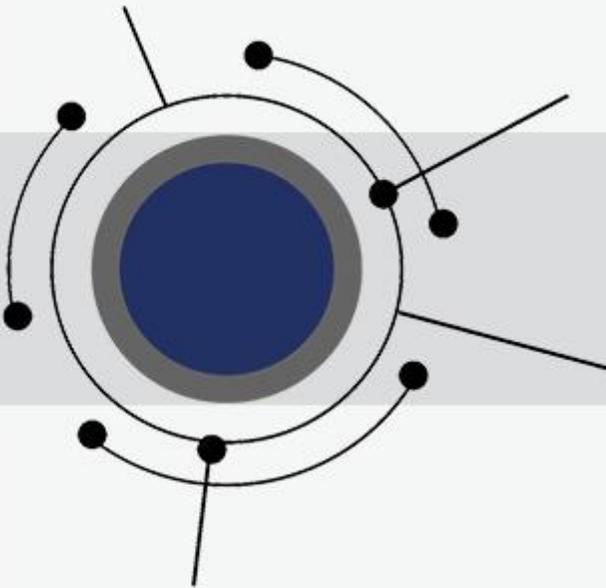




**GAMBLING RESEARCH  
EXCHANGE ONTARIO**  
DRIVING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

# Emotional Dysregulation and Problem Gambling Workbook



## Introduction

### How were these guidelines developed?

These guidelines were prepared by a multidisciplinary team led by psychiatrist Dr. Daniela Lobo at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), as part of a pilot project funded by Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO). This team reviewed empirical research on emotional regulation in problem gambling as well as clinical workbooks on the development of emotional regulation skills, merging current evidence-based treatment protocols with gambling-specific research and clinical expertise. It is anticipated that the resulting session outlines may be revised further based on feedback from clinicians implementing them as well as the clients we serve.

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### Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are designed for use with individuals experiencing gambling-related harms and emotional dysregulation, for whom an outpatient treatment format is appropriate. Clinicians using the manual will require prior knowledge, training, and experience in gambling and mood disorders. These session outlines are designed to be employed within a treatment setting that endorses a harm reduction approach.

In addition, there is flexibility in how treatment providers can use the sessions. Depending on group size and clients' needs, it might not be possible to deliver the full content outlined in one session. Thus, treatment providers can select either the most relevant content in each session or can choose to break down one session into two sessions to better address the needs of their clients.

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### How do these guidelines work?

These guidelines outline session-by-session goals, tasks, supporting materials, and homework assignments. "In-session" materials are designed to be completed by both the clinician and client during that psychotherapy session, whereas "homework" materials are typically sent home with the client as part of their between-session assigned activities. Citations are provided for supporting materials found in published workbooks. These session outlines are intended to be implemented within group treatment plans flexibly, highlighting materials most relevant to the clinical context at hand, including healthcare setting, concurrent treatments, and client features.

Finally, we would like to highlight that we have used concepts and materials that are available in the literature but that were adapted for use with problem gambling clients.

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## Outline for Emotional Regulation and Problem Gambling Treatment Sessions

<b>Session 1: Introduction to Emotional Regulation</b>		
1. Welcome & Business		5 min
2. Check-in		20 min
3. Develop understanding of emotions	Definition of emotions	30 min
	Purposes and consequences of emotions	
	Process of describing emotions	
	Primary and secondary emotions	
4. Introduce emotional regulation	Definition of emotional regulation	45 min
	Connection between mindfulness and emotional regulation	
	States of mind and importance of wise mind	
	Emotional regulation and emotional hijacking	
5. Additional strategies for emotional regulation and provide homework	H.A.L.T.	10 min
6. Create connection between emotions and problem gambling	Reasons for gambling	10 min
	Short-term vs. long-term consequences and benefits of gambling to regulate mood	
<b>Session 2: Introduction to Distress Tolerance Part One</b>		
1. Welcome & Business		5 min
2. Check-in and review homework		20 min
3. Introduce distress tolerance as a form of emotional regulation	Definition of distress tolerance	30 min
	Spectrum of tolerance and importance of healthy distress tolerance	
	Window of tolerance and changes in your optimal arousal zone	
4. Identify value/utility of distress tolerance for changing gambling behaviours	Connection between mood and propensity to gamble	15 min
	Use of distress tolerance skills to manage urges to gamble	
5. Introduce crisis survival skills	Definition of crisis survival skills	10 min
	Utility of crisis survival skills for tolerating distress	
6. Practice skills for surviving crises and provide homework	Introduce types of skills; STOP, TIPP, Wise Mind ACCEPTS, Self-Soothing	40 min

<b>Session 3: Introduction to Distress Tolerance Part Two</b>		
1. Welcome & Business		5 min
2. Check-in and review homework		20 min
3. Introduce and practice skills for acceptance	Definition of acceptance	25 min
	Skills for accepting distress	
	Strategies for practicing acceptance	
4. Introduce and practice skills for improving distress	Importance of balancing accepting and improving distress	25 min
	Skills for improving distress	
5. Importance of problem-solving strategies for changing gambling behaviours	Problem solving steps	25 min
	Development of personalized distress-improvement plans	
6. Connection between emotional regulation, distress tolerance and gambling behaviours	Tying together three sessions	20 min
	Importance of practicing skills and keeping tracking of preferred exercises	

## Session #1 Introduction to Emotional Regulation

### Duration:

- 120 minutes

### Goals:

1. Develop an understanding of emotions
2. Define emotional regulation
3. Explore connection between emotions and problem gambling
4. Introduce initial strategies for emotional regulation

### Tasks:

#### 1. Welcome and business

- **Describe purpose and goals of sessions**
  - To explore the connection between our emotions and gambling
  - To enhance skills in managing emotions

#### 2. Check-in

#### 3. Understanding emotions

- **Define and review emotions commonly experienced by members of the group;** see 'Naming Emotions' handout
  - Emotions consists of feelings, thoughts, changes in psychological and biological states, and urges to act in response to situations/events

*Note to leader:* Depending on the nature of the group, the length of time on this topic will vary. Optional activities that can be used to aid in the understanding of this topic are:

- To act out or to print out images of different expressions and postures (e.g. a person with their head down, a person with their arms crossed etc.) and ask the group to label the emotion.
- To ask group members to describe the bodily sensation that goes along with their experience of the emotion. This will help to demonstrate and normalize the variability in members' emotional experience.
- **Discuss the purposes and consequences of emotions;** see 'Purposes of Emotions' handout
  - Functions of emotions include:
    - Important part of communication (only 15-20% of communication is verbal)
    - Motivation for our behavior
    - Help prepare us for action, respond to events and act as signals (i.e. the fight-or-flight response)
  - **Identifying emotions;** see 'Describing Emotions' handout

- Emotions are complex and the *emotional experience* includes changes in your body sensations, posture, facial expressions and urges to act.
- As you go through each component of an emotion, provide examples that are gambling-related. For example:
  - Prompting event – Fighting with a spouse
  - Interpretation – Telling yourself “I can’t handle this”
  - Body responses – Increased muscle tension and heightened heart rate
  - Body language – Hunched shoulders and closed posture
  - Verbal communication – Yelling at your spouse “Leave me alone!”
  - Action urges – Leaving the room, and playing online poker to distract yourself
- Using the ‘Describing Emotions’ handout, ask the group to express how they are feeling right now in this low risk situation. Contrast with recent gambling-related situation.
- **Explain difference between primary and secondary emotions;** see ‘Primary and Secondary Emotions’ handout
  - Emotional distress is often a result of secondary responses (e.g. intense shame/rage) to primary emotions.
  - Anger can become the ‘go-to’ emotion; facilitate a discussion about taking time to reflect on whether this is the emotion you are really feeling or if there is something else underlying it.
    - For example, the anger after a loss may be a secondary emotion to underlying worry about gambling and the strain it is putting on finances.

*Note to leader:* Primary and secondary emotions is an important topic to cover when working with problem gambling groups.

#### 4. Emotional regulation

- **Define emotional regulation**
  - The ability to recognize and control how you *express* emotions; emphasize the goal is **not** to get rid of your emotions.
  - Purposes of emotional regulation:
    - to be aware of the changes in your emotions
    - to make sense of and accept your emotions
    - to be able to control your impulses and engage in goal-directed behavior
  - The use of imagery can aid in the group’s understanding of what it means to regulate emotion. If time permits, elicit from group or provide your own examples.
    - For example, emotions are fleeting and their expression can be controlled similarly to how you can control the pressure of water using a tap. Strong emotions have the potential to be overwhelming but with the help of emotional regulation strategies, you can control the degree to which you express these emotions.

