills: ONE POD**. See how the first letter of each of the **What Skills** form the word “POD” and the first letter of each of the How Skills form the word “ONE”?

Spiritual Perspectives

There are **Spiritual Perspectives** on how to practice Mindfulness. Learn about and try to catch small moments of the “**Ultimate Reality**.” Do things to grow your **Wisdom**. Practice **Loving Kindness**. Let go of your attachments and be free, which is the practice of **Non-Attachment**. Your therapist can teach you more about these versions of mindfulness if you are interested in them.

Mindfulness Skills Practice

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread **Mindfulness Skills** on your own at least once this week.
2. Memorize what **ONE POD** stands for.
3. Search Google to find lists of Mindfulness activities. Save a list you like and practice the activities.
4. Search YouTube to find short voice-led Mindfulness practices that you like. Save them to your account and relisten to them.
5. Search YouTube for “loving kindness meditation” and find one you like. Save it to your account and relisten to it.
6. Each day, take a moment to stop and just **Observe** with your 5 senses.
7. Each day, take a moment to stop and **Describe** only what you observed with your 5 senses.
8. Each day, stop and really “throw yourself” into the current moment (**Participate**).
9. Each day, commit to doing an activity with all your focus. Shift your focus back whenever you notice you get distracted (**One-Mindful**).
10. Each day, catch yourself judging things, either in your head or by what you say. Then restate what you just thought or said without any good/bad, like/dislike, or should/should not type words (**Non-Judgment**). Does anything bad happen when you do this?
11. Each morning, commit to being skillful, “following the rules,” and not engaging in behavior that risks interfering with your freedom. Then set some positive goals and focus on doing what is needed to take steps toward those goals during the day (**Effective**).
12. Each morning, say the following sentences to yourself:

“I can want things AND I do not have to have them.”

“As long as I give today my best effort, then there is not anything else I can give. So if things go my way, great. If they do not, I did everything I could do, and it was just meant to be that way today.”
13. Each day, search Google to find wise quotes about life.
14. Each day, do something spiritual to try to catch a glimpse of the “ultimate reality.”

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Tolerate Distress Skills

Why Tolerance Distress?

Sometimes really difficult situations cannot be changed right now. Maybe the difficulty has to do with very uncomfortable emotions, strong addiction urges, or a major conflict with someone. There are many examples of very difficult situations.

The **Wise Mind** solution is this: time heals all. No difficult experience lasts forever. But you have to tolerate the distress while waiting for it to pass.

The **Tolerate Distress Skills** help you cope with really difficult emotions, urges, or interactions so that you do not act quickly to make the situation worse. These skills will not remove your distress, solve your problems, or improve your life. They will only keep you from making distressing situations worse. They work in the short-term by not making the situation worse. They work in the long-term by removing the need to engage in problematic coping.

Problematic Coping is ineffective. This means it is not mindful. However, problematic coping does make sense. It gives you temporary relief. But it is problematic because it causes you more problems in the long run. In this way, it eventually causes you more distress. You have many options for tolerating your distress rather than making it worse.

Crisis Survival

You might be experiencing a crisis. A **Crisis** is a short-lasting but very stressful time when you experience an intense pressure to do something. You may be overwhelmed. Your emotion mind may be pushing you to use problem behavior. The problem or your pain might not be able to be reduced quickly. In these situations, it may be effective to just not make the situation worse. The **Crisis Survival Skills** help you to do this.

STOP

Crisis situations can feel overwhelming. Pump the breaks by using the **STOP Skill**.

- **Stop**
 - **Take a Step Back**
 - **Observe**
 - **Proceed (Move Forward) with Mindfulness**
-

Pros and Cons

When in crisis, there is often an urge to act in non-skillful ways that make sense in the short-term but create problems in the long-term. The **Pros and Cons Skill** is when you write out the positive and negative consequences of acting skillful versus not acting skillful in both the short-term and long-term. List all the consequences and then add a plus (+) sign next to each positive consequence and a minus (-)

sign next to each negative consequence. You can read what you write back to yourself many times. You can also imagine the outcomes of acting skillful versus not acting skillful. This skill works best when you do it before a crisis. Making the list, reading it back, and imagining the outcomes help you access your **Wise Mind**. What you decide after doing a pros and cons list is up to you and your **Wise Mind**. The Pros and Cons List looks like this:

	Short-term	Long-term
Non-skillful option (urge)	+ Consequence 1	+ Consequence 1
	+ Consequence 2	- Consequence 2
	- Consequence 3	- Consequence 3
Skillful option	+ Consequence 1	+ Consequence 1
	- Consequence 2	+ Consequence 2
	- Consequence 3	- Consequence 3

TIPP Your Body Chemistry

A crisis is often felt in the body as sensations like tightness, heat, shakiness, and discomfort. The **TIPP Skills** help you access your body’s rest-and-relax system so that you have body sensations like looseness, coolness, steadiness, and comfort.

- **Temperature Skill:** Bend over and put your face in ice-cold water for 30 seconds. Or put a cold object on your forehead for 30 seconds.
- **Intense Exercise Skill:** Exercise hard for about 15 minutes.
- **Paced Breathing Skill:** Breathe out longer than you breathe in for a few minutes. For example, breathe in for 5 seconds and breathe out for 10 seconds.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR 1):** Flex for a few seconds and then release the muscles in your face, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, tummy, thighs, calves, and feet. Ask your therapist how to do this if you do not know how.
 - **Paired Muscle Relaxation (PMR 2):** There is a quicker way to access muscle relaxation when in crisis. But you have to practice it ahead of time. When you release a flex while practicing progressive muscle relaxation, repeat the word “relax” to yourself. With practice, the word “relax” will come to be “paired” with the sensation of your muscles being relaxed. You might also have stressful or problematic thoughts when in crisis. You can more easily challenge these negative thoughts by further building this skill. Pair the word and body sensation of “relax” with useful thoughts you come up with ahead of time to challenge negative thoughts you have when in crisis.

Self-Soothe with the Senses

Another option for tolerating the uncomfortable body sensations that come with a crisis is the **Self-Soothe with the Senses Skill**. Do calming or pleasant things that you can see, hear, smell, taste, or touch.

You can also do a mindful Body Scan. Imagine slowly scanning through your body like the light of a photocopier. Imagine the heat of the light melting away any discomfort you notice in different parts of your body.

Distract with ACCEPTS

Distracting yourself is very useful when in crisis. There are many ways to distract. You can remember them as the **ACCEPTS Skills**.

- **Activities:** Do activities that you can do right now in the moment.
 - **Contribute:** For example, have you ever noticed how you feel when someone thanks you for holding the door open for them?
 - **Compare:** yourself to others who may be worse off, or to times when you were worse off.
 - **Emotions:** Throw yourself all the way into things connected to different emotions. For example, if you are worried, listen with Mindfulness to yoga music.
 - **Push Away:** the distressing thoughts temporarily. You can return to them when not in crisis.
 - **Thoughts:** Throw yourself into thinking different thoughts. For example, if you are sad during the week, think with Mindfulness about what you are looking forward to doing during the weekend.
 - **Sensations:** Throw yourself into feeling different body sensations. For example, if you are angry and feeling hot and tight, touch you face with something cold and do some PMR.
-

IMPROVE the Moment

Another way to create some distance from the current crisis is to use the **IMPROVE Skills**. Improve the moment with:

- **Imagery:** Imagine in your mind being in a pleasant moment or place.
- **Meaning:** Find meaning in the crisis. The person who has a why can tolerate just about any how.
- **Prayer:** Call on your **Wise Mind** or a spiritual or religious power.
- **Relaxation:** Do relaxing things.
- **One Thing at a Time:** Focus on doing just one thing in this moment.

