

STOP Skill

DBT: Distress Tolerance Skills

The **STOP Skill** is a distress tolerance technique from **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)** that helps you manage impulsive behaviors and emotions. This worksheet will guide you through the STOP steps when you feel overwhelmed, distracted, or triggered.

S

Stop: when distress arises, freeze!

- Don't react or take action yet
- Your strong emotions might be trying to override your ability to think clearly and make good choices
- Stay in control!

T

Take a step back: pause and take a deep breath

- Take a break or leave the situation for the moment
- Take a deep breath into your diaphragm
- You may be feeling very strongly that you have to act *right now*. Remind yourself that you can pause

O

Observe: notice yourself and the situation

- What are your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behavior urges?
- What is the situation? What are you reacting to?
- What are other people saying or doing?

P

Proceed mindfully: choose your next steps with awareness

- Think about the situation, your thoughts and feelings, and others' thoughts and feelings
- Think about your goals, and what actions will help you get closer to them
- Ask wise mind which actions will make the situation better or worse

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



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Work through a past situation again

Use this page to get familiar with the STOP skill by reflecting on a past situation.

Think about a time in the past when you acted or reacted **impulsively**. This might look like:

- Saying or doing things you later regret
- Making choices without thinking about the consequences
- Doing things you're specifically trying *not* to do (e.g., smoking, substance use)

What triggered or caused your impulsive action? (e.g., *an argument with my partner about X*)

In a few words, what did you do impulsively? (e.g., *said Y, slammed the door, drove away*)

S**Stop**

How long was the **pause** between the trigger and your action?

- ☐ No pause ☐ Seconds ☐ Minutes ☐ Hours ☐ Longer

T**Take a step back**

If there was a pause, why did it happen?

- ☐ N/A ☐ I tried to stay in control ☐ I was feeling such intense emotions that I froze
☐ Other: _____

O**Observe**

Think back. What were your:

Thoughts: _____

Emotions: _____

Body sensations: _____

Actions: _____

P**Proceed mindfully**

If you could try this situation again, what would you do differently?

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Use the STOP Skill in the moment

Use this page to try the STOP Skill in a moment of distress or impulsive urges. This page shows an example, and the next page is blank.

S Stop Freeze! Don't react or take action.

T Take a step back Pause and take a deep breath. How did you pause?

- ☒ Took deep diaphragmatic breaths ☒ Left the room ☐ Took a break ☐ Changed the subject
☐ Other: _____

O Observe Notice yourself and the situation:

What's happening? *My ex just broke up with me few days ago. I'm out at the bar with a friend to talk about it and he just walked in with a big group of people. He looks like he's having the time of his life and I'm miserable. I can't handle this. I ran into the bathroom for a second to get a grip.*

Thoughts: *He's going to see me and think I'm pathetic. I want to scream at him, make him realize what he's missing, get drunk, and beg him to get back together all at the same time.*

Emotions: *Surprised, sad, angry, distressed*

Body sensations: *My stomach dropped, fast heart rate, sweaty, red face, tearful*

Behavior urges: *Yell, flirt with a stranger in front of him, drink a lot, talk to him, sneak out*

What are others doing and saying? *My friend is with me in the bathroom. He's drinking with friends and watching the game. His friends are talking and laughing together. I don't think they noticed me.*

P Proceed mindfully Use wise mind to brainstorm actions that can make things better or get you closer to your goals.

All my urges might feel good temporarily, especially making him jealous or numbing the pain with drinking, but I'll probably feel embarrassed about it tomorrow. I guess the goal is to keep my dignity. I could:

- stay, ignore him and all my feelings - stay, say hi, and appear as unbothered as possible
 - go home with my friend and talk about it - go to another bar with my friend and talk about it*

What is the best choice? *- go home with my friend and talk about it*

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☐ Other: _____

O Observe Notice yourself and the situation:

What's happening? _____

Thoughts: _____

Emotions: _____

Body sensations: _____

Behavior urges: _____

What are others doing and saying? _____

P Proceed mindfully

Use wise mind to brainstorm actions that can make things better or get you closer to your goals.

What is the best choice? _____

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://choosingtherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

Learn More with [Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



[Free Mental Health Worksheets](#)

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