

TIPP Skills

The first Distress Tolerance skills taught in DBT are the TIPP Skills. Like many of the skills taught in DBT, TIPP is an acronym. The purpose of TIPP is to help you bring down intense or extreme emotions quickly. TIPP stands for:

TIPP STANDS FOR:

- **T**ip the Temperature
- **I**ntense Exercise
- **P**aced Breathing
- **P**aired Muscle Relaxation

The acronym helps you remember the skills involved in the calming down process, which lets you act quickly and effectively when you are in the middle of extreme emotional turmoil. Sometimes, when folks are experiencing strong and upsetting emotions, they have the urge to engage in dangerous or unwise behaviors. The TIPP skills are designed to prevent that by calming down your body chemistry. These skills are like little tricks you can use to quickly take your body from an extremely emotional state to a more balanced state. Here's how each skill works:

LET'S BREAK DOWN THE TIPP SKILLS:

Tip the Temperature: The full description of this skill is tip the temperature of your face with cold water. Fill a bowl or a ziplock bag with cold water (try to keep the water over 50 degrees Fahrenheit, though!). If you have a bowl, hold your breath and put your face in the bowl of water for at least 30 seconds. If you have a bag, hold it on your face (focusing on your eyes and cheeks) for at least 30 seconds. The cold water used in this skill triggers the “dive response”, which is a natural reflex that occurs in all mammals. The cold water activates the reflex, which helps to adjust your body chemistry naturally by lowering your heart rate and activating your parasympathetic nervous system.

Intense Exercise: When you're feeling intense emotions, intense exercise can help deal with that negative energy. Intense exercise can help to bring down the fight or flight response that you may feel when you experience strong emotion. Try walking quickly, jumping jacks, running, playing a sport, swimming, or whatever will tire you out. Not only will being tired make it harder to stay in that place of extreme emotional arousal, but exercise also releases endorphins into your bloodstream which can help decrease the negativity you feel.

Paced Breathing: One way to gain control over your state of mind is to focus on your breath. Paced breathing helps you slow down your breath, which can be really helpful during emotional situations. Deep breathing can help activate your parasympathetic nervous system, which in turn helps relax your body. To pace your breathing, start by breathing deeply. When you breathe in, can you see your belly move? If not, try breathing more deeply. Once you've found a nice deep breath, slow it down. Lengthen your inhalations and your exhalations until you're breathing about 5 to 6 breaths a minute. Experiment with changing the pattern. Try exhaling longer than you inhale. Count slowly as you breathe in and out, and exhale for two beats longer than you inhale. You can also try box breathing, which is when you inhale for four seconds, hold your breath for four seconds, exhale for four seconds, and then hold your breath for four seconds, before starting over.

Paired Muscle Relaxation: This skill works very well paired with paced breathing. It allows you to actively tense and relax your muscles, with the goal of letting go of the tension in your body. As you breathe in, clench the muscles in your body tightly. Feel how tense you are all over as you inhale. When you're ready to exhale, visualize your entire body relaxing as you breathe out and release the tension from your muscles. You can even say the word "relax", in your mind or out loud. Do you see a difference? It might be tricky to practice muscle relaxation with your whole body right away, so you can experiment with practicing with different parts of your body. It might feel strange at first, but it gets easier with practice.