- **Vacation:** Take a brief escape from the experience in your mind, or by physically walking away from the situation.
 - **Encouragement:** Cheer for yourself like a caring and supportive coach would.
-

Reality Acceptance

The crisis survival skills involve changing the problem or how you feel about the problem. **Emotion Regulation Skills** do a better job at both, but sometimes a crisis prevents you from using the **Crisis Survival Skills**. And sometimes, not even the Crisis Survival Skills work very well.

You have three options left in a situation like this. You could make matters worse. You could stay miserable. Or you can **Accept the Reality** of the situation.

Why is it best to use **Reality Acceptance Skills** in this case? Because **Pain** in life is unavoidable. Pain actually serves a purpose in nature. It pushes us to make changes. But when pain that cannot be avoided is not accepted, it becomes something worse. It becomes **Suffering**.

Radical Acceptance

The **Radical Acceptance Skill** helps you to tolerate pain rather than suffering. “**Radical**” means complete. You do the skill with your mind, body, and spirit. “**Acceptance**” means to acknowledge and allow “what is” without evaluation. You actually use radical acceptance a lot of the time. You use it easily with things that you like or prefer! The same skill can be used with things that you do not like or do not prefer. In other words, it can be used with things that cause you pain.

More Things to Know about Radical Acceptance

There are a few more things to know to help you understand the **Radical Acceptance Skill**.

- Acceptance is to realize that everything in the universe has **Causes**. This means if something happens then it was caused by things. Therefore, it should have happened. How else could it be? That we approve of it or do not approve of it does not change that it should have happened.
- All you have to accept is that the past was caused and that the current moment is almost over. Once you do this, you are welcome to try to change the next moment. Therefore, acceptance is not approving of something painful. Acceptance is also not “doing nothing” about it. You are just a lot more likely to be able to change the next moment into one that you prefer when what you try is connected to reality. “**Reality**” is what actually has been, what actually is right now, and what is realistic in the future. In other words, reality is causes and consequences. Reality is not what you wished it were. Because wishing might not have anything to do with actual causes and consequences.
- Acceptance often feels like letting go. It feels like relief. It feels like becoming centered. It feels calm. It feels like there is now a possibility of moving forward with ordinary pain. You may feel sadness and grief but also a sense that you can move forward. You conclude that you can always find a life that is worth living even if it is not the life that you want. “This is, and I do not like it or want it to be this way. *AND* this is not a catastrophe. Because the situation will eventually change. For change is the only certainty in this life.”
- All the **Reality Acceptance Skills** described below end up blending together. It is hard to do one without the others naturally happening.

- Other skills, like **Pros and Cons**, **Opposite Action**, and **Cope Ahead**, can help you apply this skill. Some of these are explained in the **Emotion Regulation Skills** pages.
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Turning the Mind and Willingness

To get your spirit or attitude into radical acceptance, you have to use the **Turn the Mind Skill** to turn away from non-acceptance and toward acceptance, again and again. You also have to turn your mind over and over again toward the **Willingness Skill**. Willingness is an attitude of responding to the challenges of life in a ready, voluntary, and wise way. You choose to do what is needed, without grudges, and with awareness of how things are connected. Being willing is to turn away from being willful. **Willfulness** is an attitude of ignoring, turning down, giving up, resisting, or refusing. It is an attitude of responding without thought, on impulse, with force, with resentment, or in a selfish way.

Mindfulness of Current Thoughts

To help get your thoughts into radical acceptance, you use the **Mindfulness of Current Thoughts Skill**. This is the skill of observing that your brain naturally and constantly comes up with new thoughts. The skill is in not becoming “fused” or “one” with any particular thoughts. You separate “you” from “your thoughts.” You remember that your thoughts are just random chemical reactions in your brain. Just because certain thoughts grab your attention does not mean that they are truly important. We all have lots of thoughts and we can decide that any of them are not important. Only “you” can choose to give a thought power. Therefore, you can choose to just allow your thoughts to float by, like clouds in the sky. You can choose not to give them any power besides just noticing them.

Trying to block or shove a thought down generally does not work. The reason why is because your brain needs to keep a negative thought “online” to detect when it arises in your mind. Ironically, this just makes you more likely to think about it and less likely to get rid of it.

The alternative is to just observe your thoughts with the curiosity of a child or beginner. If you start hanging on to a thought that you notice, take a step back in your mind and watch to see when your mind naturally wanders to other thoughts. Trying to fight with your thoughts is like playing an impossible game of tug-of-war. Instead of continuing to pull on the rope, if you just drop the rope, you can then watch what the person on the other end does next.

Half Smile, Willing Hands, and PMR

To help get your body into radical acceptance, you can use the **Half-Smile Skill**. This is when you smile just a little bit on one side of your mouth, like Mona Lisa does. You can also use the **Willing Hands Skill**. This is when you keep your hands open and the inside of your hands facing up. You can also use **PMR**.

Addiction Crisis

Addictions can be distressing. Most people think of the most obvious and problematic addictions. Like drugs and alcohol, gambling, sex, spending money, or food. But anything can become an addiction. Like intense emotions like love.

An addiction is an urge that you act on over and over again even though you have started to have negative consequences. The last part of that definition is important. Because if you do something that you have an urge to do again and again but without negative consequences, then it is not an addiction. An example of this is breathing.

Addictions often start when you feel normal and then you do something that feels good. If you do that thing that feels good again and again, it eventually throws your balance out of whack. You begin to notice that you often feel uncomfortable when not doing the thing that feels good. And so, you start to do it not just to feel good, but also to not feel uncomfortable. At this point, you are addicted. An addiction is a crisis because you have short-lasting but intense desires or urges to do the thing you are addicted to doing.

The **Addiction Skills** can be remembered as the **DCBA Skills**.

Dialectical Abstinence

This is balancing a 100% abstinence approach (not doing your addictive behavior at all) with a relapse prevention plan that springs into action to reduce the harm of any lapse (starting to do your addictive behavior again but just a little bit). A relapse prevention plan is made using the **Learning Skills**. The goal of the plan is to prevent a minor lapse from becoming a full-on relapse (doing your addictive behavior a lot) by instead returning to abstinence.

Clear Mind

Addict Mind is obsessive, compulsive, and willful. **Clean Mind** is too optimistic in assuming that “it is all behind me.” **Clear Mind** is the solution. This is an attitude of being both abstinent *and* on guard.

Community Reinforcement

This is finding and letting healthy and supportive people know that you are working on your addiction so that they can encourage you. It is also participating in activities that you like that are not your addiction. They are things that you can do in the place of your addiction. At least try them out for a week or so to see if your life improves.

Burn Bridges

This is getting rid of the people, places, and things that trigger your addiction.

Build New Bridges

One form of this is distracting yourself from cravings with different images (like a busy road at night) and smells (like a cup of coffee or a flower) than those tied to your addiction.

Another form is to imagine that you are surfing over an urge or “craving wave.” Like surfing, this will feel somewhat unstable. But that is why surfing is a thrill! Plus, you get better at surfing with practice. Meaning that it feels less unstable as you get better at it. Do not try to suppress the natural rise and fall of your urge. If you tried to push an actual wave back into the ocean, you would get a face full of salt water. If you instead turned around and surfed, you would ride on top of the wave until it passed.

Alternate Rebellion

You might have addictions because you like to be a rebel. If this is true, find creative and effective ways to rebel that do not involve giving in to addictive urges. For example, get a tattoo, have secret thoughts, say unpopular things, or wear odd clothes.

