



# DISTRESS TOLERANCE JOURNAL



@COUNSELLORCRONAN





# RADICAL ACCEPTANCE



RADICAL ACCEPTANCE RESTS ON LETTING GO OF THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL AND A WILLINGNESS TO NOTICE AND ACCEPT THINGS AS THEY ARE RIGHT NOW, WITHOUT JUDGING.



## WHAT IS RADICAL ACCEPTANCE?

Radical acceptance is a distress tolerance skill designed to keep pain from turning into suffering. Radical acceptance is based on the notion that suffering comes not directly from pain but from one's attachment to the pain. Inevitably, we all experience pain in life, whether it be physical or emotional. Pain is a natural occurrence that signals something is wrong. However, we all have a choice in how we choose to deal with pain. Often, people ignore or reject certain kinds of pain or use unhealthy coping habits to minimize discomfort in the short term, leading to ongoing distress, pain, and suffering. Choosing to face your pain head-on and accept your reality as it is will ultimately help end your suffering, as suffering occurs due to pain and non-acceptance.

Radical acceptance is most often applied when you have no control over a situation, when you can't fix what has happened, or when a life event feels unfair, such as losing a loved one or losing one's job.

While everyone experiences normal emotions such as grief and disappointment in their lifetime, suffering results when prolonged pain becomes suffering due to a lack of acceptance.

Radical acceptance does not mean you agree with what is happening or what has happened to you. Instead, you acknowledge that denying the facts of reality will not change the facts but keeps you stuck in thoughts such as "This is unfair," "Bad things always happen to me," and "Why me?".

## SIGNS OF LACK OF ACCEPTANCE

### THOUGHT PATTERNS

- I can't deal with this.
- This is not fair.
- Things shouldn't be like this.
- I can't believe this is happening.
- It's not right.
- Things should be different.
- Why is this happening to me?

### FEELINGS AND BEHAVIORS

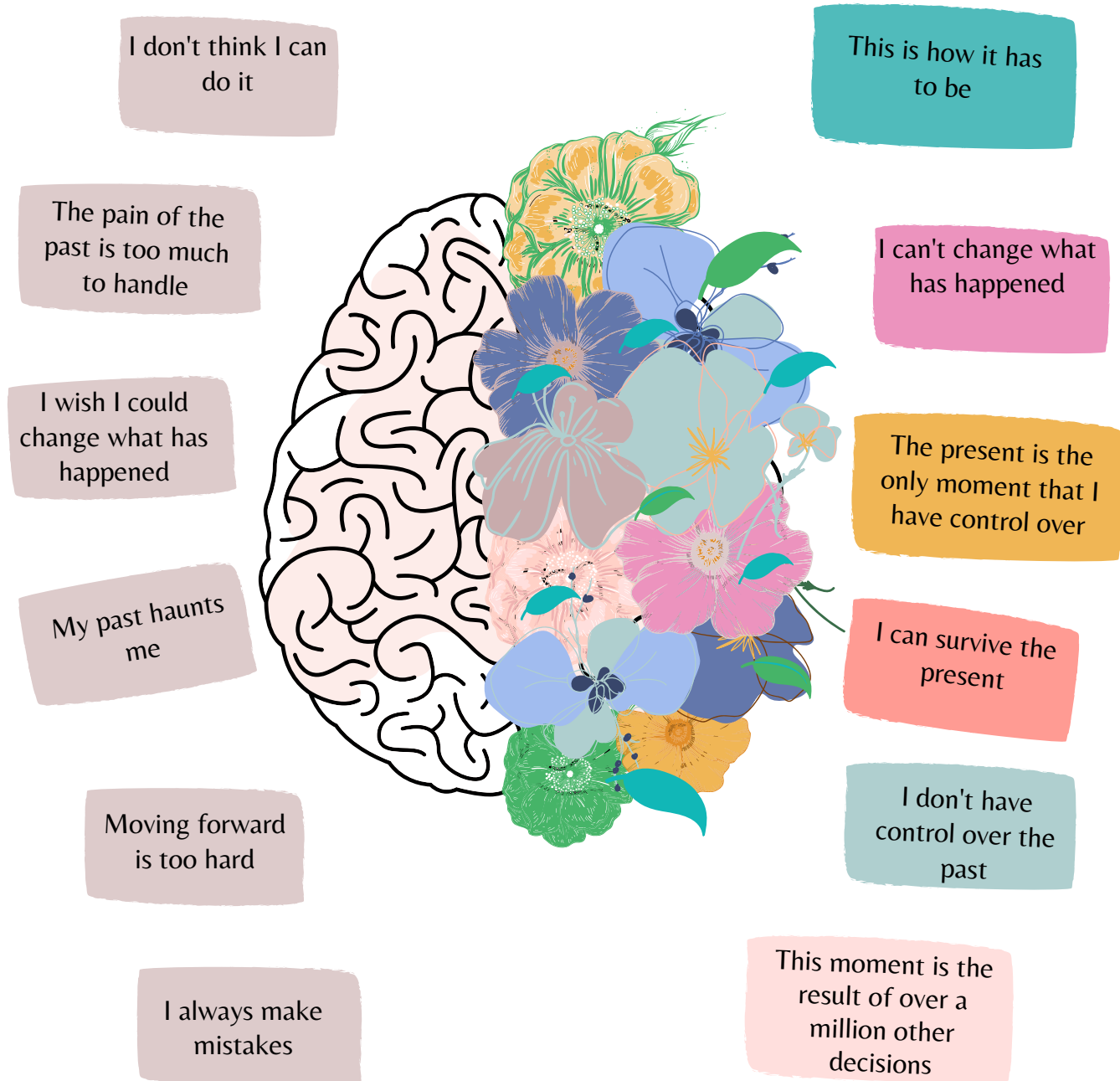
- You blame yourself for everything wrong that happens in your life.
- You feel stuck and don't think you can improve anything.
- You wish that things were different, but you feel powerless.
- You are angry with the world.
- You resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms (such as alcohol or drugs).



