

TIPP Skills for Managing Extreme Distress

When your emotions feel overwhelming and out of control, TIPP skills can help rapidly reduce their intensity. These four skills, drawn from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), are designed for crises.

Applying them lets you create enough calm to engage other coping strategies. Remember, TIPP is best reserved for moments of peak distress—when you're at your emotional limit.

T Temperature

Altering your body temperature can swiftly reduce the intensity of overwhelming emotions. Submerge your face in cold water (at least 50 degrees Fahrenheit) while holding your breath, aiming to keep it there for 30 to 60 seconds. Alternatively, apply an ice pack to your face, focusing on the areas around your eyes and cheeks

I Intense exercise

Participating in vigorous cardio-aerobic activity activates your body in a manner that helps deescalate high-intensity emotions. Strive for at least 20 minutes if possible, but even shorter bursts can be beneficial—do whatever you can manage.

P Paced breathing

Slow your breathing to about 5 or 6 breaths per minute, targeting a complete breath cycle of 10 to 12 seconds. You can also try the 4-7-8 technique: Inhale while slowly counting to 4, hold your breath while counting to 7 at a normal pace, and exhale while slowly counting to 8.

P Progressive Muscle Relaxation

As you inhale, tense a group of muscles for 5-6 seconds and observe the sensation of tension. Then, as you exhale, release the tension and focus on the feeling of relaxation. Pay close attention to the contrast between tension and release. Work through your entire body systematically, starting from the top of your head and moving down to your toes.