

IMPROVE – Enhancing the Moment/Distress Tolerance

IMPROVE skills help change how survivable the moment feels when pain cannot be avoided. These skills focus on altering the experience of the moment, not removing emotion.

I – Imagery

Purpose: Uses visualization to create safety, containment, or relief.

Examples:

- Imagining a safe or calm place
- Visualizing emotional pain draining away
- Imagining support or protection

Helpful notes:

- Keep imagery simple
 - Eyes open is okay
-

M – Meaning

Purpose: Connects distress to values, purpose, or growth.

Examples:

- “What does getting through this say about me?”
- “How does this align with the life I want?”

Helpful notes:

- Meaning-making is optional
 - Skip this skill if it feels invalidating in the moment
-

P – Prayer or Intention

Purpose: Creates connection, surrender, or trust beyond the self.

Examples:

- Prayer
- Talking to a higher power or a protector
- Setting a grounding intention or phrase e.g., “May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be free from suffering.” or “Everything that I am and everything that I am not is just right for what I came to do in this world.”

Helpful notes:

- Can be spiritual, secular, or symbolic
-

R – Relaxation

Purpose: Reduces physical tension and nervous system activation.

Examples:

- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Warm shower or bath
- Gentle stretching

Helpful notes:

- Works best after distress has come down slightly
-

O – One Thing in the Moment

Purpose: Reduces overwhelm by focusing on only one thing.

Examples:

- Eating or drinking mindfully
 - Fully focusing on one task
 - Paying attention to breath or sounds
-

V – Vacation (Brief)

Purpose: Gives temporary relief from demands.

Examples:

- Lying down for 5–10 minutes
- Sitting outside

- Closing your eyes and listening to music

Helpful notes:

- This is short and intentional—not withdrawal
-

E – Encouragement

Purpose: Builds self-support and reduces self-criticism.

Examples:

- “I can get through this moment.”
- “I don’t have to decide anything right now.”
- “This feeling will pass.”