

Sensory Awareness: Step by Step

WITHIN DBT DISTRESS TOLERANCE, THERE ARE FOUR METHODS WHICH ARE:

1. *Distracting*
2. *Self-Soothing*
3. *Improving the Moment*
4. *Focusing on the Pros and Cons*

Sensory awareness is part of the process of improving the moment. As we cover in our *Improving the Moment* worksheet:

“Sometimes the goal of distress tolerance is to improve the moment that you are in. When you are in a distressing situation or recalling a distressing event, you may think there’s nothing you can do in the moment to make yourself feel better. Remember, intense and distressing emotions don’t last forever, so you can use the DBT Distress Tolerance skill IMPROVE to help you manage your emotions until they feel less intense. Taking action to improve the moment you are in can help you feel more in control of what’s going on around you.”

When we draw our awareness to our body and our senses, we ground ourselves in the present moment. Then we are able to relax, and focus on these sensations rather than what is causing our distress. Calling our awareness back to our senses is a form of mindfulness. Rather than letting our thoughts jump wildly around, we focus them on one thing at a time, all centered around ourselves, our senses and our body.

To make the most of this step by step sensory exercise, make a recording of yourself asking the following questions*. (You can do this with a voice memo app on your phone or a free program online). You should leave a space of about five seconds between each question.

Read the countdown between each question silently as you record, allowing for five seconds between questions for reflection as you listen back.

1. Can you feel your hair touching your head?

five ...four...three...two...one...

2. Can you feel your belly rising and falling as you breathe?

five ...four...three...two...one...

3. Can you feel the space between your eyes?

five ...four...three...two...one...

4. Can you feel the distance between your eyes?

five ...four...three...two...one...

5. Can you feel your breath touching the back of your eyes while you inhale?

five ...four...three...two...one...

6. Can you picture something far away?

five ...four...three...two...one...

7. Can you notice your arms touching your body?

five ...four...three...two...one...

8. Can you feel the bottoms of your feet?

five ...four...three...two...one...

9. Can you imagine a beautiful day at the beach?

five ...four...three...two...one...

Read the countdown between each question silently as you record, allowing for five seconds between questions for reflection as you listen back.

10. Can you notice the space within your mouth?

five ...four...three...two...one...

11. Can you notice the position of your tongue within your mouth?

five ...four...three...two...one...

12. Can you feel a breeze against your cheek?

five ...four...three...two...one...

13. Can you feel how one arm is heavier than the other?

five ...four...three...two...one...

14. Can you feel a tingling or numbness in one hand?

five ...four...three...two...one...

15. Can you feel how one arm is more relaxed than the other?

five ...four...three...two...one...

16. Can you feel a change in the temperature around you?

five ...four...three...two...one...

17. Can you feel how your left arm is warmer than the right?

five ...four...three...two...one...

18. Can you imagine how it would feel to be a rag doll?

five ...four...three...two...one...

Read the countdown between each question silently as you record, allowing for five seconds between questions for reflection as you listen back.

19. Can you notice and tightness in your left forearm?

five ...four...three...two...one...

20. Can you imagine something very pleasant?

five ...four...three...two...one...

21. Can you imagine what it would feel like to float on a cloud?

five ...four...three...two...one...

22. Can you imagine what it would feel like to be stuck in molasses?

five ...four...three...two...one...

23. Can you picture something far away?

five ...four...three...two...one...

24. Can you feel a heaviness in your legs?

five ...four...three...two...one...

25. Can you imagine floating in warm water?

five ...four...three...two...one...

26. Can you notice your body hanging on your bones?

five ...four...three...two...one...

27. Can you allow yourself to drift lazily?

five ...four...three...two...one...

Read the countdown between each question silently as you record, allowing for five seconds between questions for reflection as you listen back.

28. Can you feel your face getting soft?

five ...four...three...two...one...

29. Can you imagine a beautiful flower?

five ...four...three...two...one...

30. Can you feel how one arm and leg are heavier than the other?

five ...four...three...two...one...

Once you have recorded the questions, sit in a comfortable position. Play the recording back, sitting in this same position, focusing on each question as it comes up. Let your mind focus only on the question being asked, letting it go as the next one comes up. Notice your mind easing, and beginning to quiet.