

Parent Toolkit:
**MANAGING
STRESS**

MANAGING STRESS

Managing stress is good for your health and your baby's health during pregnancy and beyond. If you can manage stress, you can reduce your chance of premature birth and your baby's chance of childhood health problems like asthma and allergies.

Also, when you manage stress, your pregnancy is likely to be a more positive experience overall.

If you have life stresses under control and stress management strategies in place during pregnancy, you might also be able to cope better with new stresses after birth.

**WATCH VIDEO
TO LEARN MORE**



<https://bit.ly/49QpGqG>

GOALS OF MOOD REGULATION



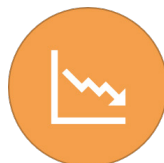
Understand and name your emotions



Reduce intensity of unwanted emotions



Reduce vulnerability to unwanted emotions



Reduce emotional suffering

RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: WHAT IS IT?

What is Radical Acceptance?

- When you choose to accept reality rather than fight it, with your mind and your body.
- The difference between pain and suffering can be acceptance.
- Pain is a part of life. Suffering is unnecessary and causes excessive pain.

What to Accept?

- Our pregnancy and postpartum experiences, made up of the facts about the past and present – even if we don't like the facts.
- Even the situations that are painful have a cause and can create opportunity for meaning.
- Life can be worth living even with the experience of painful events.

Why Accept?

- Refusal to accept does not create change.
- To create change we have to be clear about the present.
- Pain is a part of living. It signals movement, meaning and distress.
- Refusal to accept reality = suffering.
- Refusal to acknowledge reality can keep us stuck in strong emotions that are ineffective.

A common misconception is that radical acceptance means approving of something that they don't actually agree with, or being passive in a situation; however, this is not the case. Be aware that strong emotions may arise from learning about/ practicing radical acceptance.

**WATCH VIDEO
TO LEARN MORE**



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RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: FACTORS THAT INTERFERE



**This is not what I expected.
This is not what others told me.
This is not the story I wished for.
This was not my plan.**

Acceptance of reality does not mean you are in agreement or approve.

Factors that interfere with our ability to accept:

Lack of skill:

We don't have or know the skills to accept.

Emotions:

Get in the way of accepting.

Belief:

That with acceptance comes approval or agreement.

Judgment:

Belief that it shouldn't be this way.

Environment:

Events, situations or people urging you to refuse to acknowledge the reality (your depression, your anxiety, your limits, your needs, etc.).

FOOD & MOOD

We know that diet (type of foods eaten, how much you eat, and how often you eat) significantly impacts mood and anxiety on multiple levels. One key fact is that large increases or decreases in your blood sugar can lead to alterations in your level or mood or anxiety. Focusing on eating regular meals, as well as foods that will keep blood sugars stable (those with a good amount of fiber and protein) can greatly help to stabilize your emotional state.

MAKE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT HOW VARIOUS FOODS IMPACT YOUR MOOD.

- Are you irritable? Tired? Anxious or jittery?
- Consider ways in which particular foods impact your mood: sugar, caffeine, fatty foods, fast food

CONSIDER YOUR INTAKE, ARE YOU OVER OR UNDER EATING?

- Consider ways to plan ahead for meals and snacks.
- Eating regularly during pregnancy and postpartum can be challenging for many reasons.

THINK ABOUT SMALL CHANGES AND WAYS TO SUPPORT OVERALL HEALTH.

- Observe any patterns (missed meals, snacking, overeating, difficulty with certain foods), consider motivation and ways to increase success.
- Ask for help with meals.

DEVELOP GOALS TO ADDRESS MODEST CHANGES.

- Start small, making gradual changes.
- Increase fruits/vegetables with variety in color.
- Increase protein and fiber to diet.
- Make sure to drink plenty of water.
- Take prenatal vitamin as prescribed. When no longer taking prenatal vitamins, take multivitamins which contain trace elements (metals).
- Eat a diet rich in protein, fiber and folate.
- Take an Omega 3 supplement with as close to one gram of EPA as possible.