Adaptive Denial

When an urge hits, firmly tell yourself that you do not want to do the addictive behavior and that you are not actually going to do it anyway. And then give yourself a small reward each time you resist an urge.

Tolerate Distress Skills Practice 1 (Crisis Survival)

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread the **Crisis Survival Skills** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Try the **STOP Skill** each day for a minor annoyance, or for a **Crisis** if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.
3. At least once this week, write out the **Pros/Cons** of acting skillful versus acting non-skillful in both the short-term and long-term for a minor annoyance, or for a Crisis if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.
4. Try one of the **TIPP Skills** each day for a minor annoyance, or for a Crisis if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.
5. Do something that **Soothes** one of your **Senses** each day for a minor annoyance, or for a Crisis if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.
6. Search YouTube for a “**body scan**” meditation and find one you like. Save it to your account and relisten to it.
7. Try one of the **ACCEPTS Skills** each day to distract yourself from a minor annoyance, or for a Crisis if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.
8. Try one of the **IMPROVE Skills** each day to improve an annoying moment, or for a Crisis if you have one. Log your practice on your diary card.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Tolerate Distress Skills Practice 2 (Reality Acceptance)

1. Reread the **Reality Acceptance Skills** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Say the following to yourself each day when a situation causes you to feel an uncomfortable emotion or an urge to be non-skillful.

*I can **Accept** life and this situation, with my mind, body, and spirit.*

I do not have to approve of it to accept it.

If I accept it, while I may feel pain, I do not have to suffer.

All I have to do is accept the past and the present. And to be realistic about the future.

This situation was caused, so it should be how it is right now.

Acceptance is not doing nothing. I am free to work to change the next moment.

I can better work on the next moment if I address what actually is, rather than trying to address something that is not reality.

*By accepting, I am letting go **and** moving forward.*

*I am **Willing** to accept it.*

*I am doing a **Half-Smile**, like Mona Lisa.*

I have my hands open and the insides of my hands facing up toward the sky.

I am letting go of non-acceptance.

I accept this, and I am moving forward.

Repeat these statements to yourself if you get distracted or notice yourself slipping back into non-acceptance or **Willfulness**.

3. Say the following to yourself each day when you notice an uncomfortable thought.

The job of my brain is to constantly make thoughts.

All my thoughts are just chemical reactions in my brain. None of them are important unless I say that they are.

My thoughts are just one part of me. They are not Me.

I choose which thoughts to give power.

Right now, I am choosing not to give any of my thoughts power.

I am only noticing them.

I am watching them float by, like clouds in the sky.

If I start to hang on to any one thought, I just let go of it and continue to watch the flow of my thoughts..

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Tolerate Distress Skills Practice 3 (Addiction Crisis)

1. Reread the **Addiction Crisis Skills** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Make a 100% commitment to yourself this week to free yourself of one of your addictions. Then journal about a plan to avoid slipping back into this addiction.
3. Stay both abstinent and on guard for a slip up this week. If you do slip up, immediately recommit to 100% abstinence and stay even more on guard.
4. Tell all the important people in your life that you are quitting the addiction and ask for them to encourage you. Then come up with a list of things you can do rather than spending time on your addiction. Do them. Journal about any encouragement you receive and what it is like to do things besides your addiction.
5. Get rid of everything in your life that reminds you of your addiction. Cut people off. Stop going to certain places. Throw things away.
6. Search YouTube for an “**urge surfing**” meditation and find one you like. Save it to your account and relisten to it when you experience urges for your addiction.
7. When you experiences urges for your addiction this week, distract yourself with strong images (like searching YouTube for a video of a busy road at night) and smells (like making a cup of coffee and smelling it) that are different from the images and smells tied to your addiction. Journal about how this practice goes.
8. If you are feeling like a rebel, Google “alternate rebellion ideas” and try some instead of engaging in your addiction to rebel. Journal about how this practice goes.
9. When you notice an urge for your addiction, tell yourself that you are not going to give in to the urge. And then give yourself a small reward whenever you resist the urge (like a piece of candy, or a break to browse the Internet or go on a walk, or a dollar in a jar to save up for something you would like to buy yourself). Journal about this practice.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Relationship Skills

Being Effective with Others

Being skillful in your relationships has many benefits. For example, you can better get your needs met and get more support from other people.

What May Be Getting in the Way

You first need to figure out **What May Be Getting in the Way** of being effective in your relationships.

- Is it that you do not know relationship skills?
- Are you confused about what you want from your relationships?
- Are you too focused on short-term goals in your relationships?
- Do your thoughts get in your way?
- Do your feelings get in the way?
- Do other people get in your way?

You may need to use the **Problem-Solving Skill**. This skill is explained in the **Emotion Regulation Skills** pages.

Pros and Cons

Think about the **Pros and Cons** of using relationship skills versus the pros and cons of being demanding, attacking, refusing to interact, or giving in too much. This skill is explained in the **Tolerate Distress** pages.

Check the Facts and Challenge Beliefs

Check the Facts and **Challenge Any Beliefs** that may be getting in the way of getting your goals met in your relationships. These skills are explained in the **Emotion Regulation Skills** and **Flexible Thinking Skills** pages.

Clarify Priorities

Clarify Your Priorities. Decide which of three goals you have for a given interaction with someone.

1. Get or keep a positive relationship. In other words, to get someone to feel good about you.
2. Get what you want from someone. Or get them to accept when you say “no.”
3. Keep your self-respect.

Hopefully you will be able to get all three of these goals met when you interact with someone. But sometimes you cannot. Therefore, whenever you interact with someone, you may need to figure out which of the three goals is the most important to you. Do this before the interaction or as it is happening.

Finding Potential Friends

You might need to meet some people before you can get them to feel positive about you. You will have the best luck finding potential friends by looking for people who are nearby you. This is called **Proximity**. It is also useful to look for people who do similar things to what you do. This is called **Similarity**. If people who are nearby you or who you relate to are negative, then you will need to find new places and new things that are positive. For example, if you live in close proximity to a lot of people who commit crimes, then spend most of your time each day away from there. As another example, if you feel more similar to people who commit crimes, then get involved in new work or hobbies that positive people are also doing.

To **Join a Conversation**, look for “**Open Groups**” rather than “**Closed Groups**.” People tend to be standing further away from each other in open groups and there tends to be more gaps in their conversation. These are the types of groups to try to join. Wait for a gap in the conversation. Then ask a group member who looks friendly if you can join the conversation rather than just butting in.

Talk Skillfully with others. Use small talk. Read, listen, and do interesting things so you have more things to “chit-chat” about. Ask people questions and answer questions they ask you. Match how much the other person is telling you about himself or herself. You can try giving just a little more detail than you were asked to deepen the conversation. Do not interrupt.

Express That You Actually Like the Other Person. Comment about something you like about them that is not obvious. But do not go overboard with this and do not lie.

Apply your **Mindfulness Skills to Others**, via your **What (POD) and How (ONE) Skills**. Being a more mindful listener improves closeness to other people. Because people like to be listened to!

Relationship Effectiveness

If your primary goal is to get or keep a positive relationship, use the **GIVE Skill** to make the other person feel good about you.

- **Be Gentle:** Drop threats, attacks, and judgments. Do not act like the other person is beneath you.
 - **Act Interested:** Keep eye contact, nod your head, and use “mmm” sounds to let them know you get the emotions they are expressing.
 - **Validate the Other Person:** How to do this is explained in more detail below.
 - **Keep an Easy-Going Manner:** Be chill. Do not take things too seriously. Laugh at yourself.
-

Objective Effectiveness

If your primary goal is to get what you want from someone, or for them to accept your “no,” first figure out **How Strongly to Ask or Say No**. Ask yourself:

- Is the timing right?
- Am I prepared?
- Is this a priority of mine?
- Do I have the right or authority to ask or say no?
- What type of relationship is this?
- What has the give and take in the relationship been like lately?
- What are my short-term goals?
- What are my long-term goals?

