

# Feel Better Fast (Distress Tolerance)

## Student Workbook



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Feedback Form: [https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_3L7zIHZMCIMyMJ](https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3L7zIHZMCIMyMJ)

# Welcome!

Welcome to **Feel Better Fast**, a fast-paced, 3-session seminar designed to help you make a change in your life by learning mindfulness techniques, as well as ways to cope with distressing emotions and thoughts. The goal is to provide you with some skills to recognize and manage strong emotions you may be experiencing. We hope you find it helpful.

Remember, this intervention is not intended to “get rid of” unpleasant emotions. While occasionally unpleasant, difficult emotions can actually be helpful and motivating. Our hope is that these three sessions provide you with a jumping board from which to integrate skills into your daily life.

By the end of this course, you will have received a lot of information and at times it may feel overwhelming. Remember that like any skill (e.g., learning to ride a bike), the skills you will learn in **Feel Better Fast** take time and practice to master. At times, you may encounter obstacles and/or find it difficult to integrate these skills into your daily life. That’s okay, it’s how change works, and as with all change, it’s important to practice as much as you can, even after encountering setbacks.

Think of your practice of these skills as a form of “mental health hygiene.” At the outset, it may seem tedious and you may question why you need to practice these skills so often. Think of it like dental hygiene—you brush your teeth multiple times a day to prevent the buildup of plaque and ultimately to prevent cavities. Similar to brushing your teeth, daily practice prevents a buildup of anxiety and stress over time. The more you practice and use these skills as part of your daily routine, the less tedious they may seem because they simply become a regular part of daily life.

Should you wish to focus more in depth on any of your concerns, you may debrief with a therapist following completion of **Feel Better Fast** to discuss options.

***If at any time you feel that you need additional support, please let your Feel Better Fast leader know or contact CAPS at (303)-492- 2277. Walk in hours are Monday through Friday 10am to 3:30pm. You may also find additional resources online at [www.colorado.edu/counseling](http://www.colorado.edu/counseling)***

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is Feel Better Fast?**

Feel Better Fast is a fast-paced, 3-session seminar designed to help you make a change in your life by learning mindfulness techniques, as well as ways to cope with distressing emotions and thoughts.

### **Why does Feel Better Fast use a 3-session model?**

Teaching Feel Better Fast over the course of 3 sessions allows you sufficient time to learn the concepts with time to practice between sessions. Keeping it to three 60-minute sessions allows you to find time in your busy schedule to learn these skills.

### **What if I need more than 3 weeks to learn the model?**

You are not alone. The skills taught in Feel Better Fast are difficult and take time to build. For this reason, we offer follow up options for anyone who would like additional support. Please see the front desk to schedule a follow up.

### **What if I don't feel comfortable in groups?**

Many people feel a little anxious about participating in a group. Feel Better Fast is structured and curriculum-driven, like an academic class. You are not required to speak if you do not feel comfortable doing so. The facilitators respect each participant's right to share only what they are comfortable sharing and never require you to share sensitive or potentially embarrassing information.

### **What if I have an urgent need to see a counselor during Feel Better Fast?**

Simply let the facilitator or CAPS' front desk staff know, and they will facilitate you getting the help you need. You can also walk in to CAPS Monday through Friday 10am to 3:30pm with limited exceptions. The CAPS phone number is available to you 24/7 at (303) 492-2277.

### **Why do I have to do homework?**

The focus of this workshop is on building skills to cope with challenging emotions; in order to achieve that goal, regular practice is essential. Any homework offered is simply a suggestion for ongoing practice. The more you practice, the more you may find you get out of this workshop. You will not be required to provide your responses at any time.

# IN SESSION WORKSHEETS

## **DISTRESS TOLERANCE HANDOUT**

### **When to Use Crisis Survival Skills**

#### **YOU ARE IN A CRISIS when the situation is:**

- Highly stressful.
- Short-term (that is, it won't last a long time).
- Creates intense pressure to resolve the crisis *now*.

#### **USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS when:**

1. You have intense pain that cannot be helped quickly.
2. You want to act on your emotions, but it will only make things worse.
3. Emotion mind threatens to overwhelm you, and you need to stay skillful.
4. You are overwhelmed, yet demands must be met.
5. Arousal is extreme, but problems can't be solved immediately.

#### **DON'T USE CRISIS SURVIVAL SKILLS for:**

- Everyday problems.
- Solving all your life problems.
- Making your life worth living.

