

Soothing Intense Emotions

Dysphoria is an intense emotion that drives people to do extreme things in search of relief. Extremes like self-cutting, self-medicating with drugs, fights, violence, and aggressive driving.

People do these things for a reason. Self-cutting releases natural opiates in the brain (called endorphins) that sooth emotional pain. All these solutions bring some relief. The only problem is they cause long-term damage.

Safer Relief

There are other ways to raise your endorphins without causing damage. Try one from this list. If it doesn't work, just move on to the next one:

- Squeeze an ice cube.
- Bite into a hot pepper.
- Chew on frozen fruit, ginger, or lemon peels.
- Take a cold shower.
- Go out for a run or exercise.
- Bite into wasabi or wasabi peas.
- Pour school glue on your skin, allow it to dry, and peel it off.
- Fill a bucket or sink with ice water and put your head in it.



- Put on sun screen and lay in the sun.

- Hold a hot water bottle to your neck.
- Pull weeds in the garden (this is particularly good as a replacement for hair-pulling).
- Use aromatherapy (lavender helps anxiety; citrus and mint help depression).
- Listen to soothing music. Or loud music.
- Call a friend and just talk.
- Take a hot shower.
- Paint. Use body paint instead of self-cutting.
- Slap your wrist in a way that doesn't leave damage (or with a rubber band around your wrist).
- Flatten aluminum cans for recycling.
- Hit a punching bag or a mattress/pillow.
- Break sticks.

There is also a blood pressure medicine called clonidine that can be taken as needed to reduce impulses to self-harm. Ask your provider if it is be appropriate for you.

Soothing Statements

When you can't think your way out of depressive thoughts, it's best to walk away from the struggle. Instead, repeat a soothing statements. Say it out loud, write them down, or visualize them in the air.

Here are some soothing statements that our patients have found helpful. What's soothing for one is trouble for another, so make it your own and take these suggestions with a grain of salt.

- This too shall pass.

That one was a favorite of Abe Lincoln. Lincoln suffered chronic depression. The

serenity prayer is another popular one:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”

Other soothing statements:

- I have gotten through difficult situations in the past, and I can do it again.
- I am stronger than this problem.
- I won't let this beat me down.
- This pain is only temporary.
- This is not the worst thing that could happen.
- I tend to handle things better than I think I will.
- What lies behind you and what lies before you are tiny matters compared to what lies within you.
- There are 2 days in the week we should not worry about, yesterday and tomorrow. That leaves today, live for today.
- Stumbling blocks can become stepping stones to a better life. You can turn adversities into opportunities. Do not be discouraged because of today's problems.

Crisis Management

A crisis is a problem that is too big to ignore but too complex for quick solutions. A divorce, a trauma, a natural disaster. Losing a job. Something looming in the future that you can't do anything about, like a court case or a doctor's appointment to evaluate a mass that might be cancer.

Crises don't have ready solutions, but there are steps you can take to survive them while waiting for a solution to come.

1. Shift your goals. Instead of trying to fix an unfixable problem, make it your goal to avoid things that worsen your life and mental health. