

# Crisis Survival Strategies

Coping skills for getting through painful events and emotions  
when you can't make things better right away.

## **DISTRACT with "Wise mind ACCEPTS"**

Activities  
Contributing  
Comparisons  
Emotions  
Pushing away  
Thoughts  
Sensations

## **SELF -SOOTHE the FIVE SENSES**

Vision  
Hearing  
Smell  
Taste  
Touch

## **IMPROVE THE MOMENT**

Imagery  
Meaning  
Prayer  
Relaxation  
One thing at a time  
Vacation  
Encouragement

**PROS  
&  
CONS**

## DISTRACTING

A useful way to remember these skills is the phrase "Wise Mind ACCEPTS"

**With Activities:** Engage in exercise or hobbies; do cleaning; go to events; call or visit a friend; play computer games; go walking; play sports; go out to a meal, have a decaf coffee or tea; go fishing; chop wood; do gardening; play table tennis.



**With Contributing:** Contribute to someone; do volunteer work; give something to someone else; make something nice for someone else; do a surprise; thoughtful thing.

**With Comparisons:** Compare yourself to people coping the same as you or less well than you. Compare yourself to those less fortunate than you. Read about disasters, others suffering.

**With opposite Emotions:** Read emotional books or stories, old letters; go to emotional movies; listen to emotional music. Be sure the event creates different emotions. Ideas: scary movies, joke books, comedies, funny records, religious music, marching songs, going to a store and reading funny greeting cards.



**With Pushing Away:** Push the situation away by leaving it for a while. Leave the situation mentally. Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation. Or push the situation away by blocking it in your mind. Refuse to think about the painful aspects of the situation. Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while.

**With other Thoughts:** Count to ten; count colors in a painting or tree, windows, anything; work puzzles; watch TV; read.

**With intense other Sensations:** Hold ice in hand; squeeze a rubber ball very hard; stand under a very hard and hot shower; listen to very loud music; put a rubber band loosely on wrist, pull out, and let go.

## SELF-SOOTHE

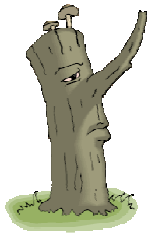
A way to remember these skills is to think of soothing each of your FIVE SENSES



**With Vision:** Buy one beautiful flower; make one space in a room pretty; light a candle and watch the flame. Set a pretty place at the table, using your best things, for a meal. Look at nature around you. Go out in the middle to the night and watch the stars. Walk in a pretty part of town. Fix your nails so they look pretty. Look at beautiful pictures in a book. Go to a ballet or another dance performance, or watch one on TV. Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of you, not lingering on any.



**With Hearing:** Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to invigorating and exciting music. Pay attention to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, and leaves rustling). Sing to your favorite songs. Hum a soothing tune. Learn to play an instrument. Call an information number to hear a human voice. Be mindful of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other.



**With Smill:** Use your favorite perfumes or lotions, or try them on in a store. Spray fragrance in the air, light a scented candle. Put lemon oil on your furniture. Put potpourri in a bowl in your room. Boil cinnamon; bake cookies, cake or bread. Smell the roses. Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smell of nature.



**With Taste:** Have a good meal, have a favorite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate (no alcohol), treat yourself to a desert. Put whipped cream into your coffee. Sample flavors in an ice cream store. Suck on a piece of peppermint candy. Chew your favorite gum. Get a little bit of favorite food you don't usually spend money on, such as fresh squeezed orange juice. Really taste the foods you eat, eat one thing mindfully.



**With Touch:** Take a bubble bath, put clean sheets on the bed. Pet your dog or cat. Have a massage, soak your feet. Put creamy lotion on your whole body. Put a cold compress on your forehead. Sink into a really comfortable chair in your home, or find one in a luxurious hotel lobby. Put on a silky blouse, dress, or scarf. Try on fur lined gloves or fur coats in a department store. Brush your hair for a long time. Hug someone. Experience what ever you are touching, notice touch that is soothing.

# IMPROVE THE MOMENT

A way to remember these skills is the word IMPROVE

**With Imagery:** Imagine very relaxing scenes. Imagine a secret room within yourself, seeing how it is decorated. Go into the room whenever you feel threatened. Close the door on anything that can hurt you. Imagine everything going well. Imagine coping well.



- Make up a fantasy world that is calming and beautiful and let your mind go with it. Imagine hurtful emotions draining out of you like water out of a pipe.

**With Meaning:** Find or create some purpose, meaning, or value in the pain. Remember, listen to, or read about spiritual values. Focus on whatever positive aspects of a painful situation you can find. Repeat them over and over in your mind. Make lemonade out of lemons.

**With Prayer:** Open your heart to the Lord. Ask for strength to bear the pain in this moment. Turn things over to God. Remember, where there is life there is hope.

**With Relaxation:** Try muscle relaxing by tensing and relaxing each large muscle group, starting with your hands and arms, going to the top of your head, and then working down. Listen to a relaxation tape, exercise hard, take a hot bath or sit in a hot tub, drink hot milk, massage your neck and scalp, your calves and feet. Get in a tub filled with very cold or hot water and stay in it until the water is tepid. Breathe deeply, half smile, change facial expression.



**With One thing in the moment:** Focus your entire attention on just what you are doing right now. Keep yourself in the very moment you are in, put your mind in the present. Focus your entire attention on physical sensations that accompany non-mental tasks (e.g. walking, washing, doing dishes, cleaning, fixing). Be ware of how your body moves during each task. Do awareness exercises.

**With a brief Vacation:** Give yourself a brief vacation. Get in bed and pull the covers up over your head for 20 minutes. Rent a hotel room at the beach or in the woods for a day or two. Drop your towels on the floor after you use them. Ask your roommate to bring you coffee in bed or make you dinner (offer to reciprocate). Get a magazine or newspaper at the grocery store, get in bed with chocolates, and read it. Make yourself milk toast, bundle up in a chair, and eat it slowly. Take a blanket to the park and sit on it for a whole afternoon. Unplug your phone for a day, or let your answering machine screen your calls. Take a one-hour breather from hard work that must be done.



**With Encouragement:** Cheerlead yourself. Repeat over and over, "I can't stand it", "It won't last forever", "I will make it out of this", "I'm doing the best I can do".

## Thinking of PROS AND CONS

Make a list of the pros and cons of tolerating distress. Make another list of the pros and cons of not tolerating distress, that is coping by not hurting yourself, abusing alcohol or drugs, or doing something else impulsive.



Focus on long-term goals, the light at the end of the tunnel. Remember times when pain has ended.

Think of positive consequences of tolerating the distress. Imagine in your mind how good you feel when you achieve your goals, if you don't act impulsively.



Think of all the negative consequences of not tolerating your current distress. Remember what has happened in the past when you have acted impulsively to escape the moment.