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## Distracting

A way to remember these skills is the phrase “**Wise Mind ACCEPTS.**”

### With **A**ctivities:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focus attention on a task you need to get done. | <input type="checkbox"/> Go out for a meal or eat a favorite food. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rent movies; watch TV.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Call or go out with a friend.             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean a room in your house.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to your iPod; download music.      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find an event to go to.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Build something.                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play computer games.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with your children.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Go walking. Exercise.                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Play cards.                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surf the Internet. Write e-mails.               | <input type="checkbox"/> Read magazines, books, comics.            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play sports.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Do crossword puzzles or Sudoku.           |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                              |

### With **C**ontributing:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find volunteer work to do.                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Call or send an instant message encouraging someone or just saying hi. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help a friend or family member.                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Make something nice for someone else.                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surprise someone with something nice (a card, a favor, a hug). | <input type="checkbox"/> Do something thoughtful.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give away things you don't need.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With **C**omparisons:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compare how you are feeling now to a time when you felt different. | <input type="checkbox"/> Compare yourself to those less fortunate.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Think about people coping the same as you or less well than you.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Watch reality shows about others' troubles; read about disasters, others' suffering. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With different **E**motions:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Read emotional books or stories, old letters.  | <i>Ideas:</i> Scary movies, joke books, comedies, funny records, religious music, soothing music or music that fires you up, going to a store and reading funny greeting cards. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watch emotional TV shows; go to emotional movies.                                      |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to emotional music.<br>( <i>Be sure the event creates different emotions.</i> ) |   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |

### With **P**ushing away:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Push the situation away by leaving it for a while.          | <input type="checkbox"/> Notice ruminating: Yell “No!”                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leave the situation mentally.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Refuse to think about the painful situations.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Build an imaginary wall between yourself and the situation. | <input type="checkbox"/> Put the pain on a shelf. Box it up and put it away for a while. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Block thoughts and images from your mind.                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Deny the problem for the moment.                                |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____  |

### With other **T**houghts:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Count to 10; count colors in a painting or poster or out the window; count anything. | <input type="checkbox"/> Work puzzles.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Repeat words to a song in your mind.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Watch TV or read. |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____      |

### With other **S**ensations:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Squeeze a rubber ball very hard. | <input type="checkbox"/> Go out in the rain or snow. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listen to very loud music.       | <input type="checkbox"/> Take a hot or cold shower.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hold ice in your hand or mouth.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                |

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## TIP Skills: Changing Your Body Chemistry

To reduce extreme emotion mind *fast*.

Remember these as **TIP** skills:

**T**

**TIP THE TEMPERATURE of your face with COLD WATER\***  
(to calm down fast)

- Holding your breath, put your face in a bowl of cold water, or hold a cold pack (or zip-lock bag of cold water) on your eyes and cheeks.
- Hold for 30 seconds. Keep water above 50°F.

**I**

**INTENSE EXERCISE\***  
(to calm down your body when it is revved up by emotion)

- Engage in intense exercise, if only for a short while.
- Expend your body's stored up physical energy by running, walking fast, jumping, playing basketball, lifting weights, etc.

**P**

**PACED BREATHING**  
(pace your breathing by slowing it down)

- Breathe deeply into your belly.
- Slow your pace of inhaling and exhaling way down (on average, five to six breaths per minute).
- Breathe *out* more slowly than you breathe *in* (for example, 5 seconds in and 7 seconds out).

**PAIRED MUSCLE RELAXATION**  
(to calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out)

- While breathing into your belly deeply tense your body muscles (*not so much as to cause a cramp*).
- Notice the tension in your body.
- While breathing out, say the word "Relax" in your mind.
- Let go of the tension.
- Notice the difference in your body.

**\*Caution:** Very cold water decreases your heart rate rapidly. Intense exercise will increase heart rate. Consult your health care provider before using these skills if you have a heart or medical condition, a lowered base heart rate due to medications, take a beta-blocker, are allergic to cold, or have an eating disorder.

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## Self-Soothing

A way to remember these skills is to think of soothing each of your **FIVE SENSES**.