- **Make connection between mindfulness and emotional regulation;** see ‘Mindfulness’ handout
  - Mindfulness is fundamental to emotional regulation as it helps with being able to observe and define your emotions with a non-judgmental stance. It allows you to be able to experience an emotion without feeling the urge to react or act on it.
  - Being mindful allows you to be able to let go of painful emotions as opposed to fighting or suppressing them.
  - Run through a mindfulness exercise with group; see ‘Optional Resources for Clinicians/Patients’ for example exercises.
  - After completing the breathing exercise, facilitate a discussion with the group about their experience. Elicit answers from the group for the following questions:
    - What did you notice during this exercise?
    - How did this connect with your body?
    - What did you notice about your thoughts?

*Note to leader:* Emphasize to group that getting distracted by wandering thoughts is a common experience. Depending on the group, mindfulness may be a difficult topic for people to understand. If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness, see Linehan (2014).

- **Define the states of mind and discuss importance of wise mind;** see ‘States of Mind’ handout
  - Engaging in practices to regulate your mood decreases your vulnerability to negative emotions and falling into “emotion mind.”
  - To enhance the group’s understanding of rational and emotion mind, it can be helpful to go through the descriptions for each and elicit from group examples of characters from movies/TV shows that exhibit similar characteristics.
- **Discuss importance of emotional regulation to prevent emotional hijacking**
  - The ability to regulate your emotions prevents you from being driven by your emotions and giving in to your impulses
  - Make connection to states of mind; for example, when in a stable environment (e.g. home) you can understand probability and odds but when you are in a casino and experience a loss, you are unable to think rationally and are driven to continue playing by your emotion-mind.

## **5. Additional strategies for emotional regulation**

- **Introduce H.A.L.T. as a check-in tool;** see ‘H.A.L.T.’ handout
  - Goal is to reduce emotional vulnerability

*Note to leader:* Due to time constraints, provide handout for H.A.L.T. and provide ‘Emotional Regulation Strategies Tracking Sheet’ as homework for next session.

## **6. Connecting emotions and problem gambling**

- **Reasons for gambling**
  - As a coping mechanism; to self-soothe and/or to escape reality

- To try and change an emotion, for example:
  - Boredom → Gambling for a rush
  - Loneliness → Visiting casinos provide a sense of belonging
  - Depressed and/or anxious → Gambling to perpetuate a pleasant feeling
- **Discuss short-term vs. long-term consequences and benefits of gambling to regulate mood**
  - Gambling gives you an artificial 'high' (similar to drugs) – short term emotional payoff but has long term negative consequences (in relation to your relationships, finances, physical and mental wellbeing etc.)
  - The ability to regulate your emotions enables you to work towards getting to a point where you can tolerate painful emotions without giving into your impulses.
  - Emphasize to group that although this is a slower process, it can help to break the pattern of using gambling to avoid/suppress your emotions.

*Note to leader:* This part of the session gives the group an opportunity to talk about emotions in relation to gambling and to normalize their experiences.

### Supporting Materials

- **In-Session**
  1. Naming Emotions
  2. Purposes of Emotions
  3. Describing Emotions
  4. Primary and Secondary Emotions
  5. Mindfulness
  6. States of Mind
  7. H.A.L.T.
- **Homework**
  - ✓ Identifying Emotions
  - ✓ Emotional Regulation Strategies Tracking Sheet

### Optional Resources for Clinicians / Patients

- Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.
- Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C. A. (2015). *Mind over mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think*. Guilford Publications.
- “The Three Minute Breathing Space” - <http://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/31.-Session-3-Three-Min-Breathing-Space-Script-.pdf>
- McCormick, E.W. (2012). “Mindfulness exercises and meditation (extended version)”. *Change for the better* (pp 1-4).

## Naming Emotions

Learning how to observe, describe and label emotions can help you understand the connection between your feelings and your actions. It is an important first step to understanding the link between your emotions and gambling behaviours.

Emotions can typically be labeled using one word. Below is a list of a variety of moods you may have experienced. This is not a complete list of emotions, but it shows that mood is more than “I feel good” or “I feel bad”. You can write down additional emotions you may have thought of when going through this list on the blank lines.

Mood List		
Cheerful	Sad	Interested
Disgusted	Calm	Excited
Daring	Afraid	Guilty
Strong	Tired	Active
Scornful	Amazed	Sleepy
Relaxed	Shaky	Proud

## Purpose of Emotions

Emotions have an important role in why we think and act the way we do in certain situations or after certain events. Emotions colour our world. Without them, we wouldn't be able to find joy in our experiences or understand what causes us distress.

Emotions can:



Act as a motivator for action



Signal a problem and/or need for change



Build connections with others

Emotions have a number of beneficial functions but they can also have negative effects including:

- The potential to be distracting (making it difficult to focus at work and/or on the task at hand).
- The risk of feeling overwhelmed.
- The urge to engage in negative coping behaviours (e.g. drinking or gambling).

The ability to regulate your emotions allows you to be able to *feel* your moods and *control* how you express them. This in turn will help *reduce* your chance of experiencing the negative effects of emotions.

Images from:

[Stock Photo]. Retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/>.

## Describing Emotions

Emotions are a result of a complex process. It can be helpful to observe your emotional experience as its separate parts. This can make it easier for you to describe your emotions and to recognize what to do to improve a mood instead of turning to gambling.

The process of emotions includes:

### 1. Prompting Events

- An event that cues a certain emotion. This event can be external (e.g. your environment) or internal (e.g. your thoughts).  
Example:

### 2. Interpretation

- The meaning you give to an event.  
Example:

### 3. Body Responses

- The changes in your body and brain.  
Example:

### 4. Body Language

- The resulting changes in facial expression and posture.  
Example:

### 5. Verbal Communication

- How you verbalize your experience of the emotion.  
Example:

### 6. Action Urges

- The behaviours associated with an emotion.  
Example:

## Primary and Secondary Emotions

**Primary emotions** are our first reaction to an event/situation. They occur immediately and are a result of an automatic process. **Secondary emotions** are the feelings and/or the urges to act that follow.

Secondary emotions can arise immediately following the primary emotion, making it difficult to differentiate between the two. Over time, the connection between the primary and secondary emotion strengthens and can lead to us to 'skip over' the primary emotion and to fail to recognize it.

This is a concern, because if we are unable to name the primary emotion, it will be difficult to problem solve and to change our response to an event/situation.

Primary Emotion	Secondary Emotions
Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affection</li> <li>• Lust</li> <li>• Sympathy</li> <li>• Other: _____</li> </ul>
Joy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excitement</li> <li>• Cheerfulness</li> <li>• Optimism</li> <li>• Other: _____</li> </ul>
Sadness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Guilt</li> <li>• Boredom</li> <li>• Other: _____</li> </ul>
Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritation</li> <li>• Hostility</li> <li>• Hurt</li> <li>• Other: _____</li> </ul>
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Other: _____</li> </ul>

## Mindfulness

### *Letting Go of Negative Emotions through Mindfulness*

Mindfulness is *awareness* of your feelings, thoughts, physical sensations and actions, without judgment of yourself or the present situation.

Mindfulness is to:



### Why is mindfulness important?

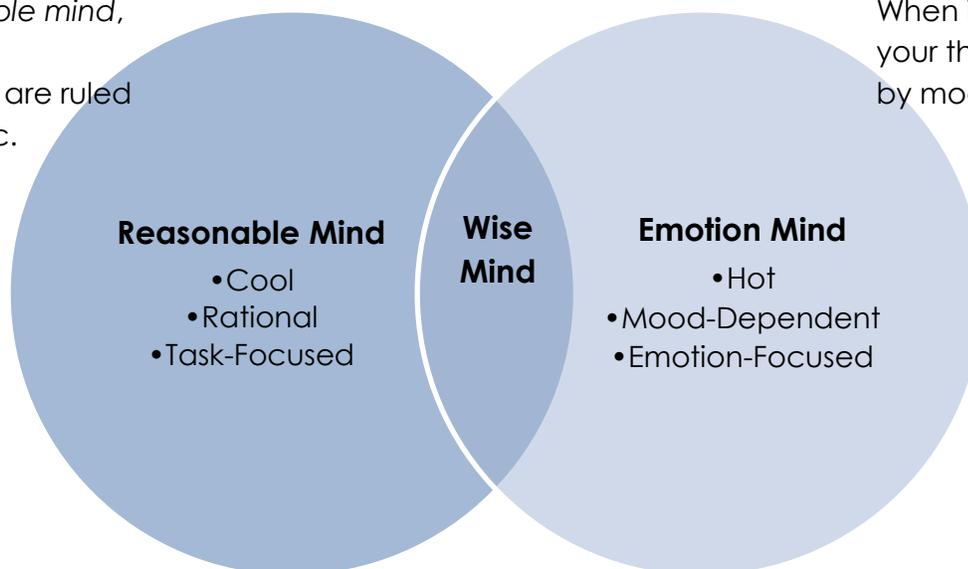
- It grounds us, allowing our minds to remain stable
- It makes us self-aware; we have a better sense of our thinking patterns and how it relates to our feelings and physical sensations
- It prepares us to act and not react; we are able to observe our emotions and choose how to act in response to stress

### What is *not* mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is **not** a relaxation exercise. The goal of mindfulness is **to be aware** of your bodily sensations and how it relates to your mood and thoughts.
- Mindfulness is **not** a way for you to avoid difficulty. Mindfulness helps you **remain present in difficult situations** and not become paralyzed by your emotions.

