

SESSION 3**BRIEF MINDFULNESS EXERCISE****REVIEW HOMEWORK****BREAK****PROS AND CONS****Why Bother with Pros and Cons?**

The skill of considering pros and cons allows people to see that coping skillfully with pain and impulsive urges leads to better results than acting impulsively and rejecting reality. We basically use this skill any time we do something we'd rather not do, such as going to a doctor's appointment, or getting out of bed for school or work rather than turning off the alarm and staying under the covers. As such, it is a central skill for changing mood-dependent behaviors.

How to Do Pros and Cons

Have you guys ever made pros and cons lists before? Maybe lists about whether you should date that guy, or break up with that girl, or go to that dance? Well, we're going to teach you how to do that a little differently and in a way that can help you cope with distress.

EXERCISE

Write an example of a maladaptive behavior that messes you up on the board, such as binge drinking, perhaps caused by an argument with a friend who won't communicate. You can also take one from the group that will be relevant but not too triggering. Then write PROS and CONS on the board with a line down the middle to make two columns. Go through the group, eliciting from them the pros of the impulsive behavior and then the cons of the impulsive behavior. Next, draw a horizontal line under the items in both columns. Then ask for the pros of not acting impulsively and the cons of not acting impulsively. See Figure 7.1 for an example.

Listing the pros and cons of both *doing* the problem behavior and *not doing* the behavior gives you additional information. Consider the following points.

- **Consider what the problem behavior does for you.** The *pros of doing* the impulsive behavior and *cons of not doing* it tell you what the behavior does for you! This is important because you can then think of more skillful ways to achieve the same things. For example, if yelling gets you your way in an argument (pro for yelling), and the absence of yelling will make you feel weak (con for not yelling), think about more effective ways to get your way and not feel weak. For example, the DEAR MAN skills from the Interpersonal Effectiveness Skills module might get your way for you *and* make you feel effective and powerful.

- **Consider all of the pitfalls of the behavior.** The *cons of doing* the behavior and the *pros of not doing it* highlight the natural consequences of the behavior. In other words, there are basic pitfalls with continuing to rely on this behavior.

	Pros	Cons
Old way: acting impulsively (binge drinking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distraction (ST) • Pain goes away (ST) • Get buzzed/feel good (ST) • Something to do, including more social (ST) • Fun (ST) • Feel courage/strength (ST) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel pain more intensely • Getting sick (ST) • Feeling more guilt/shame (ST/LT) • Could lead to other risky behaviors (ST/LT) • Reality returns, with a headache (ST/LT) • You miss an opportunity to practice new skills (ST/LT)
New way: tolerating distress (refraining from drinking; choose a skill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less chance of making a mistake, hurting yourself or others (ST/LT) • Better chance to resolve the problem (ST/LT) • By using skills, feel more mastery, empowered, and more in control, and can increase self-respect (ST/LT) • Developing the habit of tolerating distress and living more skillfully (LT) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't escape the feelings, and it doesn't relieve the distress as quickly (ST/LT) • Requires more effort and thus more difficult (ST)

FIGURE 7.1. Sample pros and cons of binge drinking. ST, short-term; LT, long-term.

• **Consider whether each pro and con has a long-term or short-term effect or both.** For example, cursing out your boyfriend might release your tension in the short term while also having potential short-term and long-term negative consequences on your relationship. Now let's go through each pro and con again, this time looking at whether each is a short-term or long-term pro and con. [*The leader can write ST or LT next to each pro and con, ideally in a different color marker. See Figure 7.1 for an example.*] For example, the pro of yelling to get your way tends to be short term, but a con of yelling is hurting the relationship, and it may be a long-term effect.

• **Identify the pattern.** Often engaging in maladaptive behavior has more short-term than long-term benefits, and refraining from engaging in the maladaptive behavior (i.e., using DBT skills) has more long-term benefits. When all pros and cons are labeled as either short term or long term, there tends to be a pattern. Do you see that pattern in your own life? The pros of behaving impulsively and the cons of not behaving impulsively (i.e., what the behavior does for you) are mostly short-term benefits. However, the pros of *not* engaging in the impulsive behavior and the cons of engaging in it tend to provide a greater number of long-term benefits along with some short-term benefits.

• **Build a life for the long term by considering the pros and cons and choosing to tolerate distress.** If you want to build a fulfilling life, there are good reasons to work on stopping the coping strategies that mess you up and replacing them with effective coping strategies. The pros of tolerating distress skillfully generally outweigh the cons.

EXERCISE

Invite each member to take 5 minutes to think about a recent distressing event in which he or she engaged in a maladaptive behavior, or had an urge to do so. Ask members to write down their examples on the top of the Pros and Cons handout (Distress Tolerance Handout 9), and fill each of the four cells, rating whether each pro and con has short-term and/or long-term effects. Depending on time, invite one or two participants to share their examples on the whiteboard and discuss with the group.

When to Use Pros and Cons

Fill out a Pros and Cons handout ahead of time (alone or with your individual therapist) about a typical target or addictive behavior. It can then be used in the moment of distress to review the pros and cons of acting and not acting on an urge. In this way, it can remind you of your long-term goals and the advantages of tolerating distress in the short term. Even if you don't have the handout with you at that moment, quickly reviewing pros and cons in your mind can help you choose to cope effectively with an urge rather than relying on a harmful behavior.

When filled out in advance, the handout can also be used to remind you about what functions a target behavior fills; it can serve as a guide to replacing them (e.g., replacing alcohol with an IMPROVE skill of doing something else to relax if you find that alcohol relaxes you). In other words, this skill could be part of a "cope-ahead practice" when you are at risk for engaging in a certain problem behavior.

REDUCE EXTREME EMOTIONAL AROUSAL QUICKLY WITH TIPP SKILLS

Why Bother with TIPP Skills?

Extreme emotional arousal can make it impossible to use most skills. Have any of you been in situations where you are so upset that nothing you try seems to work, you can't think straight, and you can't even remember the skills you learned? [*Usually most people will nod emphatically.*] When this happens, you've entered the "red zone" of emotional distress, and you might even start to panic at this point. We call this the "fight-or-flight" response when you are too aroused to practice skills. This might happen when you find out that your boyfriend or girlfriend has cheated on you, that your friends ditched you on your birthday and posted about it online, or that you failed a test you needed to pass. Whatever it is, your emotions get really amped up, in Emotion Mind, in the red zone.

We hear this all the time: "I was too upset to use my skills." What we are trying to do here is teach you ways of being skillful when you are the *most* upset (e.g., higher than 75 out of 100, if 100 is most distressed ever). Most of you probably didn't come to therapy just to learn how to cope when you are feeling a little bit annoyed! TIPP skills are for those times when you feel too upset, too emotionally dysregulated, to remember, let alone implement, other skills you may already know. When you are in a crisis, when you are overwhelmed, when you are caught in Emotion Mind and can't get out and other crisis survival strategies or skills don't work, these are the times to use the TIPP skills. They reduce the intensity of your emotions quickly. Note that the effects of these skills usually last only about 5–20 minutes, so they are not a long-term solution! They will calm you down just enough to buy you time so you can determine which skills to use next.

TIPP skills are a way to quickly "tip" your body chemistry when you're really upset. Some of you have relied on maladaptive behaviors to take the edge off of your distress. Others may have medication (i.e., a "PRN") to ease your agitation or anxiety. We recommend that you try a TIPP skill to bring down your distress just enough so that you can think of other skills to try.

Reasons to use TIPP skills include:

- TIPP skills change your body chemistry to reduce arousal.
- TIPP skills work very fast, within seconds to minutes, to bring down arousal.