### With Vision:

- Look at the stars at night.
- Look at pictures you like in a book.
- Buy one beautiful flower.
- Make one space in a room pleasing to look at.
- Light a candle and watch the flame.
- Set a pretty place at the table using your best things.
- Go people-watching or window-shopping.
- Go to a museum or poster shop with beautiful art.
- Sit in the lobby of a beautiful old hotel.
- Look at nature around you.
- Walk in a pretty part of town.
- Watch a sunrise or a sunset.
- Go to a dance performance, or watch it on TV.
- Be mindful of each sight that passes in front of you.
- Take a walk in a park or a scenic hike.
- Browse through stores looking at things.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Hearing:

- Listen to soothing or invigorating music.
- Pay attention to sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling).
- Pay attention to the sounds of the city (traffic, horns, city music).
- Sing to your favorite songs.
- Hum a soothing tune.
- Learn to play an instrument.
- Burn a CD or make an iPod mix with music that will get you through tough times. Turn it on.
- Be mindful of any sounds that come your way, letting them go in one ear and out the other.
- Turn on the radio.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Smell:

- Use your favorite soap, shampoo, aftershave, cologne, or lotions, or try them on in the store.
- Burn incense or light a scented candle.
- Open a package of coffee and inhale the aroma.
- Put lemon oil on your furniture.
- Put potpourri or eucalyptus oil in a bowl in your room.
- Sit in a new car and breathe the aroma.
- Boil cinnamon. Make cookies, bread, or popcorn.
- Smell the roses.
- Walk in a wooded area and mindfully breathe in the fresh smells of nature.
- Open the window and smell the air.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Taste:

- Eat some of your favorite foods.
- Drink your favorite soothing drink, such as herbal tea, hot chocolate, a latté, or a smoothie.
- Treat yourself to a dessert.
- Eat macaroni and cheese or another favorite childhood food.
- Sample flavors in an ice cream store.
- Suck on a piece of peppermint candy.
- Chew your favorite gum.
- Get a little bit of a special food you don't usually spend the money on, such as fresh-squeezed orange juice or your favorite candy.
- Really taste the food you eat. Eat one thing mindfully.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### With Touch:

- Take a long hot bath or shower.
- Pet your dog or cat.
- Have a massage. Soak your feet.
- Put creamy lotion on your whole body.
- Put a cold compress on your forehead.
- Sink into a comfortable chair in your home.
- Put on a blouse or shirt that has a pleasant feel.
- Take a drive with the car windows rolled down.
- Run your hand along smooth wood or leather.
- Hug someone.
- Put clean sheets on the bed.
- Wrap up in a blanket.
- Notice touch that is soothing.
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Coping Thoughts

Here is a list of coping thoughts that many people have found to be helpful (McKay et al., 1997). Check the ones that might be helpful for you and then create your own.

- Mistakes happen; nobody's perfect
- This situation won't last forever
- I've already been through many painful experiences and I've survived; I'll survive this one too
- This too shall pass
- My feelings are like a wave that comes and goes
- My feelings make me uncomfortable right now, but I can accept them
- I can be anxious/sad/angry/\_\_\_\_\_ and still deal with this situation
- I'm strong enough to handle what's happening to me right now
- This is an opportunity for me to learn how to cope with my fears
- I can ride this out and not let it get to me
- I can take all the time I need right now to let go and relax
- I've survived other situations like this before, and I'll survive this one too
- My anxiety/fear/sadness/\_\_\_\_\_ won't kill me; it just doesn't feel good right now
- These are just my feelings, and eventually they'll go away
- It's okay to feel sad/anxious/afraid/\_\_\_\_\_
- My thoughts don't control me life; I do
- I can think different thoughts if I want
- I'm not in danger right now
- So what?
- This situation sucks, but it's temporary
- I'm strong and I can deal with this
  
- \_\_\_\_\_
  
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Radical Acceptance:** to acknowledge your present situation without judging the events or criticizing yourself or others. Instead, try to recognize that your present situation exists. Radical acceptance means looking at yourself and the situation and seeing it as it really is. This doesn't mean you condone or agree with what happened, but it does mean that you stop trying to change what has happened and start refocusing your attention on what you can do now.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYht-guymF4>

# APPENDIX

# **Breathing Exercises**

## **Belly (or Diaphragmatic) Breathing**

You can do this exercise in any position, but it is helpful to do this exercise while lying down when first learning belly breathing.