## States of Mind

When in *reasonable mind*, you are thinking intellectually and are ruled by facts and logic.



When in *emotion mind*, your thoughts are ruled by moods and urges.

When in *wise mind*, there is a balance between the two minds. You are able to sense your feelings and respond in a rational manner.

**Describe an example of an experience you have had with each mind.**

<b>Reasonable Mind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Asking a casino employee to explain how a slot machine works"</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Emotion Mind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Continuing to bet in order to recover the money you have lost while gambling"</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Wise Mind</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Recognizing the urge to flee and gamble to avoid dealing with a stressful situation and taking a moment to self-soothe, think and act with intention"</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets*. Guilford Publications.

The Wise Mind. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.therapistaid.com/content/0113.pdf>.

## Identifying Emotions

Body language is an important part of an emotion. Being able to recognize the change in your facial expressions can be helpful when trying to understand how you are feeling.



Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

Image from:

Emotions [Clipart]. Retrieved from [https://openclipart.org/image/800px/svg\\_to\\_png/126787/emotions.png](https://openclipart.org/image/800px/svg_to_png/126787/emotions.png)

## H.A.L.T.

Fighting the urge to gamble can be made easier by remembering to check-in with how you are feeling. Next time, you are feeling distressed and want to turn to gambling, remember to first

### H.A.L.T.



H.A.L.T. is an easy tool and can be used at any time in the day when you feel the desire to buy a lottery ticket, go online to play a card game, and/or visit a casino to check in with your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

#### Hunger

- When you're hungry, you are more likely to get overwhelmed by situations because your body and brain are lacking the nutrients to function at its best.

#### Anger

- If you are experiencing anger, it is important to recognize how you are feeling, take a moment to yourself to breathe, self-reflect to recognize what is making you angry and decide what needs to be done to make you feel better.
- Remember, it is not a *bad* thing to feel anger, but it is important to not lose control of your temper.

#### Lonely

- It is not unusual to lose touch with some people in your life after you stop gambling because you are no longer visiting the casino or going to your corner store on a regular basis to buy lottery tickets.
- Take some time out of your day to have a positive interaction with someone whether that be a family member, friend or a stranger on the bus.

#### Tired

- Irritability and hypersensitivity are often related to tiredness. You will notice that after a good night's rest or a nap, issues that seem impossible to overcome often become easier to handle.

Adapted from:

Iliff, B. (2009). *A Woman's Guide to Recovery: Written by Brenda Iliff, Director of the Hazelden Women's Recovery Center*. Hazelden Publishing.

## Emotional Regulation Strategies Tracking Sheet

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Every day, try to record the emotion you were most aware of, whether it was because it was the feeling that lasted the longest or because it was the most distressing. Record what strategies you used to try to regulate your mood and if it was effective for you.

Date	Mood Try to name your emotion in one word.	Situation What prompted you to feel this way?	Interpretation What was going through your head before you started feeling this way?	Change in sensations Did you sense any changes in your heart rate, muscle tension, and/or body language?	Action urges Did you have an urge to gamble or engage in other behaviour?	Check-in (Yes/No) Did you H.A.L.T.?	Activity What mindfulness exercise did you try?	Outcome Did you notice any changes in your mood, thoughts, or sensations after you checked-in with yourself and/or practiced mindfulness?
Monday								
Tuesday								
Date	Mood	Situation	Interpretation	Change in sensations	Action urges	Check-in (Yes/No)	Activity	Outcome

<b>Wednesday</b>								
<b>Thursday</b>								
<b>Friday</b>								
<b>Saturday</b>								
<b>Sunday</b>								

## Session #2: Introduction to Distress Tolerance Part One

### Duration:

- 120 minutes

### Goals:

1. Introduce distress tolerance as a form of emotional regulation
2. Identify the value/utility of distress tolerance for changing gambling behaviors
3. Define crisis survival skills
4. Practice skills for surviving crises

### Tasks:

#### 1. Welcome and business

#### 2. Check-in and review homework

- With the aid of the tracking sheet, elicit from group what skills have been most useful to them and what has not been helpful.
- Elicit from group: “Reflecting on the past week, at what times were you most aware of your emotions and when were you not?”
- If time permits, practice one mindfulness exercise or H.A.L.T.; see Session One.

#### 3. Distress tolerance as a form of emotional regulation

##### ○ **Define distress tolerance**

- Elicit from group; “Many here have experienced pain and distress particularly in relation to gambling. How would you describe this experience?”
  - Overwhelming
  - Stressful
  - Associated with a sense of loss (e.g. changes in finances, relationships, or status)
  - Related to making difficult choices
  - Connected to prior experiences with violence and/or trauma
- To be distress tolerant is to experience uncomfortable emotions and not become overwhelmed by them and/or your urges to escape them.

*Note to leader:* It is important to emphasize that although it is uncomfortable to experience negative emotions, feeling a negative emotion is not always necessarily a *bad* thing. For example, crying during a movie. Elicit from group examples of other experiences where you may feel a negative emotion, but you were able to accept it.

##### ○ **Explain spectrum of tolerance and importance of healthy distress tolerance;** see ‘Spectrum of Tolerance’ handout

- One’s level of distress tolerance can be thought of as a continuum where it is not healthy to be on either end of the spectrum.
  - Emphasize to group that it is not okay to tolerate *any* kind of discomfort.

- A healthy level of distress tolerance is to have the ability to balance tolerating distress while also taking planned actions to reduce intensity of emotion.
- **Explain window of tolerance and importance of recognizing changes in your optimal arousal zone;** see 'Window of Tolerance' handout
  - Define hyperarousal, hypoarousal and optimal arousal zone
  - Emphasize to group that your optimal arousal zone is dynamic and that your window of tolerance will vary depending on the present situation.
  - With the aid of the second graph on the 'Window of Tolerance' handout, facilitate a discussion about where group members think they are: a) prior to entering the casino, b) during a game and, c) after they have experienced a win or loss.
    - a. Before entering the casino – For example, may be in 'blue'/optimal arousal zone and able to think rationally about odds, and set reasonable limits; May also be in another zone, especially if gambling to cope, etc.
    - b. During a game – For example, may be in 'red'/hyperarousal and feeling a rush from playing, angry at interruptions, overwhelmed by the environment
    - c. After a win/loss – For example, may be 'green'/hypoarousal and feeling a sense of numbness, playing to chase losses or increase your winnings instead of for entertainment
  - Elicit from group; "What signs can you look for to help recognize when you are slipping out of your window of tolerance?"
    - How to spot yourself 'zoning-out' and going into auto-pilot
    - For example, when you have experienced a loss during a gambling session and continue to play to recover the loss without considering the impact it will have on your incurring debt or tending to your physical needs.

#### **4. Value/utility of distress tolerance skills for changing gambling behaviours**

- **Make connection between your mood and propensity to gamble**
  - Elicit from group meaning of trauma to normalize their experiences
    - Provide definition of trauma by Judith Herman; see below for link.
    - Traumatic experiences cause feelings of pain and distress, and for many people, gambling is used to cope with those feelings or as a distractor.
  - Emphasize importance of distress tolerance skills to develop better coping skills
    - It is important to be able to find meaning in these experiences and work towards accepting these moments and improving the related pain and rather than trying to escape through destructive behaviour.
    - Developing skills in accepting, living with, and tolerating pain and distress are fundamental to improving our mental wellbeing and making lasting changes to better ourselves.

