

# Willingness

**Willingness** is a DBT skill. Willingness is the readiness to respond to life's situations wisely, as needed, voluntarily, and without holding a grudge. It is openness to the moment and doing what is needed. When you practice Willingness, you are listening carefully to your Wise Mind.

The opposite of Willingness is **Willfulness**. Willfulness is trying to control the universe and deliberately or stubbornly doing something you know isn't working.

Willingness is about **accepting what is** and responding in an effective or appropriate way. Willfulness is about digging your heels in and refusing to accept reality. When you are willful, you are trying to hold onto control. While this may be a natural response for you, digging in and trying to maintain control over situations may only end up hurting you.

## HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF WILLINGNESS:

Imagine a hitter practicing with pitches from a baseball machine. The hitter's job is to know the baseballs are coming and try to hit them. Refusing to accept that the baseball is coming does not make it not come. Complaining, crying, or wishing it was different does not make it not come.

Refusing to accept that the ball is coming leads you to get hit. So too will life keep coming. Do you want to stand still and get hit? Or are you willing to do what you need to do to avoid being hit?

## STEPS TO PRACTICE WILLINGNESS

When you notice yourself practicing Willfulness instead of Willingness, here are some steps you can use to learn from the experience:

- Don't judge yourself for practicing Willfulness. Simply notice it when it happens so you can set yourself up to turn the situation around.
- Remember, Willingness is about accepting what is. Accept that your natural response was Willfulness, instead of trying to fight it with more Willfulness.
- Think about Willingness. Open your mind to the idea of accepting the situation you're in.
- Ask yourself why you're holding on so tightly to Willfulness. What concerns you about letting go of control?
- Practice distress tolerance skills like Half Smiling and Willing Hands.

## HOW TO PRACTICE HALF SMILING AND WILLING HANDS

Half Smiling and Willing Hands are distress tolerance skills that help you accept reality using your body. These postures can be cues to your brain to help you figure out how to respond to the situation you are in.

Half Smiling is a quick way to improve the current moment. Your facial expressions can reveal your inner emotions and what you're going through. To practice Half Smiling, first, relax your entire face. You can do this in a few ways. You can visualize moving from the top of your head down to your chin, relaxing each part of your face as you pass over it. You can also tense up all of your facial muscles and then relax them. Once your face is relaxed, gently turn up the corners of your mouth. It doesn't even need to be a distinguishable smile, but try to infuse it with serenity.

Willing Hands is another way to signal to your body that you are in distress and need to let something go. To practice this posture, all you need to do is relax the muscles in your hands. Once your hands are relaxed, turn your hands palms up, and allow your fingers to relax as well. If you are seated, you can rest your hands on your lap or on whatever furniture you find yourself on. If you're standing, turn your palms forward and relax from your shoulders down.

Once you are in one or both of these postures, you can continue them for a certain number of breaths or until you feel ready to turn to Willingness instead of Willfulness.

### HERE ARE SOME SCENARIOS WHERE YOU CAN USE HALF SMILING AND WILLING HANDS:

- Right when you wake up in the morning
- Any time you realize you're irritated
- While you're listening to music or podcasts
- On your lunch break
- When you encounter someone hostile
- Before presentations or difficult conversations
- Any free moment you find