

ACCEPTS – Short-Term Distraction Skills/Distress Tolerance

ACCEPTS skills help by temporarily shifting attention away from distress so emotions can settle enough for urges to pass. This is intentional, appropriate time-limited distraction. It is different from avoidance.

You can use any one skill for any length of time and stop whenever you want.

A – Activities

Purpose: Occupies your mind and body so there's less room for rumination or urges.

Examples:

- Cleaning, organizing, or tidying one small area
- Walking, stretching, or light movement
- Cooking, baking, or prepping food
- Watching a familiar or predictable show

Helpful notes:

- Works best when the activity has clear steps
- Can be as short as 5–10 minutes
- You don't need to enjoy it—only engage with it

C – Contributing

Purpose: Shifts focus outward and increases a sense of meaning or connection.

Examples:

- Helping someone with a task
- Sending a supportive text
- Doing something kind or useful for another person

Helpful notes:

- This should not involve self-sacrifice or people-pleasing
- Small contributions count

C – Comparisons

Purpose: Creates perspective and distance from the current moment.

Examples:

- Remembering a time you survived something similar
- Noticing that emotions rise and fall over time
- Reminding yourself: “I’ve handled hard moments before” or “Even when I have felt really bad, it has never lasted forever.”

Helpful notes:

- This is about resilience, not minimizing pain
- Avoid comparisons that feel shaming or invalidating e.g., “You shouldn’t feel this bad right now.” “You should have learned from the last time you felt bad so you didn’t feel that way again.”

E – Emotions (Different or Opposite)

Purpose: Introduces a different emotional state that softens the current one.

Examples:

- Watching or listening to something funny
- Engaging in something playful or creative
- Listening to energizing or comforting music

Helpful notes:

- You’re not suppressing emotions—just allowing another one to enter

P – Pushing Away (Temporary)

Purpose: Creates a mental boundary so the problem doesn’t overwhelm you.

Examples:

- Visualizing putting the problem in a box or on a shelf (container exercise)
- Writing worries down and setting them aside (worry jar)
- Imagining a pause button

Helpful notes:

- This is temporary and intentional
- You can decide later when (or if) to return to the issue

T – Thoughts

Purpose: Redirects attention to neutral or structured thinking.

Examples:

- Counting backwards or by intervals
- Naming objects you see by category
- Doing puzzles, trivia, or reading

Helpful notes:

- Especially helpful when thoughts are ruminative or intrusive

S – Sensations

Purpose: Uses physical sensation to ground attention in the present moment.

Examples:

- Holding something cold
- Strong flavors (mint, sour candy)
- Hot or cold water on hands or face

Helpful notes:

- Sensations should be intense but safe
- Especially useful for dissociation or urge-driven states