

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Emotion Regulation Skills Pack

Practical, DBT-informed skills to ride out intense emotions — name the wave, cool your body, and choose your next move on purpose.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- Learn what emotions are for (and why they are not the enemy)
- The emotion wave: why every feeling peaks and passes
- Fast skills for hot moments: STOP, TIPP, and opposite action
- A check-the-facts worksheet and a daily emotion log
- Distress tolerance and five-senses self-soothe menus
- A fill-in emergency plan and 6 cut-out pocket skill cards

A printable self-help pack drawn from dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills training.

How to Use This Pack

Welcome. If your emotions sometimes feel too big, too fast, or too much — you are not alone, and nothing is wrong with you. Everyone's emotional alarm system runs hot sometimes. What most of us were never taught is that emotion regulation is a set of learnable skills. This pack puts those skills — drawn from dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills training — on paper so you can practice them at your own pace.

Getting started

1. **Print what you need.** Print the whole pack, or just the pages you want. Worksheets and logs are meant to be reused — print as many copies as you like.
2. **Start with the education pages.** "What Emotions Are For" and "The Emotion Wave" make every skill after them easier to use.
3. **Practice skills while you are calm.** STOP, TIPP, and paced breathing work best when your body already knows the steps. Rehearse them on ordinary days.
4. **Log your emotions daily.** The Daily Emotion Log helps you spot your triggers, your patterns, and which skills actually work for you.
5. **Fill in the emergency plan early.** Complete "My Emotion Emergency Plan" and cut out the pocket cards while you feel steady — they are built for moments when thinking is hard.
6. **Check in weekly.** The Weekly Skills Reflection helps you notice progress you would otherwise miss.

A few gentle reminders

- There is no perfect order and no deadline. Use what helps. Skip what does not.
- New skills feel awkward at first. Awkward is what learning feels like.
- These tools are self-help, not therapy. If intense emotions are seriously affecting your relationships, work, sleep, or safety — or if they ever come with urges to hurt yourself — please reach out to a qualified mental health professional. These pages can support that work; they do not replace it.

I am starting this pack on (date):

One moment I wish had gone differently lately:

What Emotions Are For

Signals, not enemies

It is easy to treat emotions as problems — glitches to shut down or push through. But emotions are not malfunctions. They are your brain's fastest messaging system, built to grab your attention and get your body ready to act. Every emotion, even the painful ones, carries information.

What each emotion is trying to say

- **Fear and anxiety** say: *something might be dangerous — get ready*. They sharpen attention and speed up the body.
- **Anger** says: *something is unfair, or a line has been crossed — protect it*. It mobilizes energy to defend.
- **Sadness** says: *something mattered and it has been lost — slow down*. It asks you to rest, process, and let others support you.
- **Guilt** says: *I may have crossed my own values*. It nudges you toward repair.
- **Shame** says: *I might be rejected by people I need*. It urges hiding — useful only when the threat of rejection is real.
- **Joy** says: *this is good — do more of it*. It marks what matters.

The signal is not always accurate — alarms misfire all the time. But the signal is never meaningless. That is why the goal of this pack is **regulation, not elimination**: more choice about what you do with an emotion, not fewer emotions.

Primary vs. secondary emotions

A **primary emotion** is the first, fast, natural reaction: hurt when you are left out, fear before a difficult call.

A **secondary emotion** is your reaction to the first one — the emotion about the emotion: anger that covers hurt, shame about feeling anxious, anxiety about getting angry. Secondary emotions pile on quickly and often cause more pain than the original feeling did.

Why this matters: skills work best on the primary emotion. When you find yourself furious or ashamed, it is worth asking: *what did I feel first, just before this?*

An emotion I usually treat as an enemy — and what it might be trying to tell me:

The Emotion Wave

Feelings rise, peak, and pass

Here is the most useful fact in this pack: **an emotion is a wave**. When something triggers you, your brain releases a surge of chemicals. The feeling rises fast, crests, and then — if nothing re-triggers it — your body clears the surge and the wave falls on its own. The body's part of an emotion is surprisingly short: often seconds to a few minutes.

So why do some emotions last all day? Because we **re-fuel** them. Every replay of the argument, every harsh self-judgment, every worst-case story sends the brain a fresh signal — and the brain answers with a fresh surge. The wave was ending; the thought started it again.

Riding vs. feeding

Feeding the wave looks like: replaying the moment on a loop, rehearsing comebacks, judging yourself for feeling it ("what is wrong with me?"), building the case for how bad it is, acting on the urge at the peak.