RESPONDING TO CRISIS

CRISIS

High Stress

Short Term

Strong Urges

Impulsive Responses
Possible

WHEN TO USE CRISIS RESPONSE

Intense emotional or
physical pain

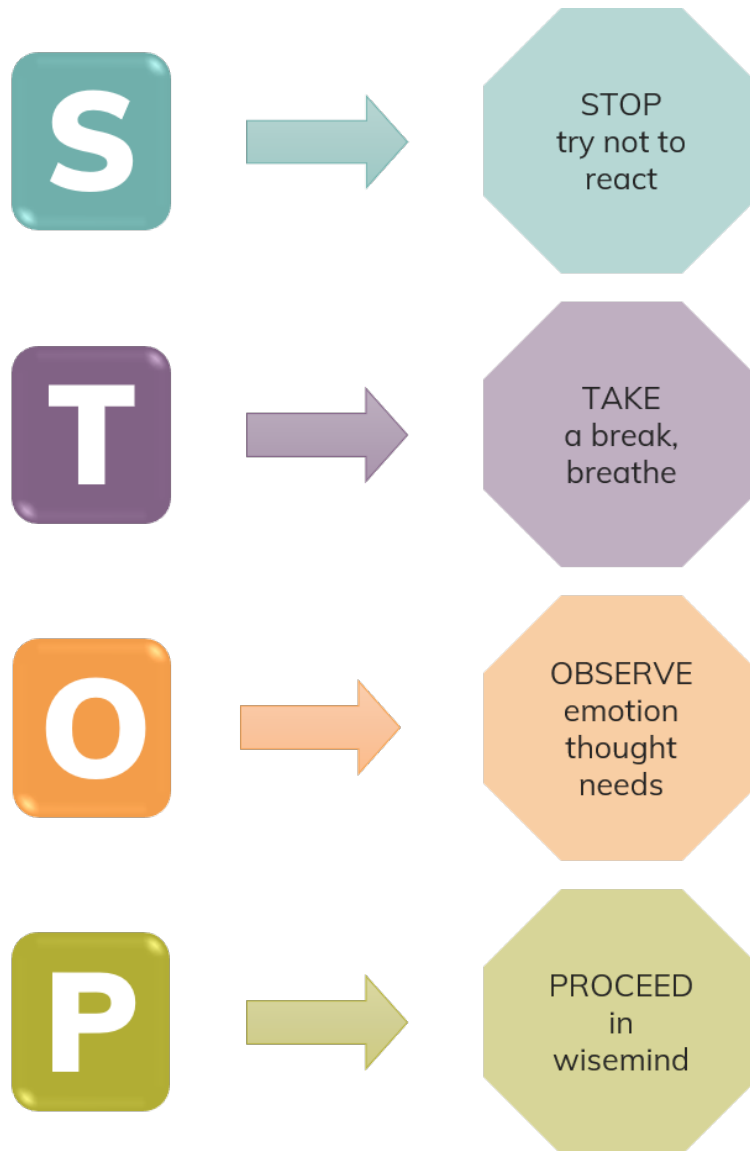
Strong urge to use
ineffective behavior

Emotional pain is too
overwhelming

Needing to think but
feeling too intense

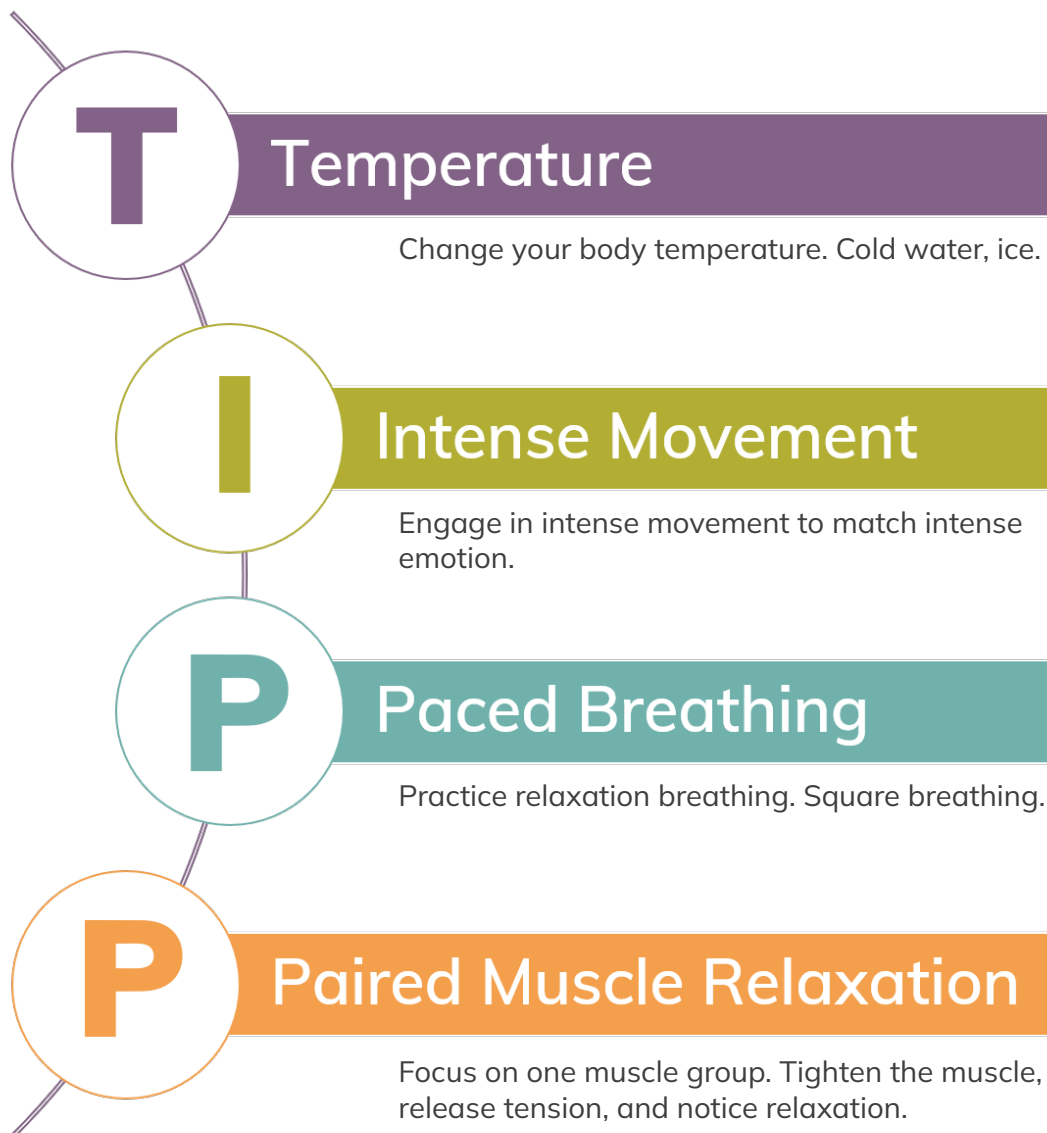
STOP SKILLS

To help you stay in control during crisis moments, use the STOP Skill. When you feel as though your emotions are about to take over, literally just STOP/FREEZE. Remember freeze tag during childhood? Do just that! Don't react! Don't move a muscle! Freezing for a moment can help you to prevent impulsive emotional reactions!



TIPP SKILLS

This TIPP skill is a rapid way to reduce emotional intensity. Why does this work? It's designed to activate the human body's physiological nervous system for decreasing arousal. The body has a "sympathetic nervous system" and a "parasympathetic nervous system" that work in opposite directions. Your sympathetic nervous system activates the fight or flight response while the parasympathetic system increases your ability to calm and regulate emotions. These skills help increase activity in your parasympathetic nervous system and decrease your fight or flight response.



DISTRACT WITH ACCEPTS

Intense feelings will come and go. They often peak as though they are a wave of emotion and the intensity will lessen over time. These experiences are frequent throughout pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and within moments of parenting. It can prove to be of value to distract until the peak of intensity lessens and then return to the moment, problem solving or experiencing. The acronym ACCEPTS helps us remember this skill.

A	Activities	Engage in short activity that requires your attention and demands concentration. This could be a crossword puzzle, reading a book to your child, giving a bath, a hobby, work activity, cleaning, etc.
C	Contributing	Distract your attention by shifting to thinking of someone else. Do something kind for that person, volunteer, contribute to a cause, write a nice letter to someone, find a community project.
C	Comparisons	Consider a time when you were not coping as well and compare to this time. Remember there may have been times you were in more pain and you made it through. Compare to those less fortunate than you.
E	Emotions	Do something that creates a competing emotion. For example, if you are sad, find a funny video online, watch a funny movie. Nervous? Listen to soothing music.
P	Pushing Away	Temporarily push intense emotions out of your mind. Write the problem on a piece of paper, fold it up and put it away to deal with later. However, remember you must come back to the problem at some point.
T	Thoughts	When intense emotions arrive, try to shift to logical mind: count your thoughts, list the colors in the room, play 'eye spy,' recite a poem or song in your head, read a good book.
S	Sensations	Find sensations that are strong enough to distract from intense emotion. Hold ice in your hands and squeeze, eat something very sour, chew on mint.