1. Lie comfortably on your back, with a pillow under your head, your knees bent and your back flat. You can stretch your legs out if that's more comfortable.
2. Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your upper chest.
3. Inhale slowly and expand your belly as you breathe so that your lower hand moves with your belly. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Slowly exhale, focusing on the movement of your belly and lower hand as it returns to its original position.
5. Repeat steps 3 & 4 for several minutes, always focusing on the movement of the belly as you breathe. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breathing.

## **Breath-Counting Exercise**

This exercise focuses on the use of counting with the rhythm of the breath. Start with a short period of time and gradually increase the time. Set a timer so that you do not have to worry about when to stop.

1. Find a comfortable position. Take several deep breaths and settle into yourself. You may either close your eyes or keep them open, depending on your own comfort. If you keep them open, fix them on an object or a spot on the floor about four feet in front of you. Your eyes may be either focused or unfocused.
2. Take deep, comfortable breaths. Notice your inhalation. The pause between inhaling and exhaling, your exhalation, and the pause before starting again.
3. As you inhale, count, "one..." As you exhale, count, "two..." Inhale, "three..." Exhale, "four..." Continue until you reach 10 then start over.
4. If you lose count, simply begin with "one" on your next inhalation.
5. If you notice your mind has wandered, gently notice this, and return your focus back to counting your breath.
6. If you notice any body sensations catching your attention, focus on that sensation until it fades. Then return your attention back to counting your breaths.

## Making A Self-Soothing Kit

Having a kit ready in emotionally intense situations can be a helpful reminder of self-soothing techniques you can use. To make a self-soothing kit, start with a small box or bag (a shoe box works well) and gather your self-soothing items making sure to include something that engages each of the 5 senses. You can have a larger self-soothing kit for home or a smaller one that you can carry with you. Below are some ideas to try, but feel free to use any items you can find at home that you find soothing. For any items that don't fit, leaving a simple reminder note to yourself in the box can be helpful (for example, if your photos are on your cell phone, put a note in the box reminding you to look at photos on your phone). Or make a virtual self-soothe kit on your cell phone using the free app Virtual Hope Box.

### **Vision:**

Photos of people and/or good memories  
Pictures of kittens, puppies, baby animals, etc.  
Postcards of places you've been or would like to go to  
Art supplies  
A small coloring book and colored pencils  
Glitter jar  
Funny memes

### **Hearing:**

An MP3 player with your favorite songs  
Create a Spotify or Pandora playlist on your phone, leave a reminder note in your box to use it  
White noise machine

### **Smell:**

Scented lotion  
Perfume/Cologne  
Candles or incense  
Aromatherapy or diffuser oil  
Spices or dried herbs (lavender and sage work well)

### **Taste:**

Dried cookie or cake mix (baking or cooking can cover both smell and taste)  
Favorite candy or non-perishable food items  
Strong mints  
Chocolate  
Tea bags

### **Touch:**

Playdough  
Fidget Cube or spinner  
A small stuffed animal  
Soft blanket  
Silly Putty

## Exercise: Distract Yourself from Self-Destructive Behaviors

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Here are some safer actions that you can use to distract yourself from your self-destructive emotions and thoughts. Check (✓) the ones you're willing to do, and then add any healthy, nonharming activities that you can think of:

Instead of hurting yourself, hold an ice cube in one hand and squeeze it. The sensation from the cold ice is numbing and very distracting.

Write on yourself with a red felt-tip marker instead of cutting. Draw exactly where you would cut. Use red paint or nail polish to make it look like you're bleeding. Then draw stitches with a black marker. If you need to make it even more distracting, squeeze an ice cube in the other hand at the same time.

Snap a rubber band on your wrist each time you feel like hurting yourself. This is very painful, but it causes less permanent damage than cutting, burning, or mutilating yourself.

Dig your fingernails into your arm without breaking the skin.

Draw faces of people you hate on balloons and then pop them.

Write letters to people you hate or to people who have hurt you. Tell them what they did to you and tell them why you hate them. Then throw the letters away or save them to read later.

Throw foam balls, rolled-up socks, or pillows against the wall as hard as you can.

Scream as loud as you can into a pillow or scream some place where you won't draw the attention of other people, like at a loud concert or in your car.

Stick pins in a voodoo doll instead of hurting yourself. You can make a voodoo doll with some rolled up socks or a foam ball and some markers. Or you can buy a doll in a store for the specific purpose of sticking pins in it. Buy one that's soft and easy to stick.