# ACCEPTANCE MINDSET

## FOCUSING ON THE PAST

## ACCEPTING THE PRESENT





## ACCEPT SKILL

### ACTIVITIES

**A**

Participate in hobbies you enjoy, such as watching a movie or playing cards.

### CONTRIBUTING

**C**

Contribute to society, volunteer, or offer something nice for a friend.

### COMPARISONS

**C**

Compare yourself to others less fortunate than you or to others who are coping the same or less well than you.

### EMOTIONS

**E**

Watch an inspirational movie, book or music that create a better emotion or feeling.

### PUSHING AWAY

**P**

Ask yourself these questions. Can I do anything about this right now?

Is it a good time to work on this?

### THOUGHTS

**T**

Distract your thoughts by engaging in some mindfulness activities.



## ACCEPT SKILL

The ACCEPT acronym helps you remember that distress tolerance skills are intended to help distract us and get us through difficult emotional situations one moment at a time

### ACTIVITIES

A

### CONTRIBUTING

C

### COMPARISONS

C

### EMOTIONS

E

### PUSHING AWAY

P

### THOUGHTS

T



# BEHAVIOR CHAIN ANALYSIS

## 1. PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

- Be specific
- What did you say or do?
- Describe the intensity of your behavior

## 2. PRECIPITATING EVENT

What event triggered your behavior?

## 3. VULNERABILITY FACTORS

Was there any factors that made you more vulnerable. Eg, stress, intense emotions, illness, substance abuse?

## 4. CHAIN OF EVENTS

Imagine that each event is a link in a chain. Trace back all your links. Eg, emotions, sensations or behavior

## 5. CONSEQUENCES

- How did you feel after the event?
- How did other people feel?

## 6. SOLUTIONS

Brainstorm things that you can do differently next time.

## 7. PREVENTION STRATEGY

How can you reduce your vulnerability factors?

## 8. REPAIR

What can you do to repair the consequences of your behavior?



## PROS AND CONS

The Pros and Cons skill can help individuals respond to difficult situations and feelings more effectively.