Based on your answers to these questions, use **Wise Mind** to decide to how strongly to ask or say no. This can range from “do not ask” or “do what the other person wants without being asked,” to “ask and do not take no for answer” or “definitely do not do it.”

Then use the **DEAR MAN Skill** to ask or say no.

- **Describe the Situation:** Just state the facts.
- **Express your Feelings and Opinions:** Use “I” statements. This is where you say how you feel. But do not go on for too long here. Keep it tight.
- **Assert What You Want or Are Saying No To:** Make sure it is clear to the other person.

- **Reward:** Tell the other person the good things that will happen if they give you what you want to accept you saying no. Give them the rewards if they do what you ask.
 - **Remain Mindful:** Keep your focus on your **Assert**. Keep saying it over and over. This is called being a **Broken Record**. **Do Not Get Sidetracked** and **Ignore Attacks**. Otherwise, the other person will “win.” Just keep going back to your **Assert**.
 - **Appear Confident:** Keep eye contact. Have strong body language. Use a firm voice.
 - **Negotiate:** Use your **Thinking Flexible Skills**. Ask the other person for ideas if you get stuck. Take a break and say that you will check back in soon to see if there is a way forward. Maybe an idea will occur to you or the other person. Or maybe the situation will have changed. “Live to fight another day.”
-

Self-Respect Effectiveness

If your primary goal is to feel good about yourself, then use the **FAST Skill**.

- **Be Fair:** Use your **Thinking Flexible Skills** and **Mindfulness Skills** on yourself and the other person. **Validate** yourself and the other person.
- **Avoid Apologizing or Over-Apologizing:** Only apologize if you have actually violated one of your own morals or values. And only say it once.
- **Stick to Your Values:** Rank these in order of importance to you.
 - Accomplishing things
 - Being safe and secure
 - Following your own path
 - Working on yourself
 - Being honest and real
 - Being spiritual
 - Relationships
 - Being a part of a group
 - Being powerful or able to influence people
 - Pleasure and satisfaction
 - Excitement
 - Respect

- Seeing the goodness in all things
- Giving back

Then stick to your most important values when using this skill. Do not sell yourself out for reasons that are not really important to you right now.

- **Be Ttruthful:** Do not lie, make excuses, act helpless, or exaggerate.
-

Ending Destructive Relationships

Your self-respect may require **Ending an Interfering or Destructive Relationship**. This calls for all three of the main **Relationship Skills**. It also calls for some of the **Mindfulness Skills** and **Emotion Regulation Skills**.

You should only decide to end a relationship when in **Wise Mind** and never when in **Emotion Mind**.

First think about if the relationship is important and if it interferes with your life but is not destructive. You may be able to improve a relationship like this with your **Problem-Solving Skill**.

But if you need to end a destructive relationship, you should use your **Cope Ahead Skill** to practice and troubleshoot what could get in the way. Be direct with the **Relationship Skills**. Use the **Act Opposite Skill** for love if you love the destructive person. Use **Intimate Partner Violence Safety Procedures** and **Access Social Supports** if these skills apply to the relationship. If ending the destructive relationship may be dangerous to you, work closely with your therapist on a plan that will make it safer.

Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Thinking Flexible and Validation

The **Walking the Middle Path in Your Relationship Skills** are a solution to the dialectic of acceptance versus change in your relationships. You use the **Flexible Thinking Skills** to shift back and forth between the **Validation Skill** and **Behavior Change Skills**.

Dialectics in Relationships

Useful **Flexible Thinking Skills** include the synthesis of opposing forces, seeing everyone as connected, and remembering that change is constantly happening, including when people interact. The **THINK Skill** also helps you to challenge quick, overly negative interpretations of other people's actions.

- **Think about it from the other person's point of view.**
 - **Have empathy.**
 - **Come up with multiple Interpretations for the other person's behavior.**
 - **Notice how the other person has been trying to do better or has been struggling lately.**
 - **Practice Kindness**
-

Validating Other People and Yourself

The **Validation Skill** is the relationship acceptance skill. It is not the same as approving. It is not accepting things that are not facts. It is only admitting what is valid. Facts are valid.

All thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are caused. Therefore, all of them are understandable. But just because something is understandable does not mean that it is valid. Something that is understandable might not fit the facts. And something that does not fit the facts is invalid. Do not validate the invalid.

For example, you may feel badly because you assume something that is not really true. For example, maybe you believe that you will be rejected by other people because of what you did or who you are. The feeling that goes with that thought is shame. But if there are facts to suggest that others will not actually "kick you out," then your assumption that you will be rejected is probably invalid. It is a thinking error.

The thought that you will be rejected had causes, so it is understandable. But because it does not fit all the facts, it is still invalid. This thought should not be validated. But because you had a thought that naturally makes someone feel ashamed, your feeling of shame fits the facts of the thinking error. Therefore, this feeling is valid and should be validated. Do you see the difference between what is valid and invalid here?

There is always a grain of truth somewhere that you can validate if you look closely. Therefore, validation is always a good starting point in your relationships. Use the **Levels of Validation** both on others and yourself.

Levels of Validation

The **Levels of Validation** get deeper and deeper. They also calm uncomfortable emotions.

- **Pay attention:** Be present. Do not multitask. Keep eye contact. Nod your head. Use “mmm” sounds to show you understand the emotions being expressed.
- **Parrot back:** Say back what the person just said using the same words or slightly different words. Do not use a judgmental tone.
- **Guess in a humble way what is not said:** Use your empathy to “feel” what the other person might be thinking or feeling but is not saying. Notice their face, their body language, the situation, and what they have said so far. Then say what you sensed in the form of a question. For example, “Given all that, I would imagine you are feeling pretty frustrated right now?” If the other person says you were wrong, say something like, “Okay, let me keep listening so I can understand better.”
- **Understand:** Show that you “get” that the other person’s thoughts, feelings, or actions make sense. Because all of them have causes. They are caused by their past experience, the current situation, or their present state of mind. In short, just say, “That makes sense.”
- **Admit what is valid:** Show that you “get” that the other person’s thoughts, feelings, or actions fit the facts and are valid. Even if their thoughts are invalid, the emotions that those thinking errors are giving rise to fit the facts of those thinking errors, and can therefore be validated.
- **Equality:** Do not try to outdo the other person. Do not view him or her as weak or unable to take care of himself or herself. Just be yourself and treat him or her as an equal. Equality is a deep human need. Ensure the other person feels equal.

Bouncing Back from Invalidation

Being invalidated by other people can at times be helpful. This is the case when we have the facts wrong. But being invalidated is often painful. Effectively bouncing back from it may call for the use of multiple skills.

To recover from invalidation, use the **Relationship Skills** of **Self-Validation** and **Reaching Out to Your Social Supports**. Also use the **Mindfulness Skill** of **Non-Judgment**, the **Emotion Regulation Skills** of **Check the Facts** and **Opposite Action**, and the **Tolerate Distress Skill** of **Radical Acceptance**.

Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Change

Getting Other People to Change Their Behavior

The **Behavior Change Skills** are the relationship change skills. They work because people often do more of things that get them positive outcomes and less of things that get them negative outcomes. They also do things by copying what they see other people do.

Getting Someone to Do More of Something

If you want to get someone to do more of something, reward them when they do it by giving them something they like or taking away something that they do not like. This is called **Reinforcement** (“ree-in-force-ment”).