Distraction can be useful in many situations but can also be overused at times. Try not to use distraction as a routine method to avoid painful emotions or difficult situations. It's most helpful when:

- You are so overwhelmed that it's unbearable
- The problem can't be solved immediately

TURNING THE MIND

Turning the mind is a choice. It's choosing to accept. Acceptance often only lasts a moment or two, so people have to continue to turn the mind towards the decision to accept over and over. The more difficult or painful the event, the longer it may take to fully accept it. Turning the mind will be a key component to staying on the road to acceptance and minimizing suffering.



STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO TURNING THE MIND

- Observe your body, posture, tone, facial express, thoughts: are you in rejection or acceptance.
- Ask yourself if there is benefit to work on acceptance.
- Make a commitment to yourself to practice – all the way.
- Continue to “turn the mind” over and over by repeating your action, words, choice, posture, tone, facial expression.
- Notice traps towards rejection.
- Develop a plan to catch yourself ahead of time.
- Remember acceptance does not equal agreement.

IDEAS FOR PRACTICE

- List pros and cons for practicing acceptance
- Listen for words of rejection “shouldn’t, can’t, refuse”
- Imagine all the things you would say or do if you were willing to accept
- Change your body posture to willing hands or half smile
- Describe the facts, avoid statements about “right or wrong.”

HALF-SMILE AND WILLING HANDS

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EMOTIONS ARE
PARTIALLY
CONTROLLED BY
FACIAL
EXPRESSIONS AND
MOVEMENT

HALF-SMILING

- Relax your entire face, jaw, eyes, mouth
- Let the corners of your mouth move slightly up
- Keep your face relaxed and adopt a serene expression

ADOPTING A
SERENE HALF-SMILE
CAN SEND A
CALMING MESSAGE
TO YOUR BRAIN
AND BODY

WILLING HANDS OR WILLING POSTURE

- Place hands on your lap or at your side
- Unclench your hands and turn your palms up
- Relax your fingers
- Drop your arms and shoulders
- Uncross your arms and legs
- Relax your body and lean in to the moment

ACCEPTING REALITY
WITH YOUR BODY.
OUR BODY POSTURE
CAN SEND A
MESSAGE TO OUR
BRAIN

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE: CALM/SAFE PLACE

Imagine a place where you can feel calm, comfortable, peaceful, or safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere dreamed about or seen in a movie, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create with your imagination.

TOUCH

What is around or connected to your body.
How does it feel?

HEAR

Notice the sounds around you, or even perhaps the silence. Sounds far away and those near.

TASTE

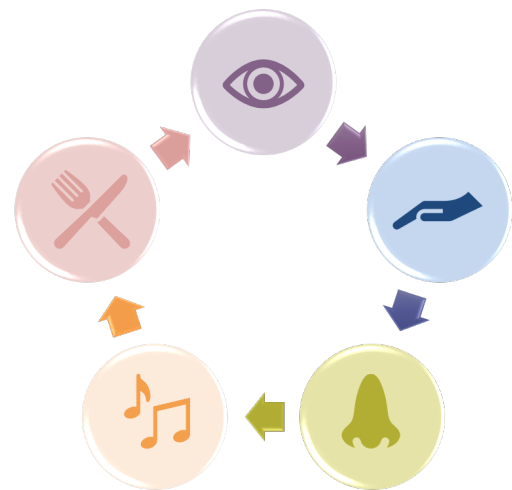
Notice the texture, is it sweet, salty, savory?
Notice any sensations in your mouth.

SEE

Look around. Notice the colors, objects,
movement, sizes.

SMELL

Look around. Notice the colors, objects,
movement, sizes.



- Focus in on these five sensations. While you notice these things, you might choose to give your place a name. Choose one word or a phrase that will help bring that image back to mind, anytime you need it.
- Now take a deep breath in and take one last look around. Turn down the volume on the sounds, dim the colors, make the images smaller and take one deep breathe in. Slowly let your breath out and begin to open your eyes.
- Practice revisiting this place by using the cue word or phrase. Try to practice once a day recalling the place with the cue word and relaxing your body.

CRISIS SURVIVAL: DISTRESS TOLERANCE

List below 8-10 items you could use during a crisis while at home. Consider tools in ACCEPTS, Self-Soothe, TIPP and STOP. Find a “child-proof” space to store these items, whether it’s in a specific area or your home, a bag or box. Examples may include: lotion, gum, crosswords, tea, candy, putty, pictures, etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Next, create a smaller version of your crisis survival kit for “on the go.” This should be able to fit in your purse or diaper bag, somewhere easily accessible.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____