#### **5. Crisis survival skills**

*Note to leader:* Distress tolerance is often divided into two types of skills: crisis-survival and acceptance. Explain this to group and emphasize that the focus of today's session is crisis-

survival and Session Three will focus on accepting and improving distress. For more information about the distinction between these types of strategies, see Linehan (2014).

*Note to leader:* Introduce the next portion of the session by facilitating a discussion with group about what they have done in the past to get through distressing moments/crises? As a group, discuss what strategies have been effective and functional (i.e. have fewer negative consequences)?

- **Define crisis-survival;** see 'Crisis Survival Skills' handout
  - Short-term solutions to highly stressful situations
  - Goals of skills: to be able to tolerate and survive distressing situations without giving into your impulses and risk making it worse

*Note to leader:* Emphasize the short-term nature of these solutions. It is importance that these skills are combined with acceptance strategies and problem-solving methods that will discussed in Session 3.

- **Explain when to use crisis-survival skills;** see 'Crisis Survival Skills' handout
  - Emphasize to group that there are particular instances when crisis-survival skills are most useful:
    - When you experience intense physical/emotional pain that cannot be resolved easily
    - When you can sense the urge to act with your emotion mind
    - When the urge to engage in a destructive behaviour (e.g. going to the casino) becomes overwhelming
    - When you have a task or job to complete but you are emotionally overwhelmed and are unable to think clearly

## 6. Types of crisis-survival skills

*Note to leader:* It is possible that you won't be able to cover all four strategies. It is suggested that leaders review two strategies in detail and direct group to refer to handouts and Linehan (2014) for more information as needed.

- **STOP skills;** see 'STOP Skills' handout
  - Function: to stop yourself from reacting impulsively and stay in control in the present moment
  - Explain each step of process and run through an example [OPTIONAL]
- **TIPP skills;** see 'TIPP Skills' handout
  - Function: to change your emotional state quickly by responding to the changes in your bodily sensations of pain and distress; to 'jolt the body' and change emotional experience
    - Make a connection to components of emotions discussed in first session. The changes in our bodily sensations are major indicator of our emotions. Therefore, by acting on the physical changes to distress, we can change the experience of intense emotions rapidly.

- Explain each strategy and run through an example [OPTIONAL]

*Note to leader:* In addition to the strategies listed in the handout, there are softer techniques that can be practiced in session such as holding a cold slice of a lemon and focusing on the cold sensation, scent and sour taste.

- **Wise Mind ACCEPTS;** see 'Wise Mind ACCEPTS' handout
  - Function: to distract yourself from the present moment
    - Emphasize to group the cost of over-using these skills. Reiterate to group, the goal is **not** to *avoid* painful emotions.
    - Rather, distraction methods are useful when the urge to gamble or engage in other destructive behaviours becomes too overwhelming, as a way to refocus your attention.
  - Explain each strategy and run through an example [OPTIONAL]
- **Self-Soothing;** see 'Self-Soothing' handout
  - Function: to be self-compassionate using activities that engage each of your five senses
  - Provide examples from each category and practice one example [OPTIONAL]

*Note to leader:* Emphasize to group the importance of self-soothing activities. Explain that at first some of these activities (particularly the body-scan meditation) can elicit undesired feelings such as anger but as you practice and discover what you skills you prefer, it will become easier.

*Note to leader:* Provide a medical disclaimer prior to explaining the above strategies. In particular, emphasize to group that it is highly recommended that they speak with their medical provider prior to engaging in tipping the temperature of their face or any intensive aerobic exercise.

### Supporting Materials

- **In-Session**
  1. Spectrum of Tolerance
  2. Window of Tolerance
  3. Grounding Techniques
  4. Crisis Survival Skills
  5. STOP Skills
  6. TIPP Skills
  7. Wise Mind ACCEPTS
  8. Self-Soothing
- **Homework**
  - ✓ Crisis Survival Practice Tracking Sheet

### Optional Resources for Clinicians / Patients

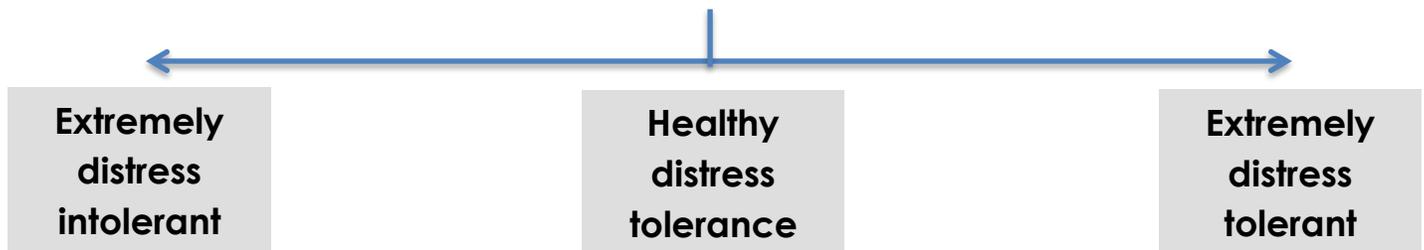
- McKay, M., Wood, J. C., & Brantley, J. (2007). The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook: Practical DBT Exercises for Learning Mindfulness, Interpersonal Effectiveness,

Emotion Regulation, & Distress Tolerance. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc. Pages 5-30.

- Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.
- Saulsman, L., & Nathan, P. (2012). *Facing Your Feelings: Learning to Tolerate Distress*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.
- Judith Herman's definition of trauma can be found at: <http://www.nnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/tic-def-6-2013.pdf>

## Spectrum of Tolerance

Distress tolerance can be thought of as a continuum.



To be on either end of the spectrum is not helpful.

- If you were to be extremely distress intolerant, you may find that you become overwhelmed by *any* changes in your mood.
- If you were to be extremely distress tolerant, you may find yourself in a position where you never take action to change a bad situation or to separate yourself from negative people in your life.

The middle of the continuum represents **healthy distress tolerance**. It is the ability to tolerate discomfort as it arises while also taking action to improve your mood.

Adapted from:

Zvolensky, M. J., Bernstein, A., & Vujanovic, A. A. (Eds.). (2011). *Distress tolerance: Theory, research, and clinical applications*. Guilford Press.

## Window of Tolerance

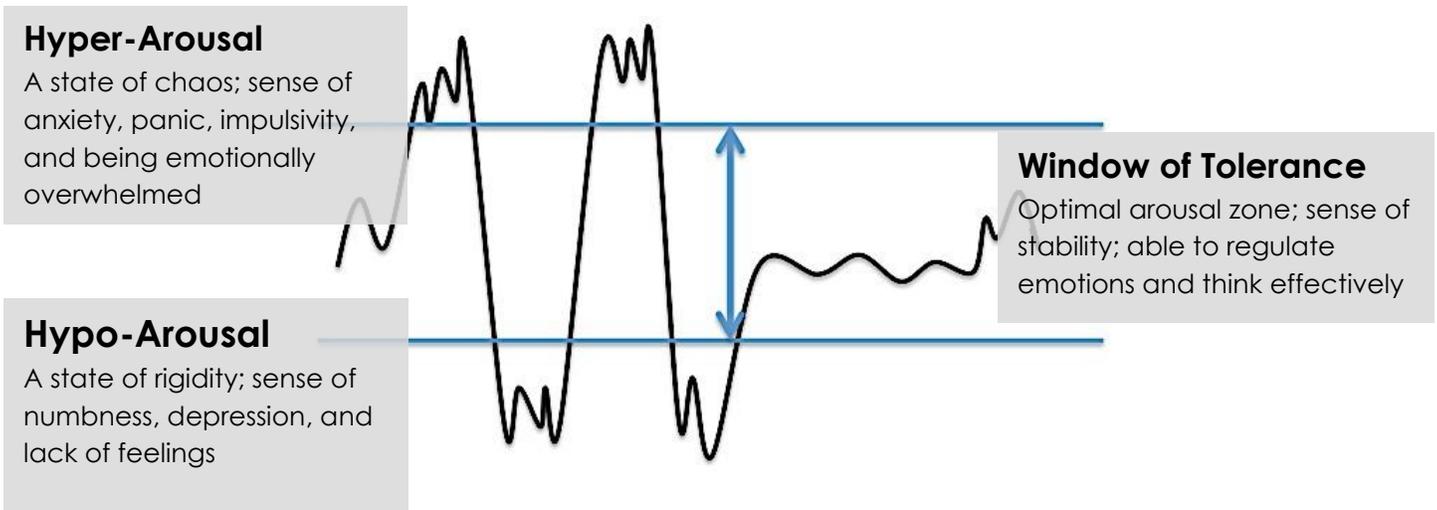
We as humans, often have difficulty staying *in control* of our emotions during high levels of distress as it is often related to past experiences of trauma.

