

TIPP

DBT SKILLS · DISTRESS TOLERANCE

Using the body to bring very intense emotion down

When emotion is extremely intense, it can be hard to think, reason or use other skills. The TIPP skills, called the TIP skills in Linehan's DBT manual, work through the body rather than through thinking. They may help bring intensity down enough to think more clearly again. They are short-term tools, not a way of solving the underlying problem.

01 From very high to more manageable

intensity from 1 to 10

1 · ABLE TO THINK AGAIN

10 · OVERWHELMED, HARD TO THINK



once intensity eases: STOP, problem-solving, reaching out

TIPP may help most here

Original diagram. TIPP skills are designed for moments of very high intensity, when other skills are hard to use.

02 The four TIPP skills

T Temperature

Cold water on the face, while briefly holding your breath.

HOW TO TRY IT

- Fill a bowl with cold water, lean forward and hold your breath
- Put your face in the water for a short time, such as 15–30 seconds
- Or hold a cold pack or wrapped ice over your eyes and cheeks

WHY IT MAY HELP

Cold on the face combined with breath-holding can trigger the body's 'dive response', which slows the heart rate.

Take care: Check with your doctor first if you have a heart condition, a low heart rate, an eating disorder, are pregnant, or take medication that affects heart rate.

I Intense exercise

A short burst of vigorous movement, matching the energy of the emotion.

HOW TO TRY IT

- Run on the spot, climb stairs quickly or do star jumps
- Go for a fast walk, cycle or dance
- Keep going for a short burst, as your fitness allows

WHY IT MAY HELP

Vigorous movement may help use up the body's readiness for action, and many people feel calmer afterwards.

Take care: Stay within your physical limits, and check with your GP if you have health conditions.

P Paced breathing

Slow your breathing, with the out-breath a little longer than the in-breath.

HOW TO TRY IT

- Breathe in gently for about 4 counts
- Breathe out slowly for about 6 counts
- Continue for one to two minutes

WHY IT MAY HELP

Slow breathing has been linked with physiological changes associated with calming, such as higher heart rate variability (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

Take care: If you feel light-headed, return to your natural breathing.

P Paired muscle relaxation

Tense a muscle group as you breathe in, then let it go as you breathe out.

HOW TO TRY IT

- Tense for about five seconds, firmly but not to the point of pain
- Release as you breathe out, and notice the difference
- Move through hands, arms, shoulders, face, stomach and legs

WHY IT MAY HELP

Pairing release with the out-breath, and perhaps a calming word, may help the body learn to relax more quickly with practice.

Take care: Avoid tensing any area that is injured or painful.

03 Putting it together

one way the skills can combine

Notice

"My intensity is around 9 out of 10. I can't think straight."

Use the body

Cold water on the face, or a short burst of fast movement.

Slow down

A couple of minutes of paced breathing or muscle relaxation.

Re-rate and choose

"Now around 6." Then use STOP, problem-solve, or reach out.

What the research suggests

EVIDENCE NOTE

These are among the crisis survival skills taught in dialectical behaviour therapy (Linehan, 2015). DBT has good evidence as a whole treatment, and increases in skills use have been linked with improvement (Neacsiu et al., 2010). Research on each TIPP skill on its own is more limited.

Their effects are usually short-lived. They are intended to help you through an intense moment, not to solve the problem behind it, and they tend to work best when practised in calmer times.

TIPP

WORKSHEET · MY TIPP PLAN

Preparing ahead, so the skills are ready when you need them

TIPP skills are easiest to use in an intense moment if you have tried them when calmer. Short notes are fine.

04 My TIPP plan

fill this in ahead of time

T · My temperature option

What I will use, and where I can access it

☐ I have checked any health concerns with my doctor

I · My go-to movement

Something I can do quickly, almost anywhere

☐ It fits my fitness and health

P · My breathing count

A rhythm that feels comfortable for me

In for _____ counts, out for _____ counts

☐ I have practised this when calm

P · My muscle sequence

The order I will move through, and a calming word

☐ I know which areas to avoid

05 Knowing when to use it

Signs my intensity is very high:

- ☐ Hard to think straight
 ☐ Heart pounding
 ☐ Shaking or restless
 ☐ Urge to act right now
 ☐ Feeling flooded
 ☐ Other

I will try TIPP when my intensity reaches about _____ out of 10

06 Practice record

intensity 0 = none · 10 = most intense

Date	What was happening	Before 0-10	Skill I used	After 0-10	What I noticed
		_____/10	☐ T ☐ I ☐ P ☐ P	_____/10	
		_____/10	☐ T ☐ I ☐ P ☐ P	_____/10	
		_____/10	☐ T ☐ I ☐ P ☐ P	_____/10	
		_____/10	☐ T ☐ I ☐ P ☐ P	_____/10	
		_____/10	☐ T ☐ I ☐ P ☐ P	_____/10	

07 Once the intensity eases

what I will do next

- ☐ Use STOP before acting
 ☐ Problem-solve once calmer
 ☐ Reach out to someone I trust
 ☐ Do something soothing
 ☐ Follow my safety plan, if I have one
 ☐ Talk it through with my psychologist

To bring to my next session

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Planning for intense moments can bring up difficult feelings. You can pause, stop, or return to this later. If you become significantly distressed, consider speaking with your psychologist or another appropriate professional.

SOURCES

Linehan, M. M. (2015). *DBT skills training handouts and worksheets* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

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