Cry. Sometimes people do other things instead of crying because they're afraid that if they start to cry they'll never stop. This never happens. In fact, the truth is that crying can make you feel better because it releases stress hormones.

Other healthy, nonharming ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Radical Acceptance Worksheet

What happened in this distressing situation?

What past events happened that led up to this situation?

What role did you play in creating this situation?

What roles did other people place in creating this situation?

What do you have control of in this situation?

What don't you have control of in this situation?

What is your response to this situation?

How did your response affect your own thoughts and feelings?

How did your response affect the thoughts and feelings of other people?

How could you have changed your response to this situation so that it led to less suffering for yourself and others?

How could the situation have occurred differently if you had decided to radically accept the situation?

## CAPS Workshops

***Please note workshop offerings are subject to change each semester. Please call CAPS at (303) 492-2277 for the most up to date information on CAPS' current offerings.***

### **Anxiety Toolbox:**

This workshop is a two-part series designed to help you understand anxiety symptoms and build skills to manage these symptoms. The sessions include modules dedicated to understanding anxiety, learning deep breathing and grounding skills, introducing a method for slowing down and disentangling anxious thoughts, and developing alternative responses to anxiety.

### **Feel Better Fast:**

This workshop is a three-part series designed to help you make a change in your life by learning mindfulness techniques, as well as ways to cope with distressing emotions and thoughts. Some of the skills you will learn include how to make balanced decisions, to self-soothe, to take a step back from your thoughts and to live by your values. With guidance and support, this workshop might be all you need to get back on track and feeling better in no time.

### **COVID Workshop Series**

The COVID workshop series is composed of 4 independent workshops designed to help you cope with ways in which COVID-19 has changed our lives. This is a great option if you're short on time, wanting some quick coping skills, and/or are noticing distress related to COVID. They include the following:

**Mindfully Thriving:** Learn how to stay present during times of unease. Now more than ever we can all benefit from learning mindfulness skills to stay grounded and present during the pandemic. This workshop teaches mindfulness skills and guides you through 3 different mindfulness exercises you can easily practice at home.

**Anxiety Toolbox for COVID:** acknowledges the ways in which COVID-19 can increase anxiety. Learn skills and tools to help you manage challenging or triggering thoughts, feelings and behaviors using examples from the current pandemic.

**Coping with COVID:** normalizes the different responses people have been experiencing related to COVID-19. Learn skills for managing overwhelming emotions and reducing emotional vulnerability during this stressful time.

**How to Survive Quarantine with Other People:** Because of COVID, more of us are spending more hours than usual at home with family members, partners, or roommates. Learn to address conflict, develop listening skills, and develop healthy boundaries to manage tension and conflict that many have experienced due to that challenges of increased time with others.

## **Feel Good Fridays:**

This drop-in workshop is an opportunity to be led through a powerful guided meditation to undo stress, soothe the nervous system and feel better. Students, staff and faculty are welcome to attend. Participants are encouraged to bring materials for personal comfort that will aid meditation (e.g., yoga mat, a small pillow or cushion, etc.). Please arrive on time so the meditation is not disturbed. There will be no late admittance.

## **Identity and Sexuality Exploration**

Do you have questions about sexuality, gender or relationships? Do you need help navigating gender-affirming healthcare? This workshop provides an inclusive and affirming space to develop knowledge and skills for your personal journey. An informal consultation with a queer-friendly nurse practitioner and clinical psychologist can provide insight for sex and sexuality questions, initiating sexual health exams and testing, gender-affirming treatment options and relationship health. All identities and questions are welcome!

## **Online Resources**

Centre for Clinical Interventions: Tolerating Distress  
<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Tolerating-Distress>

The Unwanted Party Guest Video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYht-guymF4>

Russ Harris- ACT Mindfully  
<https://www.actmindfully.com.au/free-stuff/>

## **Apps for your Smartphone, Tablet, or Computer**

ACT Coach  
Calm  
DBT Diary

Headspace (student  
discount)  
Mindfulness Coach  
Stop Breathe &  
Think

<https://www.headspace.com/studentplan>

## **Books for Further Reading**

The Expanded Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training Manual: DBT for Self-Help and Individual & Group Treatment Settings, 2nd Edition by Pederson (2017)

Mind and Emotions by McKay, Fanning, and Zurita (2011)

The Happiness Trap by Harris (2008)

The Illustrated Happiness Trap by Harris (2014)

Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life by Hayes (2005)