

FREE WORKSHEET · THOUGHTS & FEELINGS

Sitting With Difficult Feelings

Get through a painful moment without making it worse

When a feeling is painful, the instinct is to get rid of it as fast as possible: distract, avoid, numb it, act on it. That brings relief in the moment, but it also teaches the mind that the feeling was unbearable, which makes the next one feel worse.

Feelings, even strong ones, rise, peak and fall, usually within minutes if we do not feed them. Learning to stay with a feeling long enough for it to pass is one of the most useful skills there is. In dialectical behaviour therapy it is called distress tolerance.

IF YOU NEED HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. The Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

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How do you usually escape?

When a feeling is hard to bear, how often do you...

0 = never, 1 = sometimes, 2 = often, 3 = almost always

	0	1	2	3
Distract yourself with your phone or screens	☐	☐	☐	☐
Keep busy so you do not have to feel it	☐	☐	☐	☐
Use food, alcohol or something else to take the edge off	☐	☐	☐	☐
Avoid the situation or person that triggered it	☐	☐	☐	☐
Act on it straight away: say, send or do something	☐	☐	☐	☐
Go over it again and again in your head	☐	☐	☐	☐

None of these is wrong in itself. The question is whether they help over time, or keep the cycle going.

Ride the wave

Stop

Do not act yet. Freeze for a moment.

Step back

Take a breath, or a step away from the situation.

Observe

Where is the feeling in your body? What is it called? How strong, out of 10?

Proceed

Ask what would help, rather than what would make it stop right now.

Ways to get through the peak:

- Picture the feeling as a wave: it builds, peaks and passes. You only need to stay on it.
- Breathe out slowly, longer than you breathe in.
- Cold water on your face or wrists can calm the body quickly.
- Set a timer for ten minutes and agree with yourself not to act until it goes off.

EXERCISE**Afterwards**

1. How strong was the feeling at its peak, and ten minutes later?

2. What helped me get through it?