Riding the wave looks like: naming the feeling, finding it in your body, breathing while it crests, reminding yourself "this will peak and pass," and waiting to act until it drops.

Riding is not suppressing. You are not pushing the feeling down — you are letting it move through without adding fuel. Suppressing is holding a beach ball underwater. Riding is letting the wave roll past you.

Two rules of thumb

1. **Never act at the peak.** Decisions made at an 8, 9, or 10 are made by the wave, not by you.
2. **The wave always passes.** No emotion in human history has stayed at full intensity forever. Yours will not be the first.

A recent wave I fed — and the thought that kept re-fueling it:

Name It to Tame It

The right word turns the volume down

Brain research has a gift for you: the simple act of putting a feeling into precise words — researchers call it *affect labeling* — calms the brain's alarm centers. Vague dread is harder to handle than named disappointment. This page helps you find the precise word.

How to use it: when a feeling hits, find its family below, then hunt for the *most precise* word inside that family. Then locate the feeling in your body and rate it.

The five families

MAD: annoyed, frustrated, irritated, impatient, resentful, bitter, betrayed, furious

SAD: disappointed, hurt, lonely, discouraged, left out, grieving, empty, hopeless

SCARED: uneasy, nervous, worried, anxious, insecure, overwhelmed, panicked, frozen

GLAD: content, relieved, calm, hopeful, grateful, proud, excited, connected

ASHAMED: embarrassed, self-conscious, guilty, regretful, exposed, small, humiliated, unworthy

Mixed feelings are normal. You can be glad and sad at a goodbye, mad and scared in an argument. Name them all.

Now you

The closest family right now (circle one): MAD — SAD — SCARED — GLAD — ASHAMED

The most precise word is:

Where I feel it in my body (chest, throat, stomach, jaw, shoulders, hands...):

Intensity (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Take three slow breaths, saying the word to yourself on each exhale.

Intensity now (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tip box: "If the number dropped even one point, that was the naming working. Precision is power."

Ride the Wave

Let the feeling crest without feeding it

This is the practice version of the wave idea: staying present with an emotion while it rises, peaks, and passes — without acting on it and without re-fueling it. Like any balance skill, it feels wobbly the first few times and gets steadier with every wave you ride.

When to use it: any emotion strong enough to notice but not too hot to think — roughly a 3 to 7 out of 10. At 8 or higher, do a TIPP body reset first, then come back.

The five steps

1. **Name it.** Use your word lists: "A wave of
2. **Find it in your body.** Chest? Throat? Stomach? Notice its size, temperature, and movement.
3. **Watch it like weather.** You are the sky; the emotion is a storm passing through. Curiosity, not combat.
4. **Breathe into the spot.** Slow inhale, longer exhale — as if the breath could flow around the feeling. Do not force it away; make room for it instead.
5. **Catch the re-fueling thoughts.** When your mind starts replaying or building the case, silently label it — "re-fueling" — and return to the body. Expect to do this many times. That is the practice.

Practice log

Date	Emotion	Start (0-10)	Peak (0-10)	After 10 min (0-10)

The thought that most often re-fuels my waves:

You do not have to enjoy the wave. You only have to outlast it — and you always can, because it always ends.

The STOP Skill

Four letters between the surge and the regret

Most of what we regret was said or done at the peak of a wave — the message sent at midnight, the door slammed, the job quit on the spot. The STOP skill is a speed bump: four small steps that buy your thinking brain enough time to come back online.

The four steps

1. **S — Stop.** Freeze, on purpose. Do not move, do not speak, do not hit send. One second of stillness breaks the automatic chain.
2. **T — Take a step back.** Physically if you can — leave the room, put the phone down, get a glass of water. Mentally if you cannot — one slow breath, feet flat on the floor.
3. **O — Observe.** What is actually happening, inside and out? Name the emotion and its number. Notice the facts in front of you — just what a camera would record.
4. **P — Proceed mindfully.** Ask: *what outcome do I actually want here?* Then choose the one action most likely to move toward it — which is sometimes no action at all.

Practice on a real moment

Think of a recent time you reacted at the peak of an emotion.

What happened, and what did I do at the peak?

Where was the earliest moment I could have said 'stop'? What was the first body cue?

Observing like a camera, what were the actual facts?

Proceeding mindfully, what would I have done instead?

STOP is not swallowing your feelings. The wave still gets ridden — you are just refusing to let it steer.

