Managing Extreme Emotions

We’ve discussed using DBT skills for managing your emotions on a day to day basis, but what if you are experiencing extreme emotions? Sometimes, our emotional arousal is so high that we cannot use our DBT skills, even if we're familiar with them. DBT can still help in situations like this, even if you feel that your emotions are so high that you can no longer use your skills.

When you are so distressed that you are unable to use your DBT skills, that is called the Skills Breakdown Point. Here are some clues to know that you’re at this point:

- You are in extreme distress
- You feel overwhelmed
- The only thing you can focus on is the extreme emotion
- You can’t process new information
- You find yourself unable to problem-solve or use your DBT skills

Once you’ve determined that you’ve reached the Skills Breakdown Point, it’s time to pull out some old standbys.

- Check the facts. You don’t have to follow every step of every DBT skill at this stage. However, it’s important to go through the facts of the situation, if you are able, to determine if you are truly as distressed as you feel. Does your response fit the facts?
- If your response does fit the facts you can use the following skills to regulate your emotional response:
  - **TIPP** can be used to physically calm your body down
  - **DISTRACT** to remove yourself from the emotional event
  - **SELF-SOOTHE** using the five sense
  - **IMPROVE** the moment
- Once you’ve brought down the level of emotional arousal that you’re experiencing, you can focus on your current emotions using the Mindfulness of Current Emotions skill.
- If you still don’t experience relief, move on to other emotion regulation skills such as:
  - Reduce Vulnerability: (PLEASE)
  - Build **Mastery**
  - Build **Positive experiences**
  - Be **mindful of current emotion**
  - **Opposite Action**