Naturally, many people use pros and cons to assess situations and behavior, such as whether or not they should choose to proceed with something. However, the DBT pros and cons are a little different as this skill also assesses the pros and cons of tolerating vs. not tolerating distress (coping vs. not coping). For example, imagine that your natural urge or behavior was to verbally speak up and give your friend a piece of your mind because they said something very upsetting. The comment said upset you, and hurtful experiences and feelings from your past were re-triggered. Then, of course, you could yell and scream as usual, or you could sit with the uncomfortable feeling, ride the feeling wave, and talk yourself through some effective coping skills.

Thinking about the consequences of tolerating versus not tolerating this distress can help you make more positive choices that align with your long-term goals.

### HOW TO DO IT

**1** What is the urge or behavior that you are trying to avoid?

**2** Examine the pros and cons of acting on the urge/behavior vs. not acting on it. Consider what had happened in the past when you acted on your urge.

**3** Look at the advantages & disadvantages (or pros and cons) of each option. Consider your values and long-term goals.



# PROS AND CONS

## URGE OR DOING BEHAVIOR

PROS

### ACTING ON BEHAVIOR

PROS OF ACTING ON URGES, GIVING UP, GIVING IN OR AVOIDING

- FEELING BETTER IN THE MOMENT
- RELEASE TENSION
- FEELING SOMETHING RATHER THAN NUMB
- FEEL COMFORT IN FAMILIARITY
- EASE ANXIETY

### NOT ACTING ON BEHAVIOR

PROS OF RESISTING URGES, DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE,

- NO SCARS
- FEELING PROUD
- LEARN TO DEAL WITH EMOTIONS IN A MORE EFFECTIVE WAY

CONS

- AVOIDANCE OF DEALING WITH THE PROBLEMS
- CAUSES DISTRESS TO LOVED ONES
- MIGHT ACCIDENTALLY HURT MYSELF REALLY BAD
- EMBARRASSMENT AND SELF-LOATHING

- NO INSTANT RELIEF
- FEELING OUT OF CONTROL
- FEELING HELPLESS

### THE JUDGE'S VERDICT

Examine the advantages & disadvantages of each of the viable options.  
What is the best thing to do?

"SELF-HARMING IS NOT WORTH IT AS IT DOESN'T FIX ANYTHING LONG TERM. INSTEAD I SHOULD TRY AND USE SOME MORE EFFICIENT COPING SKILLS."





# PROS AND CONS

URGE OR DOING BEHAVIOR

PROS

ACTING ON BEHAVIOR

NOT ACTING ON  
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THE JUDGE'S VERDICT

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## TIPP SKILL

### CHANGE YOUR THOUGHTS BY CHANGING YOUR BODY CHEMISTRY

The TIPP skill is intended to change your body chemistry quickly in order to reduce the effects of an overwhelmed emotional mind; where your thinking and behaviors are controlled by your overwhelming emotions.

#### TIP THE TEMPERATURE

**T**

Hold your breath and place your face in a bowl of cold water. Alternatively, you could hold an ice pack on your cheeks for 30 seconds.

#### INTENSE EXERCISE

**I**

Work up a sweat. Use your energy by doing a cardio workout, such as running, lifting weights, or playing a physically demanding sport.

#### PACED BREATHING

**P**

**CONTROL YOUR BREATHING.** Breathe in deeply through your nose for four seconds, and then breathe out through your mouth for six seconds.

#### PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION

**P**

While you're focusing on your breathing, Try to tense the muscles in your body. Focus on how your tension feels.



## IMPROVE SKILL

The IMPROVE skill intends to improve the moment by replacing the immediate event that has caused unpleasant emotions with a more positive act, making the moment more pleasant and easier to tolerate.

**I**

### IMAGERY

Imagine your safe place with everything you need in one spot. Or imagine yourself coping successfully in the difficult situation that you are in right now.

**M**

### MEANING

Try and find meaning in the moment; look at your values and purpose. Focus on the things that are important to you.

**P**

### PRAYER

Prayer can mean different things to everybody. For example, it may be to pray to the higher god, or maybe it means praying to find strength within yourself at that moment.