TIPP: Fast Body Reset

For moments too hot to think

When an emotion hits 8 or higher, talking yourself down rarely works — the thinking brain is partly offline. TIPP works in the other direction: it changes your **body chemistry** first, fast, so the wave drops enough for your other skills to land. These four tools can lower intense arousal within minutes.

The four tools

1. **T — Temperature.** Fill a sink with cold water, hold your breath, and dip your face for 15-30 seconds — or hold a cold pack (or a bag of frozen peas in a towel) over your cheeks and eyes. Cold on the face triggers a built-in reflex that slows your heart rate quickly.
2. **I — Intense exercise.** Burn off the surge: 1-5 minutes of hard movement. Jumping jacks, fast stairs, a brisk walk-run, dancing hard to one song. Then let your body slow back down gradually.
3. **P — Paced breathing.** Exhale longer than you inhale: in for 4, out for 6-8. Aim for five or six slow breaths per minute, for two to five minutes. The long exhale is the calming lever. If you feel lightheaded, breathe normally for a minute, then try again more gently.
4. **P — Paired muscle relaxation.** Breathe in while gently tensing one muscle group; breathe out slowly while releasing it and silently saying "relax." Move through hands, shoulders, face, stomach, legs.

Caution note : "Cold water and intense exercise change your heart rate quickly. If you have a heart condition, low blood pressure, an eating disorder, are pregnant, or take medication that affects your heart rate, skip the temperature and intense-exercise tools — use paced breathing and muscle relaxation instead — and check with your healthcare provider first."

My TIPP plan

The cold option I can actually reach at home or work:

My 2-minute intense-exercise option:

My paced-breathing count (in / out):

Tip box: "Rehearse TIPP once this week while calm. In a hard moment you will not invent a plan — you will reach for the one you practiced."

Opposite Action

When the emotion's advice would make things worse

Every emotion arrives with an urge attached: fear says avoid, anger says attack, sadness says withdraw, shame says hide. When the emotion fits the facts, the urge is often wise. But when the emotion does *not* fit the facts — or acting on the urge would clearly make things worse — DBT offers a bold move: do the **opposite** of the urge, all the way, with your body, face, voice, and words. Acting opposite sends your brain new evidence, and the emotion follows.

The opposite action table

Emotion	The urge says	Opposite action
Fear (when the thing is actually safe)	Avoid it, escape, put it off	Approach it — gently, repeatedly, chin up
Anger	Snap, attack, prove them wrong	Speak softly and slowly, or step away kindly; unclench hands and face
Sadness	Withdraw, go dark, do nothing	Get moving; reach out to one person; open the curtains
Shame (when you broke no real value)	Hide it, shrink, keep the secret	Tell a safe person; keep your head up

Try it on your life

An emotion whose urge I have been obeying lately:

Does the emotion fit the facts? Would acting on the urge make things worse?

My opposite action — all the way, body and voice — would look like:

Opposite action is not pretending. You are not faking a feeling — you are changing the input so the feeling can update.

Check the Facts

Is the feeling the right size for what actually happened?

Emotions react to our *interpretations* as much as to events themselves. A friend's short reply can mean "she is furious with me" or "she is driving." Same fact, very different wave. This worksheet helps you separate what happened from the story about it — and decide whether the emotion fits.

1. What happened? (Camera facts only — exactly what a video would show, no mind-reading.)

2. My interpretation — the story I am telling myself about it:

3. At least two other possible explanations:

4. If I am predicting a disaster: what is the realistic worst case — and how would I cope if it happened?

5. Does my emotion — and its intensity — fit the camera facts? (circle one): Yes / Partly / No

6. My next move (check one)

- ☐ **The emotion fits the facts** → the feeling makes sense. Ride the wave, and problem-solve the situation if it needs solving.
- ☐ **The emotion does not fit the facts (or is far too big)** → use opposite action.
- ☐ **Too hot to tell** → TIPP first. Come back to this page when the wave is below an 8.

Checking the facts is not calling yourself dramatic. Sometimes the check confirms the emotion is exactly the right size — and that is worth knowing too.

Daily Emotion Log

You cannot regulate a pattern you cannot see

One line a day is enough. Each time a notable emotion shows up, log it: what set it off, what you felt and how strongly, what you did, which skill you tried, and where the intensity landed afterward. Within a week or two, patterns appear — and so does proof of which skills actually work for you.

How to use it: log in the moment if you can, or at the end of the day. Do not judge the entries — record them like a scientist collecting data.

