

MENTAL HEALTH SKILLS & RECOVERY SERIES

THE STOP METHOD

Pause. Observe. Choose.

S Stop

T Take a step back

O Observe

P Proceed mindfully

A practical workbook for stressful and overwhelming moments.

2026 EDITION

Your Safety Comes First

Use this workbook at your own pace. You can skip any exercise or ask for help.

THIS WORKBOOK IS A SUPPORT TOOL

It offers education, self-reflection, and coping practice. It does not replace professional mental health assessment, diagnosis, counseling, therapy, or medical treatment.

IF YOU NEED HELP NOW

If you are in emotional crisis or thinking about suicide, call or text 988 (United States). If you or anyone else is in immediate danger or has a life-threatening emergency, call 911. If you are at a clinic, tell staff immediately.

YOUR CHOICE MATTERS

If focusing on your breathing, body, or a memory feels uncomfortable, stop and choose a different skill. It is okay to pause, use one word, or complete the workbook with a support person.

You do not have to complete a worksheet to deserve support.

What Does STOP Mean?

Four steps that can help create space between an emotion and an action.

S

Stop

Pause before speaking, sending a message, leaving, or making a choice.

T

Take a step back

Give yourself space if it is safe. Breathe naturally or feel your feet on the ground.

O

Observe

Notice emotions, physical cues, thoughts, urges, facts, and needs.

P

Proceed mindfully

Choose a safe next step that fits your values and the actual situation.

IMPORTANT

STOP is a coping and decision-making skill, not a guarantee that distress will disappear. If you cannot stay safe, seek immediate human support.

When a Pause Can Help

You can begin at any step. There is no perfect way to use STOP.

Situations when I may need STOP:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I want to send an angry text | ☐ I feel anxious or panicked |
| ☐ I feel rejected or ashamed | ☐ I am tempted to use substances |
| ☐ I want to yell or argue | ☐ I am overwhelmed or shut down |
| ☐ I feel defensive | ☐ I am about to act impulsively |

My first warning sign is...

What might happen if I react immediately?

SHORT REMINDER

Noticing an urge does not mean you must act on it. Pausing is an option; safety and urgent needs still come first.

STEP ONE

S: Stop

Name the moment without judging yourself.

Right now I notice:

☐ Anger

☐ Sadness

☐ Stress

☐ Confusion

☐ Fear or anxiety

☐ Numbness

☐ A strong urge

☐ Physical tension

What just happened?

What am I about to say or do?

My pause sentence will be...

STEP TWO

T: Take a Step Back

Create a small amount of space without putting yourself or anyone else at risk.

Options I can try:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Keep breathing comfortably | ☐ Feel my feet on the floor |
| ☐ Unclench my hands | ☐ Look around the room |
| ☐ Ask for a brief pause | ☐ Drink water if available |
| ☐ Speak with staff | ☐ Move to a quieter space safely |

BREATHING IS OPTIONAL

Do not force a breathing count or hold your breath. If breath-focused techniques feel uncomfortable, choose an external grounding skill instead.

A safe way for me to create space is...

The person I can ask for help is...

O: Observe the Whole Moment

Notice what is happening without assuming that every thought is a fact.

In my body, I notice...

The emotion or urge I notice is...

The thought or story in my mind is...

The facts I know right now are...

What I may need right now is...

STEP FOUR

P: Proceed Mindfully

Choose one helpful, realistic action. Asking for support is an action too.

The choice I am considering is...

What could happen if I choose it?

An option that better protects safety and dignity is...

One small action I can take next is...

Quick STOP Practice

Use short answers. You can also point to an answer or ask someone to help.

How intense does this feel before STOP?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

0 = manageable 10 = highest distress

S - What will I pause?

T - How can I safely make space?

O - What am I noticing?

P - What is my next safe action?

How intense does this feel afterward?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

0 = manageable 10 = highest distress

Observe: Feelings and Facts

You do not have to challenge a real danger or dismiss an important concern.

What happened that I know for sure?

What am I assuming or predicting?

What else might be possible?

Who could help me understand or address this?

Choosing a Response

A response can be simple, safe, and unfinished.

The urge I want to avoid acting on is...

What matters to me in this situation?

What can wait until I am steadier?

What would I like to do instead?

Asking for Support

Use one clear sentence, even if you are not sure what you need.

TRY A SENTENCE

"I am feeling overwhelmed. I need a moment and some support."

"I am worried about what I might do. Please stay with me and help me get support."

The words that feel natural to me are...

Someone I can contact or ask for help is...

If that person is unavailable, my backup is...

My Personal STOP Card

Write your preferred choices. You can photograph or copy this page.

My early warning sign:

S - My pause sentence:

T - My grounding or step-back action:

O - A question I can ask myself:

P - A safer action I can try:

A trusted person or service I can contact:

Practice Log

Use a few entries at a time; practice can happen outside a crisis.

Practice 1: Situation / what I noticed / what I chose

Practice 2: Situation / what I noticed / what I chose

Practice 3: Situation / what I noticed / what I chose

A pattern I am noticing is...

When Safety Needs More

If the situation is immediately dangerous, get help now rather than completing this page.

GET HELP, NOT JUST A WORKSHEET

Tell crisis clinic staff or someone near you if you are worried you might harm yourself or another person. Call or text 988 for emotional or suicide crisis support; call 911 for immediate danger or a life-threatening emergency.

My signs that I need immediate support include...

A safe support person or place is...

What I can say to ask for help is...

After the Moment

Even if your feelings did not change, you may have taken a useful step.

What helped me pause?

What was difficult or unhelpful?

What would I like to try differently?

The next support or resource I need is...

STOP at a Glance

A short version to look at when decisions feel urgent.

S

STOP: Pause before reacting.

T

TAKE A STEP BACK: Create safe space.

O

OBSERVE: Notice emotions, urges, and facts.

P

PROCEED: Choose one safer next action.

A FINAL REMINDER

A feeling is information, not an instruction. You can ask for help at any point in the process.

Credits & Additional Resources

STOP Method Workbook | 2026 edition

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Original Publication

Bodhi Life Balance

Additional Mental Health Workbooks

<https://bodhilifebalance.com/mental-health-workbooks>

Additional educational workbooks and resources can be located at the website above.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Designed as a self-guided or clinician-supported psychoeducational tool for crisis clinics, outpatient behavioral health programs, and community mental health settings. It does not replace clinical care.

Source note: STOP is a widely taught DBT mindfulness skill.

Publication version: 2026.1 | Educational workbook