**R**

### RELAXING ACTIONS

Do something relaxing for yourself to try and find peace and calm. Read a book, have a bath, listen to music or go for a walk.

**O**

### ONE THING IN THE MOMENT

Mindfully focus on the moment and keep your attention on your task.

**V**

### VACATION

Give yourself a short vacation. Switch off your phone, and give yourself a mini-break that you know you deserve.

**E**

### SELF-ENCOURAGEMENT AND RETHINKING

Practice positive self-talk. Say things such as "I am braver than I think" or "I can do this".



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What happened?  
What's the situation?

What led up to the situation?

What was your role, and what role did other people play?



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What do you and don't you have control over?

Blank space for reflection on control.

What was your response to the situation and how did it make you feel?

Blank space for reflection on response and feelings.

How can you use radical acceptance to respond differently in the future?

Blank space for reflection on radical acceptance.



## SELF-SOOTHING SKILL

Self-sooth skill involves doing things that feel pleasant, comforting, and provide relief from stress or pain. It helps to pass the time without making things worse.

### VISION

Stimulate your eyes. Go for a walk through the park. Cut out some interesting pictures from a magazine.  
Look at some art.

### HEARING

Go outside and listen to the birds, the wind, or even the waves at the beach. Listen to your favorite music or play an instrument.

### SMELL

Light some candles or smell some essential oils. Cook your favorite meal. Go outside and smell the flowers or the fresh air.

### TASTE

Eat something yummy. Take your time and focus on tasting every bit of flavor. Feel the different textures in your mouth.

### TOUCH

Feel your favorite blanket and piece of fabric.  
Pat your cat or dog, go outside, pick up different objects from the tree, and feel all the different textures.



## COPING STATEMENTS

1 FIGHTING THE PAST ONLY BLINDS MY PRESENT

I CAN HANDLE WHAT IS IN FRONT OF ME AS  
IT IS

2

3 LIFE IS WORTH LIVING, EVEN IF I AM IN PAIN

EVERYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST,  
HAS LED UP TO THIS POINT

4

5 I CAN LIVE IN THE PRESENT, DESPITE THE PAIN I AM  
EXPERIENCING

I CAN HAVE PAIN WITHOUT IT TURNING INTO  
SUFFERING

6

7 I CAN SURVIVE THE PRESENT, EVEN IF I AM  
UNHAPPY WITH WHAT IS HAPPENING

THE PRESENT IS THE RESULT OF SO MANY  
THINGS THAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

8

9 I CAN LEARN FROM THE PAST TO SOLVE MY  
PRESENT AND FUTURE PROBLEMS

ACCEPTANCE ALLOWS ME TO BE FREE FROM  
THE SHACKLES OF DENIAL

10



# YOUR TURN







## PROBLEM SOLVING

Define the problem in detail. What is the situation? Who is involved?  
What is happening or not happening that is a problem?

Where did it happen? When did it happen? How did it happen? How  
often does it occur? Why does it happen?

How do you feel? What do you do in response? What do you want to  
change?



## PROBLEM SOLVING

Describe how the problem interferes with your goals. If the situation does not interfere with your goals, it is likely not your problem.

Identify all the options/alternatives. Try and find at least three potential solutions

What are the consequences of each option/alternative?



## PROBLEM SOLVING

Identify the steps needed to resolve/take action. Make a list of when and how the steps will be taken and then take the required action.

Evaluate results. If the steps taken were unsuccessful in solving the problem, follow steps 4-7 again until the matter is resolved.



## HALF SMILE

“ FEELING HAPPY CAN MAKE US SMILE, THE OPPOSITE IS ALSO TRUE: SMILING CAN MAKE US FEEL HAPPY! ”

Half-smile, often called the "Mona Lisa smile," is a DBT skill that focuses on using your body to communicate with your brain that you are okay. This skill can help you regulate your systems, accept situations, and feel better in the moment.