The log

Date	Trigger (what set it off)	Emotion + intensity (0-10)	What I did	Skill used	Intensity after

After a full page, look back

My most frequent trigger was:

The skill that dropped my numbers the most was:

The time of day my waves hit hardest:

Watch the 'intensity after' column. Every drop — even a 7 to a 5 — is evidence that what you do changes what you feel.

Distress Tolerance Menu

Get through the hard hour without making it harder

Some pain cannot be fixed right now — the news is already out, the person is already gone, the answer will not come until Friday. Distress tolerance skills are for exactly these hours: not to solve the problem, but to get through it without making it worse. Check the ones you have tried. Star the ones that work for you.

These skills help you survive painful moments — they are not a treatment for urges to hurt yourself. If those urges show up, please reach out to a mental health professional, and in the moment call or text 988 (Canada and US, 24/7).

Distract

(give the wave something else to crash on)

- ☐ Do a task with steps: cook something, tidy one drawer, water the plants
- ☐ Watch or read something absorbing for 30 minutes
- ☐ Count backward from 100 by 7s, or name every blue thing you can see
- ☐ Help someone else with something small
- ☐ Step outside and walk around the block once

Self-soothe

(comfort through the senses — full menu on the next page)

- ☐ Make a warm drink and drink it slowly
- ☐ Take a shower or bath, noticing the water
- ☐ Wrap up in a blanket with calming music

Improve the moment

- ☐ Picture a place you feel safe, in detail
- ☐ Find one small meaning: "what could this hour teach me?"
- ☐ Say encouraging words as if to a friend: "You are getting through this."
- ☐ Do just one thing at a time, slowly
- ☐ Pray, meditate, or sit quietly for five minutes

Accept and allow

- ☐ Say: "This is the situation right now. Fighting the fact makes it hurt more."
- ☐ Soften your face and open your hands — a relaxed body accepts more easily
- ☐ Ride the wave: name it, find it in your body, breathe
- ☐ Remind yourself: pain is the event; suffering is the struggle against it

My top 3 for hard hours

1.

2.

3.

Self-Soothe with the Five Senses

Comfort your nervous system like you would comfort a friend

Self-soothing is not weakness or indulgence — it is maintenance for a nervous system that has been working hard. The five senses are direct roads to the calming half of that system. Check what appeals, then build your favorites list below.

Sight

- ☐ Look at photos that hold good memories
- ☐ Watch clouds, rain, a candle flame, or a fish tank
- ☐ Put one beautiful thing where you will see it every day

Sound

- ☐ A playlist that settles you (build it now, not mid-wave)
- ☐ A familiar voice — call someone, or replay a saved message
- ☐ Hum or sing low and slow (long exhales built right in)

Smell

- ☐ A lotion, soap, or candle you love
- ☐ Fresh air out the window, coffee, or something baking
- ☐ A scent tied to a safe memory

Taste

- ☐ A warm drink, sipped slowly
- ☐ One small treat, eaten with full attention
- ☐ Something cold or sour when you need a jolt back to now

Touch

- ☐ A hot shower or bath
- ☐ The softest blanket or sweater you own
- ☐ A pet's fur, or a warm mug held in both hands

My go-to for each sense

Sight:

Sound:

Smell:

Taste:

Touch:

Tip box: "Build a small soothe kit in a shoebox: one item per sense. Future-you will be grateful past-you packed it."

Protect Your Baseline

The body basics that shrink big waves

Have you noticed the same setback feels twice as big when you are exhausted or running on coffee? That is not weakness — it is biology. DBT calls this reducing *vulnerability*: when the body is depleted, every wave starts higher and crests harder. These five basics are unglamorous, and they are the foundation every other skill in this pack stands on.

The five basics

- ☐ **Treat illness and pain.** Take prescribed medication as directed, book the appointment you have been putting off, rest when you are sick. Untreated pain keeps the alarm system primed.
- ☐ **Eat at steady intervals.** Long gaps and blood-sugar crashes masquerade as emotions. Aim for regular meals — not perfect ones.
- ☐ **Go easy on mood-altering substances.** Alcohol, heavy caffeine, and other substances borrow calm from tomorrow. Notice what each one does to your next-day waves.
- ☐ **Protect your sleep.** A consistent wake time is the single strongest lever. Tired brains feel everything louder.
- ☐ **Move most days.** Not punishment — regulation. A 15-minute walk counts fully.

This week's honest check-in

Body basic	How it is going (0-10)	One small improvement this week
Illness and pain		
Steady eating		
Substances		
Sleep		
Movement		

The basic that most affects my mood is:

The smallest possible step I will take this week:

You are not failing at emotion regulation if you are succeeding at being human on four hours of sleep. Fix the baseline first.

