

# DBT Skills Group

- Goal: Learn DBT skills to help manage strong emotions, unhelpful behavior urges, improving relationships, and navigate stressful situations in your life, and to achieve readiness for trauma exposures
- Daily Format:
  - Brief mindfulness exercise
  - Review of previous day's skills practice
  - Learn and try out new skills
  - Assign outside practice

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# **Mindfulness practice**

## Skills practice review: DEAR MAN

- Identify a current or past situation in your life that DEAR MAN would apply to and practice writing out “DEAR” script for this situation
- Practice making one assertive request, e.g.:
  - Special request at restaurant
  - Ask someone you love to help you with something
  - Disagree with someone’s opinion
  - Ask for help in a store

# DBT Skills Categories

- Mindfulness
- **Distress Tolerance: skills that help us get through distressing situations without feeling worse, engaging in unsafe/unhelpful behaviors**
- Emotion Regulation
- Interpersonal Effectiveness

# Distress Tolerance

- **Distress tolerance skills are used when:**
  - Emotions are HOT
  - We CAN'T immediately fix the problem
  - We could make the problem WORSE, and want to avoid this

# How to Use Distress Tolerance Skills

- Distress tolerance skills are for immediate crises only
  - Not meant as a “way of life” or strategy for any time you feel any emotion.
  - Use distress tolerance skills until emotion intensity is moderate enough that you can think more clearly, then use other skills
- Distress tolerance skills **MAY NOT MAKE YOU “FEEL BETTER”**
  - Sometimes they can reduce emotion intensity, but primarily they are meant to help you feel more in control even while emotions are still intense/painful
  - A distress tolerance skill “works” if it helps prevent you from acting on Emotion Mind, and helps you buy yourself time until emotion & emotion urges decrease naturally



*Today's skill:*

Stop

Take a step back

Observe

Proceed mindfully

# STOP: Why use?

- Trauma impacts awareness of our emotions:
  - Swinging between emotionally flooded & acting on impulse, and emotionally cut off and unaware of emotions until it feels too late
  - Feels like emotions/urges can go from “0 to 60” and we have little control/awareness
- Goal of STOP skill:
  - Learn to identify triggers and warning signs of high emotion to help catch and interrupt unhelpful behaviors
  - **Used as a 1<sup>st</sup> step: STOP helps us be aware we are struggling, and pause before acting so that we can intentionally choose how to respond to the moment**



# STOP & Trauma-Related Reactions

- Many unhelpful behaviors occur in response to trauma-related thoughts and feelings  
Ex) self-harm, substance use, lashing out, dissociation, binge eating & others
- Practicing STOP consistently helps to identify:
  - **Common triggers/situations** in which these come up so we can proactively orient to skills
    - Ex) *In situations when I feel worthless and criticized, I'm prone to self-injure.*
    - Ex) *When feeling trapped, I tend to dissociate*
  - **Warning signs** in our bodies and minds that clue us in to practice STOP and other skills
    - Ex) before dissociation: tight chest, heart racing, vision going blurry, thought: *I can't stand this*

# STOP & Trauma- Related Avoidance:

## Examples of triggers

- What kinds of situations have triggered an urge to act on emotion but doing so would have made your situation worse?
  - Ex) someone cuts in line at the store and you feel disrespected
  - **Others?**

# STOP & Trauma- Related Avoidance:

## Examples of warning signs

- Warning signs of intense emotion that appear right before you act on the emotion urge?
  - E.g., physical sensations, urges, thoughts?
  - **Others?**

# STOP: When and How to Use

- Use when emotion mind threatens to take over, in order to resist acting impulsively/acting in a way that would make the situation worse
- After STOP, follow up with other helpful skills
  - Ex) approach the situation (Opposite Action) vs avoid
  - Ex) practice assertiveness (DEAR MAN) vs lashing out
  - Ex) use other distress tolerance (TIPP) or emotion regulation skills (Mindfulness of Emotions) to ride out painful emotions safely

# STOP: Step by Step

*See STOP handout in your email for a 1-page summary of these same steps!*



# S: Stop

- When you notice signs of emotion starting to take over, **freeze and do not react!**
- Signs can be emotions, thoughts, physical feelings, specific triggers, etc.
- Can literally physically freeze, can say "STOP" to yourself out loud or in head
- Freezing for a moment helps prevent doing what emotion wants you to do, and helps you stay in control. You are the boss of your reactions!



## T: Take a Step Back

- Take a step back from the situation physically, or in your mind, in order to give yourself time to calm down and think
- Take deep breaths
- Do this for as long as you need to begin to feel more calm and able to think more clearly





# O: Observe

- Mindfully gather information/ facts about what is going on by using the “Observe” skill
  - (from Mindfulness “What” skills)
- **Inside yourself** – what are my thoughts, feelings, urges?
- **Outside yourself** – what are the facts about the situation/other person?