**Trauma** is when your body goes into *survival mode*. It is when your heart rate speeds up, your breathing shallows, and your prefrontal cortex (aka your “thinking brain”) shuts down. At these times, you may experience a sense of helplessness and feel yourself being driven by your impulses (e.g. gambling to escape reality).

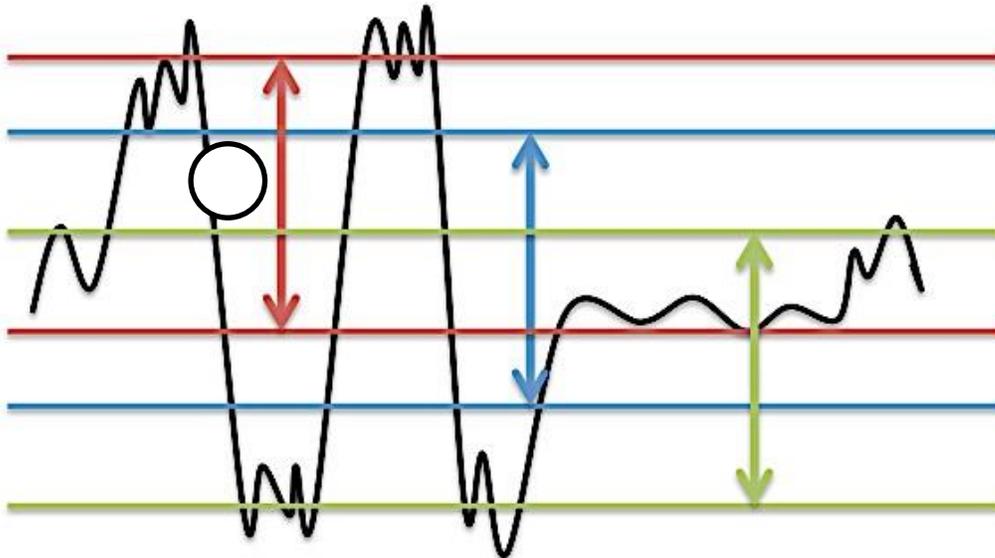
When we are distressed, our mind can go one of three ways:

1. We can overreact and become anxious, hypervigilant and action-oriented.
2. We can shut down and become numb, disconnected and immobilized.
3. We can feel stable and be able to think clearly and regulate our emotions.

When we are able to remain stable and present, we are in the **window of tolerance**. It represents the level of emotional arousal we can experience and continue to think effectively.



The width of your window of tolerance can *change* depending on the situation.



Looking at the graph, where would you place yourself:

- A. Before going to the casino?
- B. In the middle of a gambling session?
- C. After you have won or lost a game?

It is important to be able to recognize the changes in your state of arousal to be able to engage in the appropriate practices (see “Grounding Techniques”) to downregulate your emotions and remain within your window of tolerance.

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

Siegel, D. J. (1999). *The Developing Mind* (Vol. 296). New York: Guilford Press.

Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and recovery* (Vol. 551). Basic books.

Image adapted from:

Tweed, J. (2015). *Building Resilience: Making the connection between trauma and problem gambling* [PowerPoint slides].

## Grounding Techniques

### *Practices for getting back into your window of tolerance*

When you have gone outside of your window of tolerance, it is important to know how you can recover and return to your optimal arousal zone.

**Grounding skills** can be used when you feel yourself entering a state of hyperarousal or hypoarousal to gain control of your emotions and actions.

The goal of these exercises to increase your awareness and remain present during stressful moments:

- **Breathe mindfully** to slow down your thoughts – Place your hands on your belly and breathe in deeply as if you are filling up a balloon and slowly exhale to bring down your heart rate.
- **Pay attention to the sensations of your body** – Sit in a chair, gently push your feet into the ground and your back against the chair and focus on the sensations in your legs and back.
  - You can also release gripped hands, focusing on the tightening and release of your muscles.
- **Practice 5-4-3-2-1** to silence your mind and gain control of your thoughts – Focusing on the present moment:
  - Name 5 things you can see in the room with you
  - Name 4 things you can feel
  - Name 3 things you can hear
  - Name 2 things you can smell
  - Name 1 thing you can taste

**Center yourself** – Place one hand on your heart and the other on your belly to refocus your attention. Note the weight of the hands, temperature and changes in your breathing and energy.

Adapted from:

Fisher, J. (1999). *The Work of Stabilization in Trauma Treatment*. Paper presented at The Trauma Centre Lecture Series, Brookline, MA.

Ogden, P., Minton, K., & Pain, C. (2006). *Trauma and the body: A sensorimotor approach to psychotherapy*. New York: Norton.

## Crisis Survival Strategies

Crises are highly stressful situations that cause a tremendous amount of pain and distress. During these times, it can be very tempting to give in to our impulses and to engage in behaviors that we know may help in the short-term but will make the situation worse in the long-term such as gambling. The ability to tolerate and survive crises is an essential part of building distress tolerance. The goal of crisis survival strategies is to make painful situations more manageable, therefore allowing us to remain within the window of tolerance and not act impulsively.

There are **four** key crisis survival strategies:

### 1. The STOP Skills

These are skills used when emotion mind takes over and you can sense that you are wanting to react impulsively to distress

### 2. TIPP Skills

These are skills used when you are emotionally overwhelmed and you are unable to process information and/or act

### 3. Wise Mind ACCEPTS

These are skills used to distract from the crisis and therefore separate yourself from what is causing you distress

### 4. Self-Soothing

These are skills used to reduce your vulnerability to emotion mind and desire to act impulsively in response to distress or triggers to gamble

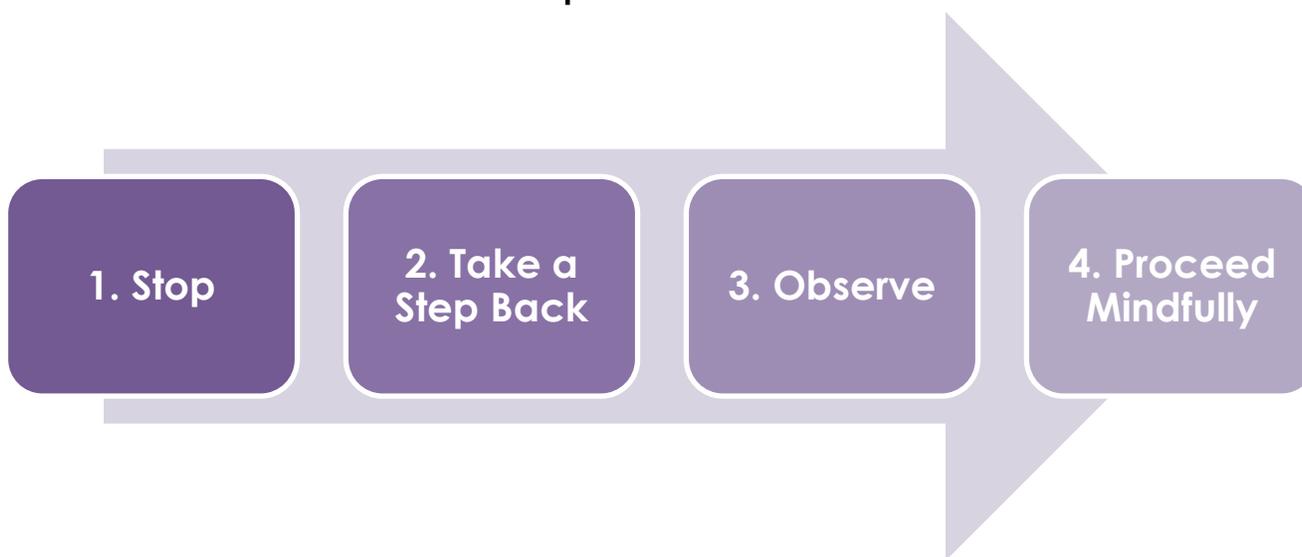
Some strategies may be more effective than others depending on the person and the situation they find themselves in. It is important to try a number of strategies in order to find out which ones work best for you and when.