The science behind it is that not only do our emotions cause us to make certain facial expressions, but also cause us to feel certain emotions: Make a frown, and you will experience anger. Take short, shallow breaths, and you induce panic. If you engage in the behavior, then the emotion will follow. For example, think of a stressful situation you have been in lately, riding out a tantrum if you are a parent, doing an exam, making a public talk, getting homework done, confronting your friend about a lie, or getting into a fight with your partner. How were you feeling? What were you thinking? Were you aware of any sensations in your body?

We often think about how situations and stress impact our bodies. But, research also shows that our bodies can affect our minds and how we experience events. In other words, the relationship between mind and body goes both ways. As such, we can use our bodies to help ourselves feel better in stressful situations.

### HERES HOW IT WORKS

1. Relax the muscles in your face, from your forehead to your jaw and chin.
2. Allow the corners of your mouth to turn up ever so slightly.
3. Adopt a peaceful facial expression.

1 Start your day right. Before you get out of bed in the morning, try smiling.

2 Smile whenever you have a free moment. If you find yourself sitting, standing and not thinking about much, try smiling, you could even think of something you are grateful for.

3 Smile when you are listening to music. Listen to the lyrics, music rhythm, and how it makes you feel.

4 Smile when you are starting to feel irritated. Take a moment to realize how you are feeling, take a break, and smile to reduce your irritation.



## WILLING HANDS

“ TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR MIND-BODY CONNECTION TO HELP US REGULATE EMOTIONS BY USING YOUR WILLING HANDS. ”

The skill of willing hands is another way to activate acceptance in your body. Since our body connects to our mind, adopting the posture of willingness in the form of Willing Hands allows your mind to be open, receptive, and more in control of whatever is coming your way.

By adopting a willing hand posture, you can move out of willfulness. Willingness is the opposite of willfulness. Willfulness is when we want our way or are unwilling to hear alternate points of view; we are closed. We often think of willful individuals as being stubborn or difficult.

Willingness involves being open to hearing opposing opinions or criticisms without reacting defensively.

Willing Hands is about opening up your body posture. Even something as simple as uncrossing your arms or unclasping your hands can communicate to your brain that you are in a safe place since an open posture is the opposite of a “defensive” stance. Willing hands are about taking it a step further; you can flip your palms open. This may look like resting our hands on our legs or knees and having our palms face up while sitting, resting our arms on the ground or a bed with our palms up while lying down, or having our arms at our side with palms facing front while standing up.

For example, you could try this exercise. Sit still with your eyes closed and imagine an argument or conflict you had with someone recently which caused you to feel stronger anger. Can you notice the anger return? Now move your hands into the Willing Hands position in your lap. What happens to those feelings of anger? Almost always, people feel more accepting and less angry when they move their hands into the Willing Hands position. Did that happen to you today?

### HERES HOW IT WORKS

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## WILLFULNESS VS WILLINGNESS

“ FOR EACH DEFINING POINT THERE IS A OPPOSITE COUNTERPOINT ”

WILLFULNESS		WILLINGNESS
Closed minded	→	Is open-minded
Is rigid and inflexible	→	Is flexible in their thoughts and thinking
Is focused on their ego	→	Considers many
Is self-centered	→	Is focused on connections
Needs to be right, no matter what the situation is	→	Is focused on effectiveness
Is full of excuses	→	Takes action and accountability
Runs from or escapes distress	→	Faces things head on
Shuts down and does not participate in life	→	Is active in life and participates fully
Gives up	→	Continues working and looking for solutions



## STOP SKILL

This skill is useful when noticing that your emotions may be causing you to want to act impulsively on unhealthy behaviors. Use it when your emotions are threatening to get the best of you, and you're tempted to take unhelpful actions such as yelling, screaming or sending a nasty message to someone.

### STOP

**S**

Interrupt your negative thinking with the command STOP. Before the emotion you're feeling gets out of control, freeze for a moment and pause with what you are doing.

### TAKE A BREATH

**T**

Take a step back. Allow yourself a little time to sort through your emotions. Practice some deep breathing techniques to slow your heart rate down.

