

Coping with Distress Using the RESISTT Technique

What to Know

When you're overwhelmed by emotions, sometimes it's hard to react in a healthy way. Maybe you overeat, drink alcohol, or harm yourself. The Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) RESISTT technique is a set of seven skills to help you cope with the unhealthy urges associated with distress.

Emotions can feel unbearable in a distressing situation or crisis. When you're very emotional you might try to avoid how you feel by distracting yourself with a bad habit.

RESISTT will help you manage distress and resist behaviors that are not good for you. Use the following skills and choose one (or more) that's suitable for you.

- 1. Reframe the Situation.** When you're upset, you might think, "Life is terrible," "I'll never stop feeling this way," or, "Things will never get better." Reframing changes your perspective. If you can "find the silver lining" it's easier to see why the situation is not as bad as it seems. This isn't meant to invalidate tough situations – it's a way to consider your situation in a more hopeful and realistic way.
- 2. Engage in a Distracting Activity.** Pick an activity to thoughtfully engage in so you can distract yourself from your distress or the upsetting situation.
- 3. Someone Else.** If you focus your attention on another person, you can shift your attention to something other than your overwhelming emotions. Maybe you can help a loved one with a task, volunteer at a shelter, or listen when someone is telling their story.
- 4. Intense Sensations.** It can be helpful to distract yourself by experiencing safe, intense sensations. For example, take a cold shower or hot bath, or hold an ice cube in your hand. The idea is to experience intense sensations that aren't harmful.
- 5. Shut It Out.** In a crisis, it's useful to leave the environment and go somewhere where you can calm yourself, if possible. Once you remove yourself from the situation, if you continue to think about it, ask yourself whether you can solve the problem now. If the answer is yes – do that. If the answer is no – visualize placing your problem in a box, putting the box aside, and "shutting it out."
- 6. Neutral Thoughts.** Do something that won't add to your distress, like counting to ten, counting your breaths, or focusing on the colors of the objects around you. Sing your favorite song or repeat a phrase that seems helpful to you in the moment, like, "I can get through this because I am strong."
- 7. Take a Break.** Maybe you can put off chores until tomorrow or take a day off work. Give yourself some time to calm down.

This worksheet will help you practice each step of RESISTT to prepare for times when you need to cope with a crisis or emotional distress.

What to Do

First, describe a recent situation where you were overwhelmed by emotions and experienced significant distress. Maybe it was a crisis or a situation where you felt out of control. Be specific.

R – what can you do to reframe this situation? Write down three statements.

E – write down healthy activities you enjoy doing in your free time. Choose something you can easily do. Write down five activities.

Here are some more ideas you can use to distract yourself from your distress. Put a check next to activities you'd consider doing:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cook your favorite meal | <input type="checkbox"/> have a cup of coffee with a friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> dance to your favorite music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> watch a movie at home | <input type="checkbox"/> do a new hobby |
| <input type="checkbox"/> take a hot bubble bath | <input type="checkbox"/> visit a museum or a gallery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> learn to play a musical instrument | <input type="checkbox"/> go for a walk outside |

___ play a board game with your friends

___ chat online with your friends

___ go shopping and browse

___ start writing a book

___ read a magazine or the newspaper

___ get a massage or get a pedicure

___ watch a sports event

___ buy some plants or do some gardening

___ go to the movies or watch a play

___ read a book

___ play video games

___ play with your pet or give it a bath

___ have a picnic or go for a hike

___ take a nap or sleep

___ listen to a podcast or talk radio

___ start a journal

___ go outside and enjoy the sunshine

___ watch a YouTube video

___ dress nice and go out

___ go for a drive

___ create art

___ go out and have your favorite lunch

___ do some coloring

___ do some work or finish up a chore

___ buy a gift for a loved one

___ write a letter or email to a friend

___ go swimming in the local pool

___ watch stand-up comedy

Now, choose ten pleasurable activities you would like to do to distract yourself the next time you are upset. Keep this list on your phone or posted where you can see it.

S – write down the names of three people you can contact or focus on when you are upset.

I – what safe, intense sensations can you choose to distract yourself? For example, you might go for a run, take a cold shower, or hold an ice cube in your hand.

S – referring to the upsetting situation you described above, ask yourself whether you could’ve easily solved the problem. If the answer is yes – what could you have done?

If the answer is no – visualize placing that situation or problem in a box and putting the box aside for now. Write down ways you can “shut it out.”

T – what are some easy, basic things you can do to shift into neutral thoughts? For example, you can count your breaths or do simple math problems in your head.

T – what does taking a break mean to you? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this activity help you prepare for times when you will need to cope with a crisis or emotional distress in the future? Why or why not?

Do you think that using one of the RESISTT skills will help you avoid unhealthy habits or harmful coping behaviors? Why or why not?

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise?

What was the easiest part?

What are your feelings about practicing these skills in a real-life situation?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful).

What did you learn from this exercise?