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

## The STOP Skills

The **STOP** skill consists of four steps:



1. **Stop** – When you feel that you are becoming overwhelmed by your emotion and can sense the urge to engage in destructive behaviors, it can be effective to stop moving. Freezing for a moment can help you to stop reacting to your emotions and maintain control of your actions.
2. **Take a step back** – This can be done by either removing yourself from the situation physically or by engaging in a breathing exercise to separate yourself mentally.
3. **Observe** – Gather all of the facts to understand why this specific event causes you distress. Mindfulness skills can be used to help you through this step.
4. **Proceed mindfully** – After you have removed yourself from the situation and taken the time to observe, it is important to ask yourself what you want and what choices will make this moment better or worse prior to acting.

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

## The TIPP Skills

The goal of the TIPP skills is to reduce your emotional arousal by addressing the physical responses to stress. This can be done by:

### 1. Tipping the temperature of your face

- Splash cold water on your face or hold an ice pack (wrapped in a towel to protect your skin) on your face. This can help to calm your nervous system and reduce the physical response to emotional arousal.

### 2. Intense aerobic exercise

- Engage in any type of aerobic exercise for a minimum of 20 minutes. This is useful because emotions function to prepare you for action and for this reason, it can be difficult to inhibit your need to react. Exercises provides you with that outlet to engage in an activity and allows for your body to shift to a less emotional state.

### 3. Paced breathing

- Slow the pace of inhalations and exhalations and breath in deeply starting from your stomach. As a rule of thumb, for each breath cycle, you should try to inhale for 4 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds. This can help to slow down your heart rate and therefore reduce your emotional arousal.

### 4. Paired muscle relaxation

- With each inhalation, tense up each of your muscle groups, observe this sensation and with your exhalation, relax all of your muscles. It can be useful when relaxing your muscles, to say the word “relax” to yourself to calm your body and mind.

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

## Wise Mind ACCEPTS

Wise Mind ACCEPTS is a set of skills that are used to *distract* you from the present situation. There are seven types of distracting skills that can be remembered by keeping in mind 'Wise Mind ACCEPTS':

### Activities

- Engage in a hobby or activity that you enjoy such as cooking, gardening or going for a walk.

### Contributing

- Do something to make another person's life better such as volunteer work or a kind gesture for a person in your life.

### Comparisons

- Compare your present situation to people who are coping the same way you are or whose life experiences are worse than yours. This can be used to put your situation in a more positive light.
- Comparisons can be done with yourself as well by focusing on past problems and how you were able to get past those to reassure yourself that you can get past this.

### Emotions

- Change your emotion. This can only be done after you have named how you are feeling in the present moment. The goal is to engage in activities that will elicit a different emotion such as reading an emotional book or watching a scary movie.

### Pushing Away

- Remove yourself physically and mentally from the current situation. By pushing away the situation, you are separating yourself from the negativity.
- The use of imagery can be helpful. Try to imagine putting your feelings and the present moment in a box, locking it and placing it on a shelf until you are ready to work through it.

### Thoughts

- Distract yourself by thinking of something else such as singing a song in your head, or counting the number of tiles on the ceiling. This can help to shift your attention from the thoughts that are reinforcing the negative emotions.

### Sensations

- Elicit intense and different sensations to help refocus your attention such as holding ice cubes, biting a lemon wedge, or listening to fast, upbeat music.

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

## Self-Soothing

The goal of self-soothing activities is to be self-compassionate. They are a group of activities that are meant to be comforting and nurturing. They provide relief from the stress and pain associated with distressing situations and therefore give you the ability to let the moment pass without engaging in behaviors that may make things worse.

Self-soothing activities are based on the five senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

### Vision

- Watch a sunrise or sunset
- Observe nature surrounding you
- Walk through a museum
- 
- 

### Hearing

- Listen to soothing music
- Pay attention to the sounds of nature
- Listen to the radio
- 
- 

### Smell

- Take a bath and use one of your favorite soaps
- Bake and be mindful of the aroma
- Take a walk and smell the surrounding air
- 
- 

### Taste

- Drink your favorite coffee, latte or smoothie
- Eat a meal mindfully, concentrating on the flavors
- Eat your favorite dessert
- 
- 

### Touch

- Take a long bath
- Have a massage or soak your feet
- Wrap yourself in a blanket
- 
-

As you become more comfortable with the activities listed above, it can be helpful to begin practicing **body scan meditation**, another form of self-soothing. This type of practice can help to calm your mind by blocking out thoughts of the past and future and focusing on the present moment.

This goal is to pay attention to how your body is feeling in this moment – the kinds of sensations you are experiencing and the shifts in your mood as you focus on different parts of your body.

The use of meditation recordings can be helpful when you are beginning this practice. See below for information on recordings:

- “Body-Scan Meditation” by Jon Kabat-Zinn (see YouTube)
- “Compassionate Body Scan” by Kristen Neff (see <http://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/#guided-meditations>)



## Session #3 – Introduction to Distress Tolerance Part Two

### Duration:

- 120 minutes

### Goals:

1. Introduce and practice skills for accepting distress
2. Introduce and practice skills for improving distress
3. Identify the value of problem solving strategies for changing gambling behaviours
4. Make connection between emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and gambling behaviours

### Tasks:

#### 1. Welcome and business

#### 2. Check-in and review homework

- With aid of tracking sheet, elicit from group what skills have been most useful to them and what has not been helpful.
- Elicit from group; “Why is it important to practice skills to cope with distress?”
  - Pain and distress are inevitable and part of being human
  - If we are unable to stay present during negative moment, we will want to avoid distress at all costs and give into urges that will only make the situation worse
  - High emotional arousal (i.e. hyper-arousal) makes it difficult to engage in effective thinking, planning, and problem-solving
- If time permits, practice one grounding technique; see Session Two.
  - Grounding techniques can help us stay in the present moment and connect our head and heart.
  - They are useful in instances when you are experiencing a craving to gamble.

#### 3. Introduce and practice skills for accepting distress

- **Define acceptance;** see ‘Accepting Distress’ handout
  - Acceptance is acknowledging that you are feeling a negative emotion without anger/grudge and changing how you attend to it. By accepting negative emotions you are letting go of fighting reality or trying to escape it through gambling.
  - Elicit from group importance of transitioning from crisis-survival to accepting and improving distress;
    - Crisis-survival enables you to get past an overwhelming moment without engaging in actions that may make it worse.
    - Rejecting reality does not change it; the rejection of reality only leads to prolonged suffering and increased pain
    - Learning to *accept* distress is a long-term strategy that can help reduce suffering and lead to freedom from painful situations and will enable you to be able to think clearly through these moments and utilize adaptive coping strategies.
  - Elicit from group examples of stressors related to problem gambling that need to be accepted

- Changes in their financial situation
- Changes in their relationships
- Changes in their role in society

*Note to leader:* If time permits, end this session by reading “Accepting Losses” (see below), a post written by an individual with a gambling addiction to help normalize the group’s experiences.

○ **Key skills for accepting distress**

- To watch or observe your emotions from a third-person perspective and recognize that you are not your emotions
  - Relate to importance of practicing mindfulness (see Session One)
- To label or describe how you are feeling and engage in self-talk
  - Relate to process of describing emotions (see Session One)
- To use non-judgemental language to describe your situation and/or how you are feeling
  - Distress is often a result of our perception that negative feelings (e.g. sadness or anger) are **bad**; the use of non-judgemental language can make it easier to tolerate such emotions.
- To use imagery to remind yourself that all emotions are fleeting
  - Elicit from group different examples of images that can be used to represent passing of emotions. For specific examples, see Saulsman and Nathan (2012).
  - Emphasize to group that the use of imagery can aid in their ability to observe their emotions from a third-person perspective.

