

People often react to challenges of life with frustration and outright anger towards others. Whether it's about unmet expectations, loss of a loved one, or juggling with responsibilities—they get anxious and obsess over things that they can't control. Sadly, these patterns keep them stuck in their everyday difficulties. They resort to unhelpful behaviors and consider life as unfair.

IMPROVE is a useful tool, designed to help you tolerate distress with alternative coping responses. It is based on the acronym, where each letter signifies an effective coping strategy that can be used to tolerate distress and deal with a situation effectively.

1. **Imagery:** *Escape from a distressing situation by imagining a comforting place.*
2. **Meaning:** *Consider what you value the most and align your goals accordingly.*
3. **Prayer:** *Seek guidance from a higher power or a higher self.*
4. **Relaxation:** *Incorporate relaxation techniques and calm your nervous system.*
5. **One Thing in the Moment:** *Direct your focus on one thing in the present moment. E.g., A specific activity in hand or your physical surroundings.*
6. **Vacation:** *Give yourself a break. Pursue an activity that brings you rest for a few hours. E.g. Going to bed.*
7. **Encouragement:** *Be your own cheerleader. Talk to yourself the way you d talk to a loved one.*

The following worksheet encourages you to create a menu of options to try when in a distressing situation. It is most helpful in situations when your self-soothing efforts aren't getting the job done.

For each IMPROVE skill—write down the activities you performed to tolerate a distressing situation. Then rate 1-5 based on how effective the particular skill was in helping you cope with the situation.

Remember that not all skills may work for you. So, here's how we suggest you to use the IMPROVE skill worksheet:

- Explore each IMPROVE skill and discover which ones resonate most with you.
- Tailor your approach based on personal preferences.
- Combine at least 2 to 3 components to help tolerate a situation.
- Incorporate these skills as part of your regular self-care routine.
- Make sure to measure their effectiveness over set time (weekly or monthly).

DESCRIBE A DISTRESSING SITUATION THAT HAPPENED TO YOU. MENTION WHO, WHAT, WHEN, AND WHERE?

Skill	What did I do to practice this skill?	(Rate 1 to 5) <i>How effective was the skill in helping me tolerate my distress?</i>
<p><u>I</u>magery</p> <p><i>(Use imagination to promote relaxation).</i></p>		
<p><u>M</u>eaning</p> <p><i>(Find/create a meaning in the current situation to make it bearable).</i></p>		
<p><u>P</u>rayer</p> <p><i>(Turn things towards higher power for comfort).</i></p>		
<p><u>R</u>elaxation</p> <p><i>(Use relaxation techniques to reduce stress).</i></p>		
<p><u>O</u>ne Thing</p> <p><i>(Focus on one thing at a time to feel less overwhelmed).</i></p>		
<p><u>V</u>acation</p> <p><i>(Take a brief mental break and escape from stress temporarily).</i></p>		

Skill	What did I do to practice this skill?	(Rate 1 to 5) <i>How effective was the skill in helping me tolerate my distress?</i>
Encouragement <i>(Use positive self talk and affirmations to feel encouraged).</i>		

Rate effectiveness of a skill: (1: "I couldn't stand the situation at all," 3: "I was somewhat able to stand the situation," 5: "I could use the skill and tolerate the situation pretty well.")

FOLLOWING ARE THE LIST OF BEHAVIORS YOU CAN PURSUE TO PRACTICE THE IMPROVE SKILL

IMAGERY

- o Imagine coping well with a difficult situation you're in right now.
- o Imagine painful emotions flowing out of you.
- o Make up an enjoyable/relaxing world.
- o Create a visual board with your dreams and goals on it.
- o Imagine a safe place that has everything you need.
- o Imagine a safe place within your home.
- o Imagine a sunny beach.
- o Relive a past happy memory.

MEANING

- o Focus on things important to you.
- o Journal your core values
- o Make a list of goals that align with values.
- o Perform acts of kindness throughout the day.
- o Journal behaviors that do and don't align with your values.
- o Volunteer at your local charity or community.
- o Foster a sense of connection.
- o Make decisions aligned to your values.
- o Surprise a close friend/family member.
- o Establish rituals that holds personal significance in your life.

PRAYER

- Connect with your wise-self.
- Turn towards a higher power.
- Pray to something bigger than yourself.
- Set a routine for prayer and express gratitude.
- Reinforce positive thoughts & affirmations.
- Send thoughts of love to yourself through a prayer.
- Seek guidance on difficulties.

RELAXATION

- Take a warm bath or shower.
- Practice yoga or deep abdominal breathing.
- Find activities you think are relaxing.
- Use calming scents such as lavender.
- Create a playlist of music that warm up your heart.
- Watch a calming movie to shift focus.
- Take a walk or sit outdoors.
- Engage in a coloring book.
- Sip a warm cup of herbal tea and focus on the flavors.

ONE THING

- Observe your thoughts going into past and future. Bring them back to present.
- Explore texture of a chosen object by touching its surface.
- Drink a warm beverage and pay attention to the aroma.
- Choose a color and focus on finding that color in the environment.
- Count details of a single flower, its color, fragrance, and shape.
- Bring your attention to the senses in your hands. Notice warmth, tingling, and other feelings.

VACATION

- Go back to bed for a while.
- Turn off your phone's notification.
- Watch TV for a few hours.
- Put down your work and stare at the wall mindlessly.
- Visualize & transport yourself to your favorite vacation spot.
- Explore new websites.
- Design a staycation within your home.
- Journal about your desired life and how you wish to make it come true.

ENCOURAGEMENT

- Imagine yourself to be your own cheerleader.
- Observe times when you're self-critical.
- Journal positive affirmations to tell yourself in difficult times.
- Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to your loved one.
- Create affirmations cards to reflect upon regularly.
- Develop personal mantras/phrases that encourage you.
- Journal your strengths and qualities.
- Engage in conversations that uplifts you.