# P: Proceed Mindfully

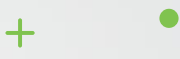
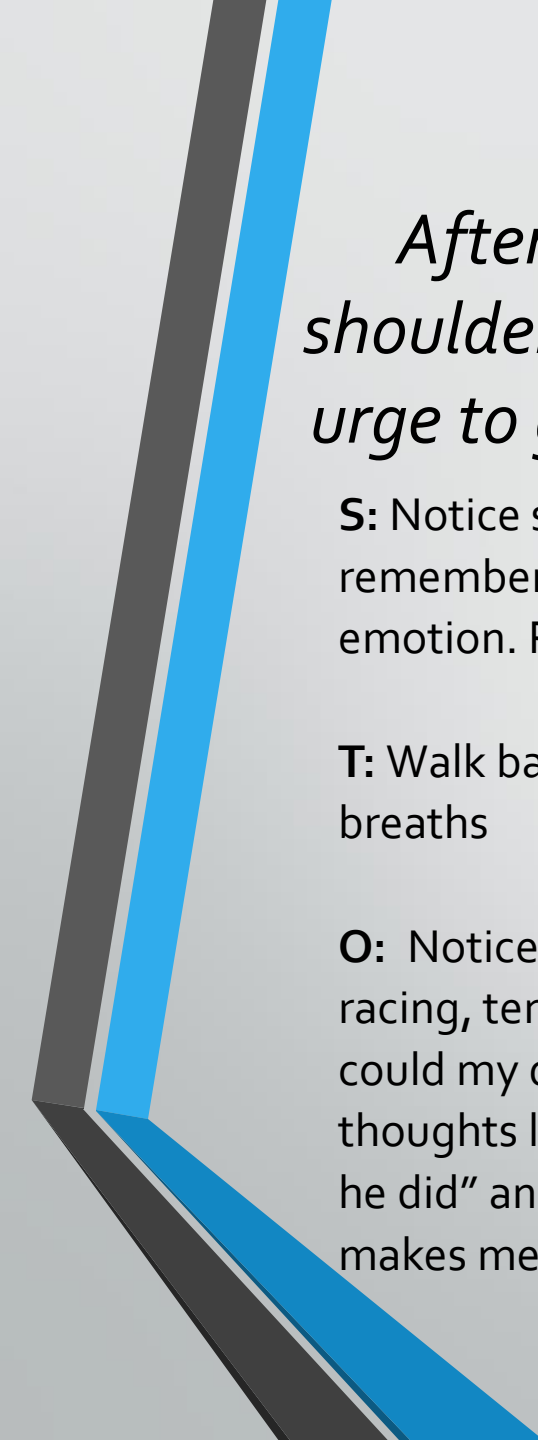
- Use the information you have gathered to make a Wise Mind decision about what steps to take next
- Can ask yourself:
  - What is most effective action given my goals in this situation and my values overall?
  - Do I need additional skills?
  - How do I want to feel about this later?
  - What actions will bring me closer to who I want to be and what's important to me?
  - **Then proceed with that action.**





## Let's practice: Example 1

*After you talk about trauma in 1:1 session, your heart is pounding and shoulders are tense. You notice the thought "I can't handle this." You feel an urge to get a beer to take the edge off. You start walking towards the fridge.*



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**S:** Notice self walking towards fridge, and remember goal of not using alcohol to escape emotion. Physically freeze and stop walking

**T:** Walk back to bedroom to sit and take deep breaths

**O:** Notice signs of anger and anxiety/fear: heart racing, tense shoulders, angry thoughts like "how could my dad have done that to his child," fear thoughts like "if I get angry I will lose control like he did" and "what if talking about my trauma makes me feel worse and lose control?"

**P: Remember values and goals:** I know when I drink I am actually more prone to doing things I regret like lashing out at my partner. And I am trying to practice sitting with these feelings so I can start exposures.

**Choose skills to cope with immediate feelings:** Self-validate my emotions (*It makes sense to feel angry towards someone who hurt me. I am allowed to feel anger*) and take a walk to calm down more

**Cope ahead for the next time this trigger occurs:** I will text my partner to take the beer out of the fridge when they get home, and write down distress tolerance skills to use when I feel angry

# Homework

- Identify a personal example of unhelpful behaviors you tend to do in response to trauma triggers, and identify at least 2 warning signs that happen before this behavior
- Complete a full practice of STOP skill in response to any unhelpful urge, and write down the results using Worksheet attached in today's group link email