If what you want someone to do is complicated, show him or her how to do it. This is called **Modeling**. Then give them rewards when they do some of it, and then only when they do more and more of it. This is called **Shaping**.

If they do what you in one situation, give them a reward. But then only give the reward when they start to do it in other situations too. This is called **Generalization** (“gen-er-uh-liz-ay-shun”).

Different people find different things rewarding. So use a reward that you know the other person actually likes. You will know if you were right if the person starts to do more of the behavior you wanted. If the reward does not seem to be working, ask yourself:

- Did I give the reward quick enough or often enough?
 - Does the person only like the reward at certain times or in certain situations?
 - Did I give enough of the reward?
 - Is the reward “natural,” like when I give my child attention after they quietly do their homework?
 - Is the reward not natural, like when I give my child money for getting a good report card?
-

Getting Someone to Do Less of Something

If you want someone to do less of something, you can do two things. The first option is to stop giving them a reward and ride out the temporary increase in the unwanted behavior. This is called **Extinction** (“ex-tink-shun”). Sometimes it is not obvious that they are doing what they are doing because they are getting a reward. For example, children sometimes throw tantrums because they get attention. In this case, you will need to just ignore the tantrum, rather than accidentally rewarding it with attention. It will eventually go down on its own. The other option is to give the person the reward before the unwanted behavior happens. This is called **Satiation** (“say-shee-ay-shun”). For example, given them lots of attention so they do not feel a need to tantrum to get it.

Getting Someone to Stop Doing Something

If you want to go further in getting someone to stop doing something, you can **Punish**. You do this by adding something negative or taking away something positive. But be careful. Punishment only stops behavior. It does not teach new behavior. People can also “go underground” with their behavior. It is still happening. You are just not seeing it. People can also become depressed and feel helpless if they get punished too much. If you punish, always give someone the opportunity to also get a reward for doing what you want him or her to do instead. Use rewards more than punishment. Your therapist can help you with this.

Relationship Skills Practice 1 (Being Effective with Others)

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread the **Being Effective with Others** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Once this week, write out the **Pros and Cons** of using Relationship Skills versus being demanding, attacking, refusing to interact, or giving in too much, both in the short-term and long-term. Log your practice on your diary card.
3. Identify at least one interaction you have with someone where your number one **Priority** is to get or keep someone feeling positive about you. Also identify at least one interaction where your priority is to get what you want or get someone to accept you saying “no.” And finally, identify at least one interaction where your priority is to maintain your self-respect. Log your practice on your diary card.
4. At least once this week, think about how you can meet a potential new positive friend who is in fairly close **Proximity** to you (physically or perhaps online) and is **Similar** to you (for example, you share an interest or hobby). Journal about an idea or ideas you come up with.
5. If you are able to interact with this potential new friend, try **Talking Skillfully** with them while using your **Mindfulness What (POD)** and **How (ONE) Skills**, and **Expressing that you Like** something that is not obvious about them. Journal about how it goes.
6. If you happen to encounter a group of people while trying the above few practices, try your **Skills for Joining a Conversation** with an open group. Journal about how it goes.
7. At least once this week, try using each letter of the **GIVE Skill** with someone. How does the other person seem to feel about you afterward? Log your practice on your diary card.
8. At least once this week, try using each letter of the **DEAR MAN Skill** with someone. Did you get what you wanted from them afterward? Log your practice on your diary card.
9. At least once this week, try using each letter of the **FAST Skill** with someone. Setting aside how they seem to feel about you, and whether you get what you want, how do you feel about yourself afterward? Log your practice on your diary card.
10. Once this week, practice using your **Mindfulness Skills** to access **Wise Mind**. Then think about a problematic relationship in your life and use Wise Mind to better determine if it is an **Interfering Relationship** or a **Destructive Relationship**. Journal about this process. Then plan to talk with your therapist about what you might do about this relationship.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Relationship Skills Practice 2 (Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Flexible Thinking and Validation)

1. Continue to practice the **GIVE**, **DEAR MAN**, and **FAST Skills** this week. Log your practice on your diary card.
2. Reread the **Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Flexible Thinking and Validation** section on your own at least once this week.
3. At least once this week, try using each letter of the **THINK Skill** for someone you are thinking negatively about. Do you think or feel any differently about them afterward?
4. In an interaction with someone this week, try using each **Level of Validation Skill**. Does the person seem calmer afterward? Log your practice on your diary card.
5. At least once this week when you feel invalidated, **Talk to Yourself** using each **Level of Validation** and **Non-Judgment Skills**. Then try **Radically Accepting** yourself and the situation. Finally, talk with someone you trust (like a family member, friend, or therapist) about feeling invalidated. How do you feel afterward? Journal about this process.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Relationship Skills Practice 3 (Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Change)

1. Continue to practice the **DEAR MAN Skill** this week. Log your practice on your diary card.
2. Reread the **Walking the Middle Path in Relationships: Change** section on your own at least once this week.
3. A few times this week, try to get someone to do more of something you want by offering and giving them a **Reward** for each time they do it. Offer them something they like or want, or take away something they do not like or want. Do they end up doing it more often? Journal about the experience.
4. A few times this week, be a **Model** and **Shaper** by showing someone the first step of how to do something somewhat complicated that you want them to do. Offer and give them a **Reward** for doing the first step. Then show them a second step and offer them a reward for doing it. Only give them another reward if they do the second step (not if they only do the first step again). Finally, show them a third step and offer them a reward for doing it. Only give them the reward if they do the third step (not if they only do the first or second step again). Does this work to get the person to do something closer to what you ultimately want from them? Journal about the experience.
5. When trying to use rewards this week, if the person does not do what you want more often, ask yourself the following questions: *Did I give the reward fast enough or often enough? Did I give enough of the reward? Was it a “natural” (relationship-based) reward? Does the person only like the reward at special times or in special situations?* Journal about your answers to these questions. Then talk with your therapist about your answers, to help figure out how to make your rewards more effective.
6. Throughout the week, try **Extinction** by completely stopping giving a reward (like your attention) to someone when they did something you did not want. Do they do it more often for a little while and then stop doing it as often? Journal about the experience and plan to talk with your therapist about it.
7. Throughout the week, try **Satiation** by giving a reward to someone before they do something you do not want. Do they stop doing it as often? Journal about the experience and plan to talk with your therapist about it.
8. Plan out a menu of **Punishments** for someone who often does things you do not like. Make sure each of the punishments “fits the crime,” that it is not too soft nor too harsh. Then plan out the **Rewards** you will give the person if they do what you want instead. Journal about this process. Then plan to talk with your therapist about what you came up with.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Emotion Regulation Skills

Know about Emotions

Emotion Regulation

Regulation means to understand and change your current or future emotions.

Why We Have Emotions

Simply **Understanding and Naming Emotions** can help with difficult emotions. This works because it is part of **Validation** of yourself. This skill is described in the **Relationship Skills** pages.

We have evolved to have emotions. Each emotion has urges that go with it. These urges motivate us to take actions to overcome common problems in our lives. Although our emotions and urges are generally useful, they can sometimes causes problems for us.

Emotions also help us communicate with others and influence them. We are social creatures and emotions help with this.

Emotions also help us communicate with ourselves. Emotions work like an alert system inside our body. The alarm tells us to pay attention to the current moment.

7 Basic Emotions

We have **2 Basic Positive Emotions**:

- **Happiness**
- **Interest**

We have **5 Basic Negative Emotions**:

- **Anger**
 - **Fear**
 - **Sadness**
 - **Disgust**
 - **Guilt and Shame**
-

Complex Emotions

The Basic Emotions can vary in **Intensity**. They can also be **Combined** to create **Complex Emotions**. For example, you can be annoyed (mild) versus angry (medium) versus enraged (hot). Or you can combine intense interest + intensive happiness which = love.