○ **Strategies for practicing acceptance**

- Urge surfing; see ‘Urge Surfing’ handout
- Process of acceptance; see ‘Practicing Acceptance’ handout
  - With aid of ‘Practicing Acceptance’ handout and tracking sheet, run through an example.
- Provide group with additional strategies that can be used to help with acceptance:
  - Mindfulness strategies; see Session One
  - Self-talk exercises; provide link to Kristin Neff’s website (see below)

**4. Introduce and practice skills for improving distress**

○ **Importance of accepting and improving distress**

- Elicit from group reasons for why we need to transition from accepting to improving distress;
  - To have a healthy level of distress tolerance (see Session Two) is to be able to accept your negative emotions while also working to improve your experience of the emotion.
  - Trying to improve your distress before accepting it will only result in your actions being frantic and out of desperation to rid yourself of the pain as soon as possible
- Make connection to Siegel’s “Flipping Your Lid” concept; refer to YouTube link (see below)

- **Strategies for improving distress**
  - Provide handout for 'Activating and Soothing Activities'; see handout and tracking sheet
    - If time permits, elicit from group additional examples of activating and soothing activities.
  - Recognizing your window of tolerance and utilizing grounding techniques appropriately (see Session Two)
  
- 5. **Identify the importance of problem solving strategies for changing gambling behaviours**
  - **Importance of engaging in effective problem-solving**; see 'Problem Solving' handout
    - Writing out your plan enables you to be able to evaluate your options in a logical manner and utilize your rational mind in your decision-making process.
      - With aid of "Life Choices Game" (see below for instructions) discuss as a group the steps to problem solving and complete handout.
  - **Importance of developing personalized distress-improvement plans**
    - After you recognize the emotional *triggers* to your gambling, it can be helpful to utilize the handout to create plans as to how you can address them (via crisis survival, acceptance, etc.).
    - Elicit from group examples of emotional triggers for gambling and what kind of plans can they create in advance to help with overcoming these moments.
      - E.g. Access to money = trigger; developing a 'debt-management' plan
  
- 6. **Make connection between emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and gambling behaviours**
  - **Discuss how distress tolerance skills can support recovery from gambling-related harm**
    - Elicit from group how distress tolerance skills can be used to manage urges to gamble
      - Negative emotions as well as negative *evaluations* of situations and circumstances can act triggers for problem gambling.
      - In order to be able to deal with losses and negative consequences of gambling, you must first be able to accept them.
  
  - **Emphasize importance of practicing skills and keeping track of effective exercises**

### Supporting Materials

- **In-Session**
  1. Accepting Distress
  2. Accepting Losses
  3. Urge Surfing
  4. Practicing Acceptance
  5. Activating and Soothing Activities
  6. Life Choices Game
  
- **Homework**
  - ✓ Practicing Acceptance Experiment Log

- ✓ Activating and Soothing Activities Tracking Sheet
- ✓ Problem Solving Strategy

#### **Optional Resources for Clinicians / Patients**

- Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.
- Saulsman, L., & Nathan, P. (2012). *Facing Your Feelings: Learning to Tolerate Distress*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.
- YouTube link for Dr. Daniel Siegel's "Flipping Your Lid" concept:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0T\\_2NNoC68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0T_2NNoC68)

## Accepting Distress

Distress is not a result of negative emotions but our perception that negative feelings are *bad* and that they need to be stopped. Distressing or overwhelming situations may lead us to becoming paralyzed by our emotions and to give in to our urges to rid ourselves of the pain. The avoidance of painful situations only makes our distress worse.

Many times, the first step to solving a painful situation or to changing your emotional response is to learn how to *tolerate* the problem. **Acceptance is to acknowledge your situation in the present moment, without being judgmental of the situation or critical of your feelings.** If you can accept a situation, you can reduce your suffering and not become overwhelmed by your emotions.

When you find yourself in a distressing situation, it can be helpful to say coping statements to remind yourself to accept the present moment as it is.

### Coping Statements

“I can’t change what has already happened”

“This moment is a result of a million other decisions”

“This is the way it has to be”

“This is how things happened”

“The present moment is the only moment I have control over”

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

Saulsman, L., & Nathan, P. (2012). *Facing Your Feelings: Accepting Distress*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

## Accepting Losses

by **Anonymous** | Tue, 2006-09-05 01:28

moe11

“A month ago I had posted some opinions that I now find to be wrong. Its about how to feel after losing a lot of money. I had posted that you should remind and criticize yourself of those losses so you do not do it again.

Well, did not work for me. I am finding out in Gamblers Anonymous the link between negativity and negative actions. Beating yourself up over your losses is not going to bring the money back and can open yourself up to trying to chase the loss at the gambling establishment of your choice.

Using me as an example. I lost a ton of money in late July-early Aug. How do I feel about it? I am paying for it right now. All my financial plans have been set back by at least 2 months. No extra money to do anything with. On the phone last week begging creditors for extensions.

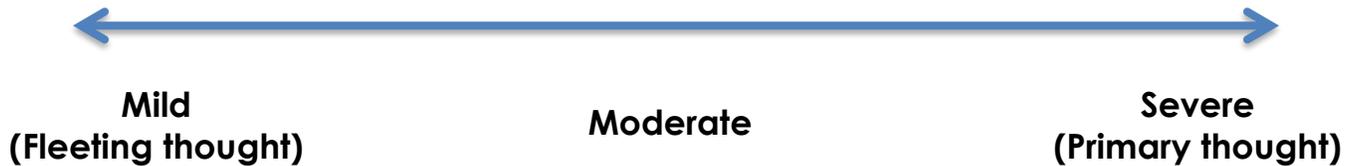
Isn't that punishment enough? Beating myself up over it would only seem like being prosecuted twice for the same crime. I am serving my sentence right now whether I want to or not. Its a beautifull weekend here in the north mid-west area. I would love to be out there paying Golf or going out to eat but for me its going to be TV and shoping at Kroger for specials.

How do I feel now? I feel acceptance. I have accepted the fact that I set back my financial plans by 2 months. I have accepted the few extra dents to my credit report. I have accepted the fact that I shot all my summer plans.

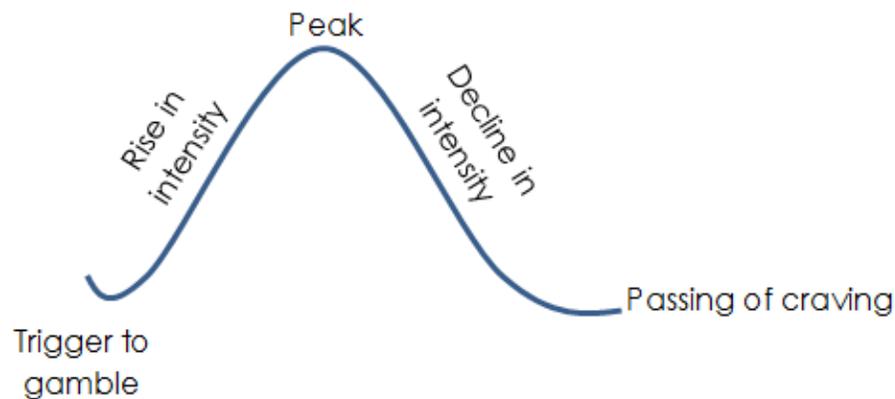
But I can still do productive things on a tight budget. The next 2 months does not have to be a total wash. I hope to make the best out of the comming weeks of tight budgets and soothing creditors. What else can I do?”

## Urge Surfing

Habits are difficult to break – it is likely that you may have cravings while reducing your gambling, particularly during high stress. Being able to overcome urges to gamble is crucial as you work towards accepting and improving your distress. The intensity of your urges will change and can often be thought of on a continuum:



Urge surfing can help you get through difficult moments when the desire becomes overwhelming to keep you on the path to recovery.



**What  
mean to  
urge?**

**does it  
surf an**

- Withstanding cravings can be made easier by visualizing urges as a *wave* where the intensity grows, peaks and falls.
- This way you are not trying to *stop* an urge, but instead observing and describing the urge until it subsides.

Over time, your brain will learn to not respond to such urges and these cravings will decline in both intensity and frequency.

There are a number of coping techniques you can try to help you surf an urge. These practices can be divided into two categories:

### Behavioural Techniques (Change in action)

- Keep a journal - write out what you are thinking/feeling throughout the urge
- Share your experiences with a friend or family member
- Engage in a breathing technique - see 'Mindfulness Exercises' handout for suggestions.
- Leave the situation and self-sooth - see 'Self-Soothing Activities' handout for suggestions
- Distract yourself - see 'Activating and Soothing Activities' handout for suggestions

### Cognitive Techniques (Change in thinking)

- Normalize your experience of urges: "I am experiencing a desire to play online poker. It is OK to feel like playing but I know it will pass."
- Use imagery to help you get through the urge (e.g. riding out a wave as it rises, peaks and falls back down)
- Practice thought stopping - visualize a STOP sign
- Use positive language (e.g. "I have not gone to the casino in two weeks and I do not want to spoil my progress.")
- Weigh the costs and benefits of gambling

Adapted from:

Safer, D. L., Telch, C. F., & Chen, E. Y. (2009). *Dialectical behavior therapy for binge eating and bulimia*. Guilford Press.