My Emotion Emergency Plan

Decide now, while you are calm

At an emotional 9, nobody invents a good plan — the thinking brain is partly offline. So you build the plan now, and let past-you hand it to future-you. Fill in the card below, cut it out, and keep it where the hard moments happen: wallet, phone case, nightstand, desk drawer.

When my emotion hits 8 or higher, I will...

Step 1 — Name the wave. "This is a wave of strong emotion. It is very uncomfortable, but it will peak and pass. It always does."

Step 2 — Reset my body (TIPP).

My go-to reset:

Step 3 — STOP. No sending, no posting, no quitting, no big conversations until the wave drops below a 6.

Step 4 — Soothe or distract.

My two picks from my menus:

Step 5 — Reach out.

A person I can text or call:

If urges to hurt myself show up: this card is not enough. I will call or text 988 (Canada and US, 24/7) and tell someone I trust.

*Filling this in is not planning for failure — it is planning like someone who knows waves come and intends to ride them.
Review the card once a month and update what has changed.*

Pocket Skill Cards

Cut them out. Keep them close.

Six skills, condensed to wallet size — for the moments when the full pages are out of reach. Cut along the dashed lines. Keep one in your wallet, tape one to the bathroom mirror, tuck one in your coat pocket.

<i>“STOP: Stop. Take a step back. Observe what is actually happening. Proceed mindfully — choose the one action that makes things better, not bigger.”</i>	<i>“TIPP: Cold water on my face. Two minutes of hard movement. Exhale longer than I inhale. Tense, then release. Change the body first — the mind follows.”</i>
<i>“This feeling is a wave. It will peak and pass on its own — unless I feed it. I can ride it without acting on it.”</i>	<i>“If the emotion does not fit the facts — or the urge would make things worse — do the opposite of the urge, all the way.”</i>
<i>“Check the facts: What would a camera have seen? What am I adding to the story? What else could explain it?”</i>	<i>“I am allowed to feel this. Feeling it is not the same as acting on it. I can speak to myself kindly and take one small next step.”</i>

Cut along the dashed lines.

Weekly Skills Reflection

Progress grows in the noticing

Skills practice is quiet work — the outburst that did not happen, the wave that passed in ten minutes instead of ruling the day. This page helps you see it. Fill it in once a week; print a fresh copy each time.

Week of:

1. This week's emotional weather

On average, my emotional intensity this week was (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Compared to last week, that is (check one): [] Calmer [] About the same [] Stormier

2. Skills I used this week (check all that apply)

- ☐ Name It to Tame It
- ☐ The STOP skill
- ☐ TIPP body reset
- ☐ Opposite action
- ☐ Check the facts
- ☐ Five-senses self-soothe
- ☐ Emotion emergency plan

3. Reflection prompts

A wave I rode this week instead of acting on it:

A moment a skill actually worked — which one, and what changed?

A moment I fed the wave — and what re-fueled it:

4. Looking ahead

The one skill I will practice on purpose next week:

One kind sentence I will say to myself at the next peak:

A stormy week is not a failed week. Showing up to this page is the practice. If several overwhelming weeks stack up, that is useful information — and a good reason to talk with a mental health professional.

Please Read: Important Information

About this pack

This pack is an educational self-help resource. It shares general information and skills drawn from dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) skills training and widely used stress-management approaches.

It is not psychotherapy, counselling, medical care, or mental health treatment. Using this pack does not create a therapist-client or any other professional relationship with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition. In particular, these skills are not a treatment for self-harm or suicidal thoughts. If you experience urges to harm yourself, please reach out to a qualified mental health professional and use the crisis resources below.

Everyone's situation is different. If intense emotions are significantly affecting your daily life — your relationships, work, school, sleep, or safety — please reach out to a qualified mental health professional or your primary care provider. Full DBT programs delivered by trained professionals exist and are effective. Seeking help is a sign of strength.

A safety note on the TIPP page: cold water and intense exercise change your heart rate quickly. If you have a heart condition, low blood pressure, an eating disorder, are pregnant, or take medication affecting your heart rate, use only the breathing and muscle-relaxation tools and consult your healthcare provider first. If any exercise in this pack feels distressing, please stop and consider speaking with a professional.

If you need help now

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call 988** — free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Text 988** — if you prefer texting to talking

Additional support:

- **United States — Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741 (24/7)
- **Canada — Kids Help Phone (ages 5-29):** call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out. If you are struggling, these services are there for you.

You matter. Your feelings are real. And support is available.

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