In addition to the **7 Basic Emotions**, you might also want to learn about some other important emotions:

- **Envy**
- **Jealousy**
- **Love**
- **Guilt versus Shame**
- **Dissatisfaction**
- **Distress**
- **Shy**
- **Cautious**
- **Surprise**
- **Courage**
- **Powerful**
- **Doubt**
- **Bored**

Secondary Emotions

One emotion can cause a second emotion. This is called a **Secondary Emotion**. An example is if you become angry to hide that you were actually first sad or afraid.

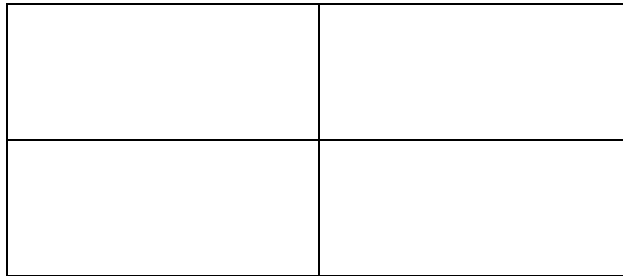
A Picture of an Emotion

You can draw an emotion that you are feeling to help you figure out what it is.

First draw a big square in the middle of the page.



Turn the center square into 4 smaller squares by drawing a line down the center of it and another line across the center of it.



The two squares on the left have to do with the biology of an emotion. The two squares on the right have to do with the expression of an emotion.

Biology	Expression

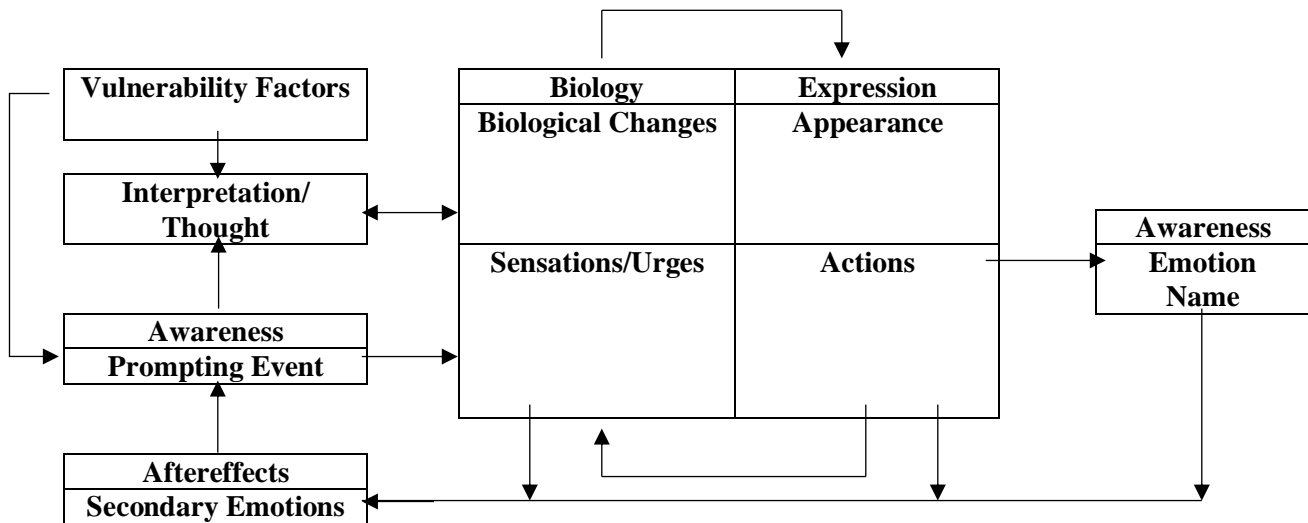
One of the biology boxes is the changes that happen in your brain and a body system called the “nervous system.” The other is your body sensations and urges.

One of the expression boxes is what you look like. Your face expression and your body language. The other expression box is what you say and do.

Biology	Expression
Biological Changes	Appearance
Sensations/Urges	Actions

Draw a few other boxes around the center box. Sort of like the **Chain Skill**, one of these boxes is vulnerability factors. Another box is the prompting event and if you are aware of it. Another box is interpretations of the prompting event. Another box is awareness of your current emotion. Another box is “aftereffects” like secondary emotions.

There are many connections (arrows) among the boxes. This means that there are different paths to an emotion.



All emotions can be understood with this picture. This can help you to name what you are feeling. Being able to name how you are feeling is important for the **Check the Facts Skill** and **Opposite Action Skill**. All the **Emotion Regulation Skills** target different boxes in this picture to change how you feel. For example, the **Problem-Solving Skill** changes the Prompting Event. The **Check the Facts Skill** changes Interpretations. The **Acting Opposite Skill** changes unwanted Emotions.

The Tumbleweed Story

Sometimes a **Prompting Event** leads to an **Interpretation (Thought)** which leads to an **Emotion**. This can be remembered with a story about a tumbleweed, a big ball of plant that blows around out West.

Two people see a large tumbleweed in the middle of the road while driving together near Las Vegas (**Prompting Event**). The driver has seen tumbleweeds before. The passenger has never seen a tumbleweed before. The driver is driving fast, and the passenger is a generally anxious person (**Vulnerability Factors**).

The driver knows from prior experience that tumbleweeds are harmless (**Interpretation**). So nothing really changes inside of him (**Biological Changes**), he does not feel any differently (**Sensations/Urges**), he looks the same (**Appearance**), and he does not change his driving (**Actions**). He feels calm (**Emotion Name**) and this does not change (**Aftereffect**).

The passenger who knows nothing about tumbleweeds just sees a giant ball in the middle of the road rolling toward the car. The passenger thinks to himself, “This giant ball looks dangerous, and it is going to hit us” (**Interpretation**). The passenger’s heart begins to beat fast, his muscles tighten, and he starts to have difficulty breathing (**Biological Changes**). He feels “butterflies” in his stomach and has urges to scream and get out of the way of the tumbleweed (**Sensations/Urges**). The passenger bites his teeth together, looks around quickly, and starts shaking and sweating (**Appearance**). He yells to the driver, “Watch out!” (**Actions**). He feels terrified, panicked (**Emotion Name**). At that moment, the driver drives straight through the tumbleweed, and it turns into dust. The passenger has the urge to say “phew,” looks grateful to be alive, and sits back in his seat. He feels relieved, calm (**Aftereffect**).

Stubbing Your Toe

Sometimes a **Prompting Event** leads to an **Emotion** which leads to a **Thought**. For example, stubbing your toe immediately causes pain and anger. You do not need to think about it first. The pain and anger then give rise to the thought, “f**k!”

Change Emotions

Check the Facts

To change unwanted emotions, first use the **Check the Facts Skill**. Think about the emotion you want to change. Think about the prompting event. Think about your thoughts about the prompting event. Think about how likely the outcome is that you expect to happen. Think about how important or serious that outcome is if it happens.

You might need to also use your **Mindfulness What (POD) Skills, Flexible Thinking Skills, Problem-Solving Skill, Coping Ahead Skill, and Radical Acceptance Skill**. Some of these skills are described in the **Flexible Thinking, Mindfulness, and Tolerate Distress Skills** pages.