### OBSERVE

**O**

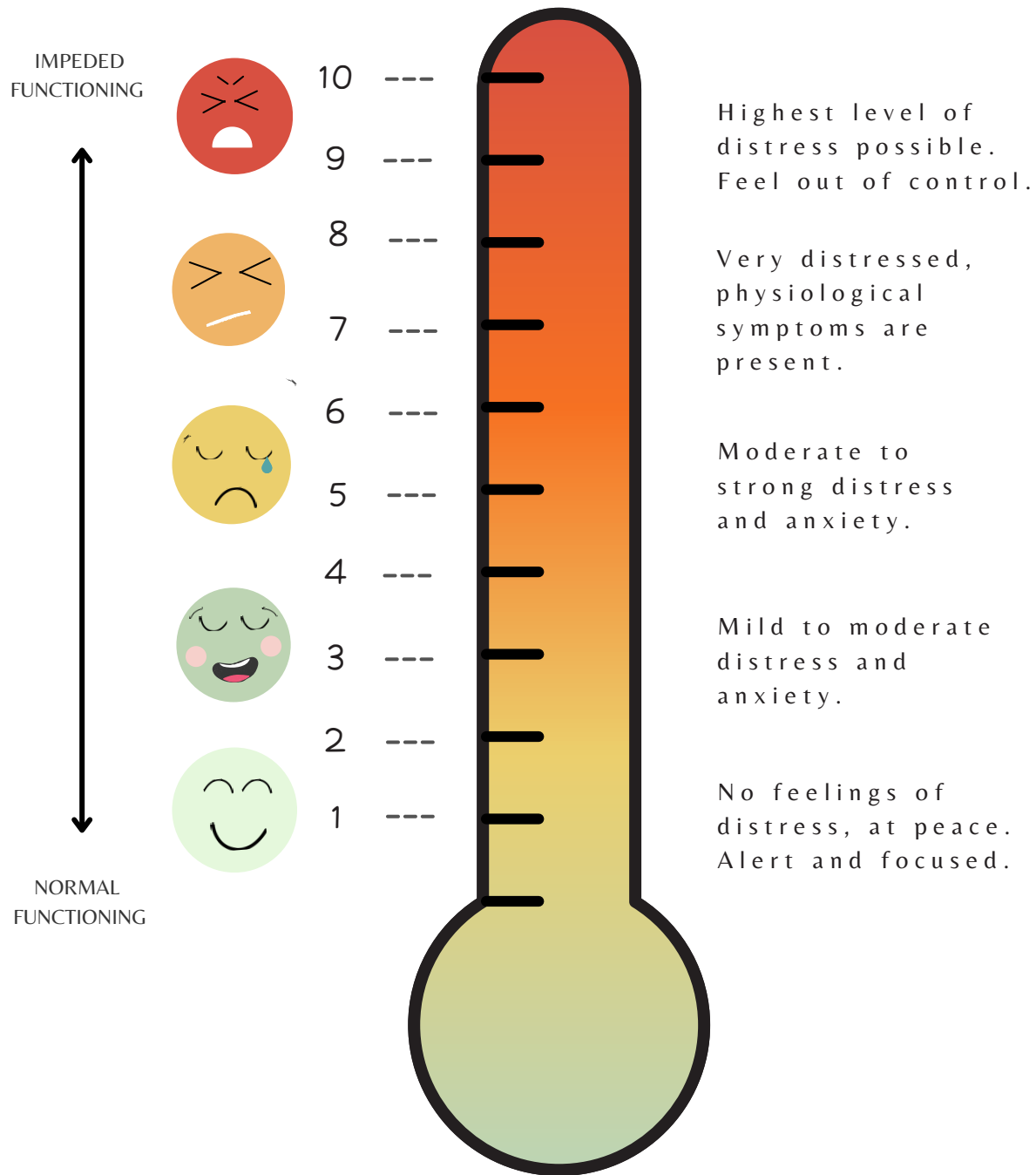
How might a stranger describe the situation? Try to notice what's happening without judgmental language. Observe your thoughts, feelings, and behavior. How does your body feel?

### PROCEED

**P**

Purposefully and mindfully proceed with your next activity, one step at a time. What outcome would be consistent with your wants, needs, and values?

# Subjective Units of Distress SCALE







## DISTRESS TOLERANCE REFLECTION

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