Annis, H., Watkin-Merek, L., & Herie, M. (1996). *Structured Relapse Prevention: An Outpatient Approach to Group Treatment*. Addiction Research Foundation.

## Practicing Acceptance

Acceptance is a skill that requires practice. It can be easy to start practicing acceptance with smaller events. For example, the next time you are stuck in traffic, use the steps listed below to try and wait without getting impatient or upset.

### 1. Recognize the facts

- Observe your thoughts and acknowledge you are fighting reality

### 2. Use your coping statements

- Remind yourself that you cannot change the present moment and that this is a result of a number of factors

### 3. Practice complete acceptance with your mind, body and soul

- Utilize your **breathing techniques** to practice mindfulness
- Engage in **half-smiling and willing hands** to accept with the body
- Practice **prayer** or **imagery** to help you get to place of acceptance

### 4. Practice opposite action

- Recognize your emotion, reflect on how you typically behave in response to this feeling, identify the opposite action and act on it

### 5. Allow yourself to feel negative emotions

- Allow yourself to feel the disappointment, sadness and/or grief associated with an experience or situation and remind yourself the feeling will pass

### 6. Recognize that pain and distress are part of life

- Acknowledge that pain cannot be avoided and life is worth living despite this

### 7. Create a list of pros and cons

- Reflect on your practice and with the experiment log, track the skills you found useful and would utilize again

### 8. Develop a plan for future events

- Recognize situations or events you think will be distressing for you and develop an acceptance plan to help you in those moments

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

## Practicing Acceptance Experiment Log

<b>Situation</b>  Who? What? Where? When?	<b>Mood</b>  What did you feel in that moment?	<b>Coping statements used</b>  What phrases did you use to remind yourself that you cannot change this moment?	<b>Skills used for acceptance</b>  What techniques did you use to calm your mind, body and soul to allow for acceptance?	<b>Emotion-driven behavior</b>  How have you behaved in the past, when you have been in this situation or experienced similar feelings?	<b>Opposite action</b>  What would be the opposite posture, facial expression and/or behaviors?	<b>Outcome</b>  Were you able to accept the situation? What sayings, skills or/or actions did you like and not like?

Situation	Mood	Coping statements used	Skills used for acceptance	Emotion-driven behavior	Opposite action	Outcome

## Activating and Soothing Activities

When you are feeling distressed it is important to engage in activities to be able to self-soothe and improve your mood. These activities can fall into the category of either being *activating* or *soothing*.

- 'Activating' activities allow you to continue to be engaged and are typically preoccupying.
- 'Soothing' activities are more focused on taking care of you and are calming.

It is not important to use all of the activities on the list, but to try a few and use the ones you prefer when feeling distressed.

Activating Activities	Soothing Activities
Exercise	Having a good meal
Walk	Lighting a candle
Cleaning	Watching the stars
Cooking	Enjoy sounds of nature
Watching your favorite movie	Smile
Reading a book	Bubble bath
Volunteering	Patting a dog or cat
Making something for someone	Relaxation tape
Playing a game	Slow breathing

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Skills Training Manual for Treating Borderline Personality Disorder*. Guilford Press.

Saulsman, L., & Nathan, P. (2012). *Facing Your Feelings: Accepting Distress*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.

## The Life Choices Game

Just as life brings many different situations, this game will present random events for you to cope with.

### Rules for the Life Choices Game:

1. Answer each situation with the best coping you can think of. Use any of the strategies you have learned in this group, or any others you know.
2. Good coping means no gambling, supporting your mood and making solutions that are realistic and safe.
3. Only one person selects a slip of paper at a time, so that we can all pay attention to that person and give helpful feedback.

Let the games begin!

You are with your family, and your father puts you down in front of everyone.

The weekend is coming, and you have no plans. You think, "I'm a loser."

Some of your friends seem to be living a better lifestyle than you are, taking trips with family and vacations. You start to feel sorry for yourself.

You're feeling so desperate and are thinking about ending your life.

Your neighbor invites you to a social game of Poker. You say to yourself, "This isn't really gambling."

You wake up and think, "I don't want to go to work, I'll just lie in bed."

One day you wake up feeling better than you have in weeks. You feel like going out and shopping and gambling.

You look in the mirror. You feel old and fat.

You just got an "A" on your exam. You think, "I feel lucky tonight. Maybe I'll go to a casino."

You're having a great day and you think, "I feel lucky. Maybe I can win some money."

You are not eating well or exercising. How could you get yourself to do those?

There is a relationship that you know is bad for you, but you keep feeling drawn back in. How could you stay away?

You are laid off from your job.

It is late at night. You are feeling lonely. You are thinking, "No one loves me."

You've just had another bill. You are already in debt and can't pay it. You start thinking, "Maybe my only option is to try to win some money."

You've been really anxious, and notice yourself thinking that gambling would give you a break from feeling this way.

You've been feeling really down about your losses and can't afford to pay for your phone. You think about how gambling could make you feel better and you might just win.

You see an ad for a course at the local college that you want to take, but you think, "I'll never pass that course. Everyone will be smarter than me."

You yell at your children more than you should. You feel guilty.

You have had a hard day. You say to yourself, "I can't take this any more. I need a break, Casino seems like a great idea."

You gambled yesterday even after promising yourself, your family, and your therapist you wouldn't. You feel ashamed and disgusted with yourself.

You run into your ex-partner on the street who looked very happy with someone new. You think, "I'll never have a successful relationship."

You try a GA meeting. You get there, look around the room, and think, "No one here can understand what I've been through."

Your mother is criticizing you again. You think, "I am sick of everyone here. They treat me more decently at the casino!"

You are at a work and someone asks you if you want to take part in a sports pool.

Your son says to you, "Why can't you just be happy? That's all I want."

You go to a medical doctor who is very rude to you.

Your ex-partner violates the court's custody agreement and won't let you see your children.

You keep promising yourself that you'll make an appointment for an annual physical exam, but you keep putting it off, week after week.

Your parents say, "Why can't you hold a job like regular people? If you just worked full-time, everything would work out."

Your bookie calls you and you think, "I'll just make one bet."

You feel triggered by a movie that reminds you of gambling.

Someone cuts you off in traffic. You feel enraged.

Someone says a remark in front of you that is offensive to you (e.g., about your race, ethnicity, heritage, or sexual preference).

Everyone you know gets invited to a party except you.

Adapted from:

Najavits, L. M. (2002). *Seeking safety: A treatment manual for PTSD and substance abuse*. Guilford Press.

## Distress Tolerance Activities Log

The thought that is causing me most distress is:

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<b>Experiment</b> What activity will I be testing to improve my distress?	<b>Type of Activity</b> Is this activity <u>activating</u> or <u>soothing</u> ?	<b>Possible Problems</b> What could get in the way of me being able to do this activity?	<b>Potential Solutions</b> What can I change to make this activity better for me?	<b>Outcome</b> Did my I notice a decrease in my distress after doing this activity? Would I try this again?

Adapted from:

Linehan, M. M. (2014). *DBT® Skills Training Manual*. Guilford Publications.

Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C. A. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A cognitive therapy treatment manual for clients*. Guilford press.

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<b>Experiment</b> What activity will I be testing to improve my distress?	<b>Type of Activity</b> Is this activity <u>activating</u> or <u>soothing</u> ?	<b>Possible Problems</b> What could get in the way of me being able to do this activity?	<b>Potential Solutions</b> What can I change to make this activity better for me?	<b>Outcome</b> Did my I notice a decrease in my distress after doing this activity? Would I try this again?

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## Problem Solving Strategy

### Step 1: Define the problem

The issue that is causing me most distress today is...

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### Step 2: List all of the possible solutions/options

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 4: List all of the pros and cons for each solution listed in Step 3

Solution 1: _____	
Pros	Cons
Solution 2: _____	
Pros	Cons
Solution 2: _____	

Pros	Cons

**Step 5: Choose one solution****Step 6: Specify the action steps for this solution**

My step-by-step plan for carrying out this solution is...

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Step 7: Carry out your plan****Step 8: Reflect on your strategy the following day and evaluate the outcomes**

Adapted from:

Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C. A. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: A cognitive therapy treatment manual for clients*. Guilford press.

Saulsman, L., & Nathan, P. (2012). *Facing Your Feelings: Learning to Tolerate Distress*. Perth, Western Australia: Centre for Clinical Interventions.