Decide if your emotion fits the facts in terms of how intense it is or how long it lasts. For instance,

- **Fear** fits the fact of real danger.
- **Anger** fits the fact of your goal being blocked or of intense pain.
- **Sadness** fits the fact of losing something you value.
- **Disgust** fits the fact of being exposed to something that could make you ill.
- **Guilt** fits the fact of you violating your own internal morals or values.
- **Shame** fits the fact of you violating other people's standards and they may reject you for it.
- **Envy** fits the fact of other people having something that you want or need.
- **Jealousy** fits the fact of a danger that something important to you or something that you value will be taken away or lost.
- **Love** fits the fact of something or someone improving your life or the chance that you will meet your goals.

All these emotional responses are valid and justified. How intense or how long your emotions last are justified based on how likely the outcome is, how serious the outcome is in your life, and how effective the emotion is for you in the moment.

Invalid emotions are emotions that do not fit the Prompting Event. They are also emotions that are too intense or long-lasting because the threat posed to you by the Prompting Event is small. These emotions still have causes and are understandable. They are just not justified.

Opposite Action

Even when an emotion fits the facts, you still have to ask if acting on the urges of the emotion will be effective.

Anger is a good example here, as it is often a justified emotional reaction. Many things block our goals each day. But the experience of anger is often unwanted. Or the expression of anger is ineffective. This is the case when it is too difficult to regulate and so it gets out of control.

When an emotion is unjustified, or when it is valid but acting on it would be ineffective, the **Opposite Action Skill** is often a good one to use. You first understand and name the emotion, check the facts, and identify the action urges that go with the emotion. Then you figure out the opposite of those urges. Do the opposite all the way, with your mind, body, and spirit, over and over until the unwanted emotion goes down.

Emotion	Action urges	Opposite actions
Fear	Run or avoid	Go toward
Anger	Attack or insult	Gently avoid or be a little kind
Sadness	Withdraw or isolate	Get active
Disgust	Keep your distance or be judgmental	Get closer or be kind
Guilt/Shame	Hide or apologize	Tell others who will accept it, or repeat it If appropriate, go public about it, apologize, repair, accept the consequences, or do not do it anymore If appropriate, hide, use Relationship Skills , change other people’s values, join a new group, or do it again
Envy	Take or destroy or be ungrateful	Leave it be or count your blessings
Jealousy	Control or keep it to yourself	Let go or share
Love	Spend time with or think about what is loved	Avoid, distract, or remind yourself why love is unjustified

Problem Solving

You can try to change or avoid a prompting event for an unwanted but justified emotion with the **Problem-Solving Skill**. The steps are to:

- Identify and describe the problematic situation, including the **Check the Facts Skill**.
- Figure out your goal.
- Come up with lots of possible solutions. Try to come up with as many as you can without judging them as good or bad.
- Choose a solution. Probably pick the one with the most pros and the fewest cons using the **Pros and Cons Skill**.

- Put the solution into motion.
 - See if your goal happens. If your solution does not work, go back to the solution-picking step and pick the next best one on your list.
-

Acting on Urges

If an emotion is justified and likely to be effective, you should go ahead and act on the urges of the emotion.

Reduce Vulnerability to Emotion Mind

In addition to decreasing unwanted emotions, you can also reduce how likely you are to experience negative emotions ahead of time with the **ABC PLEASE Skills**. The ABC of these skills are very useful for building a life worth living.

- **Accumulate Positive Emotions**
 - **Build Mastery**
 - **Cope Ahead**
 - **Treat Physical Illness**
 - **Eat Balanced**
 - **Avoid Drugs and Alcohol**
 - **Sleep Enough**
 - **Exercise Enough**
-

Accumulate Positive Emotions

Accumulate means “to get.”

You can use the **Accumulate Positive Emotions Skill** in both the short-term and long-term.

In the short-term, do things that you enjoy each day. Do whatever you like. For example, eat some candy, laugh, or do your hobby. Do not avoid doing things you enjoy. Use your **Mindfulness Skills** when you are doing these activities.

In the long-term:

- Figure out the **Values** that are important to you.
 - Accomplishing things?
 - Being safe and secure?
 - Following your own path?
 - Working on yourself?
 - Being honest and real?
 - Being spiritual?
 - Relationships?

- Being a part of a group?
 - Being powerful or able to influence people?
 - Pleasure and satisfaction?
 - Excitement?
 - Respect?
 - Seeing the goodness in all things?
 - Giving back?
- Figure out your **Value Priorities**. Decide on the values that are **both important to you in general and most important in your life right now**.
 - Choose a **Priority Value** to work on. Use the **Pros and Cons Skill** if you need to.
 - Figure out **Goals** connected to the value you chose.
 - Select a Goal to work on. Use the **Pros and Cons Skill** if you need to.
 - Figure out **Actions Steps** connected to the Goal.
 - Take an Action Step.

Build Mastery

To use the **Build Mastery Skill**, do something each day that makes you feel like you won. Do things that are challenging but that you will likely succeed at. Increase the difficulty bit by bit. If something is too easy, make it a little harder. If something is too hard, make it a little easier.

Cope Ahead

If you know that you will have a difficult event in the future, use the **Cope Ahead Skill** before you get to it.

- Describe a situation that you expect will be difficult for you in the future.
- Decide on the skills that you want to use if that event happens. Write this plan out until you get good at this skill and can do it just by thinking about it. You might fold the plan and carry it in your pocket, wallet, or purse to boost your confidence. Like a “cheat sheet.”
- Imagine the situation in your mind. Think about what the event will look like, what it will sound like, and what it will feel like. Imagine all this from the point of view of looking out of your own eyes.

- Practice effective coping in your mind. Think about exactly what and how you will think. Think about exactly what and how you will talk and act. Think about new problems that might come up. Think about your most feared outcome and how you will still effectively copy with it.
 - Do relaxing things when you are done practicing to “wind down.”
-

Take Care of Your Mind by Taking Care of Your Body

You can reduce the likelihood of your Emotion Mind taking over too much by taking care of your body. Use the **PLEASE Skill**.

- **Treat Physical Illness:** Take care of health. See the doctor and take medicine if you are ill.
- **Eat a Balanced Diet:** Do not eat too much or too little. Eat regularly and using your **Mindfulness Skills** throughout the day.
- **Avoid Using Illegal Drugs and Too Much Alcohol:** But taking drugs given to you by your doctor or psychiatrist is okay.
- **Get Balanced Sleep:**
 - Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. At least get the amount of sleep that keeps you feeling good.
 - Keep to a regular schedule for sleeping, even on weekends.
 - Stay out of your bed during the day. Do not use it for anything but sleep and sex.
 - Avoid caffeine, nicotine, exercise, and eating dinner late at night.
 - Turn off the lights and keep the room cool.
 - Give yourself a half-hour to one hour to fall asleep.
 - Do not freak out if you are have trouble sleeping. Tell yourself that you need rest. Do not give up and get up for the day. But do not believe that not sleeping is the end of the world.
 - Get out of bed, go to another room, and read something neutral or boring. Go back to your bed, close your eyes, and continue the story in your mind.
 - Eat a light snack. For example, eat a piece of fruit.
 - Use the **Temperature Skill**, get in bed, and use the **Paced Breathing Skill**.
 - Keep counting slowly back from 9 to 0 until you fall asleep.
 - Close your eyes and listen to public radio at a low volume.

- Observe your body sensations if you keep thinking worry thoughts.
 - Tell yourself that nighttime worry thoughts are normal and that you will think and feel different in the morning.
 - If you cannot stop worrying, use the **Cope Ahead Skill**.
 - If you have **Nightmares**:
 - Use relaxing skills, think about pleasant images, and use the **Cope Ahead Skill**.
 - Select a nightmare that you keep having.
 - Write down the nightmare.
 - Select a different and positive outcome to the nightmare.
 - Write down the nightmare with the positive outcome.
 - Think about the changed nightmare a few times at night and then use relaxing skills.
 - Think about the changed nightmare a few times during the day and then use relaxing skills.
 - **Get Enough Exercise**: Exercise for at least 20 minutes each day.
-

Mindfulness of Current Emotions

You might have really difficult or extreme emotions that are not quite distressing, not quite to the level of a crisis. Or you might be becoming distressed but not yet.

Trying to push down these emotions can increase your suffering. So instead use the **Mindfulness of Current Emotions Skill**.

- **Mindfully Observe** the emotion. Notice that because you can observe your emotion, you are not your emotion.
- Maybe do not act on the emotion.
- Do not push down, hold onto, or “turn up the volume” on the emotion.
- Surf the “wave” of the emotion. **Mindfully Observe** body sensations. Notice where in your body you feel the emotion. Notice how long those sensations last.
- Love your emotion. Be **Willing** to experience it. **Do Not Judge** it. Respect it. **Radically Accept** it.

Managing Extreme Emotions

When you are very emotional, use the skill of **Managing Extreme Emotions**.

- You can use your **Observe** and **Describe Skills** to see if you have reached a Skills Breakdown Point. This is when you are distressed or overwhelmed. You cannot stop thinking about the emotion. You can no longer fully take in new information, you cannot use the **Problem-Solving Skill**, and you cannot use complicated skills.
- Use the **Check the Facts Skill**. If you find that you are not really falling apart or are not truly out of control, use skills. If you are falling apart or are out of control, use the **Crisis Survival Skills**. These are explained in the **Tolerate Distress** pages. Then use the **Mindfulness of Current Emotions Skill**. Then use other **Emotional Regulation Skills** if you need them.

Troubleshooting Problems with Emotion Regulation

Regulating emotions can be hard because of

- the **Biology** of emotions.
- you get **Rewards** from others for being very emotional.
- you have beliefs or attitudes about emotions and expressing emotions that are **Not Flexible** or **Do Not Fit the Facts**.
- you **Do Not Know Skills** you need.

- you always **Act Consistent with Your Mood**.
- **Emotion Overload**.

If any of these things are getting in the way of you regulating your emotions, **Troubleshoot the Problem**.

- For your biology, use the **PLEASE Skill**.
- If you are getting rewards from others, use the **Pros and Cons Skill**, seek out new rewards, and use **Relationship Skills** like **Validation** of yourself.
- For your thoughts, use the **Check the Facts Skill**. Use the **Flexible Thinking Skills** to challenge your thoughts. And use the **Non-Judgment Skill**.
- If you lack skills knowledge, review skills or get assistance from someone who knows skills, like your therapist.
- For moodiness, use the **Pros and Cons Skill**, **Radical Acceptance Skill**, **Participate Skill**, and **Effective Skill**.
- If you feel overwhelmed by your emotions, you can use the **Mindfulness of Current Emotions Skill**, **TIPP Skills**, and **Problem-Solving Skill**.

Emotion Regulation Skills Practice 1 (Know about Emotions)

REMEMBER:

You do not get in shape by knowing how to work out. You get in shape by working out.

1. Reread the **Know about Emotions** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Try to notice and say when you feel each of the following basic emotions at least once this week: happiness, interest, anger, sadness, fear, disgust, and guilt/shame. For each emotion, is it a low, medium, or high level of the emotion? Jot down your observations in your journal.
3. At least once this week, notice when you feel a complex emotion, like one of the following: envy, jealousy, love, dissatisfaction, distress, shy, cautious, surprise, courage, powerful, doubt, or bored. Then see if you can identify two or more basic emotions, at low, medium, or high levels, that form part of the complex emotion. Jot down what you come up with in your journal.
4. For one of the emotions that you identify this week, draw and write in notes for a picture of the emotion. Include boxes for your vulnerability factors, your awareness of the prompting event, your initial interpretation or thought, sensations and urges you felt, your appearance, your actions, your awareness of the name of the emotion, and any other emotion you felt afterward. Show this picture to your therapist.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Emotion Regulation Skills Practice 2 (Change Emotions)

1. Reread the **Change Emotions** section on your own at least once this week.
2. For a few of the emotions you identify this week, ask yourself if the emotion **Fit the Facts** of the prompting event. Then ask yourself if the likelihood and seriousness of what you expected to happen based on the emotion fit how intensely and how long you felt the emotion. Log your **Check the Facts Skill** practice on your diary card.
3. At least once this week, catch yourself experiencing an emotion that does not fit the facts, or an emotion with urges that would not be effective to act on even if the emotion does fit the facts. Then figure out what the **Opposite** of **Acting** on that emotion would look like. Then act all the way opposite of the original emotion, with your mind, body, and spirit, over and over. Does the original emotion go down? Log your **Opposite Action Skill** practice on your diary card.
4. At least once this week, try all the steps of planning out how to **Problem Solve** to change or avoid an event that would prompt an unwanted emotion. Log your **Problem-Solving Skill** practice on your diary card.
5. At least once this week, catch yourself experiencing an emotion that does fit the facts and would be effective to act on. Then act on the urges of the emotion. Jot down your observations in your journal.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

Emotion Regulation Skills Practice 3 (Reduce Vulnerability to Emotion Mind)

1. Reread the **Reduce Vulnerability to Emotion Mind** section on your own at least once this week.
2. Write out at least one thing you will do that you enjoy for each day of the week. Then do these things each day while using your **Mindfulness What (POD)** and **How (ONE) Skills**. Does a positive emotion arise? Log your **Accumulate Positive Emotions Skill** practice on your diary card.
3. Figure out a value that is important to you this week. Then figure out a goal connected to the value that could be reached by the end of the week. Then come up with two to three actions steps you can take this week to reach that goal. Then take each of those steps. If you accomplish this goal by the end of the week, does a positive emotion arise? Log your **Accumulate Positive Emotions Skill** practice on your diary card.
4. Figure out something you want to get better at. Then take a step each day toward getting better at it. Do not take too small or too large of a step. If you are not successful, make the step a little smaller the next day. Every time you accomplish a step, how do you feel about yourself? Log your **Building Mastery Skill** practice on your diary card.
5. At least once this week, identify a difficult situation that you expect will come up sometime during the week. Then write out a plan of skills you will use to cope effectively with this situation. Then think about the situation and imagine using all the skills you planned out. Think about the outcome going well because you used your skills. And think about the outcome not going well, and you continuing to use your skills to keep it from getting any worse. Then do something relaxing to wind down from the practice. If the situation actually does arise during the week, how do you feel during it? Log your **Cope Ahead Skill** practice on your diary card.
6. If you are sick this week, take medicine or go to a doctor. Try to eat in a balanced way each day of the week. Do not drink any alcohol or take any drugs not prescribed by a doctor. Try several sleep hygiene tips. And try to get at least 20 minutes of exercise every day. Do you feel more emotionally balanced throughout the week as a result? Log your **PLEASE Skill** practice on your diary card.
7. At least once this week when you notice an intense unwanted emotion, use your **Observe** and **Loving Kindness Skills** with it. Imaging surfing the emotion. Do a body scan on the emotion. Apply your **Willingness** and **Radical Acceptance Skills** to the emotion. Journal about the experience.
8. At least once this week when you notice an intense unwanted emotion, follow the steps for **Managing Extreme Emotions**. Journal about the experience.
9. **Troubleshoot** at least one lingering **Problem** emotion this week. Journal about what the problem seems to be and which skills you could use to troubleshoot that problem emotion.

Talk about all this practice with your therapist at your next session.

References

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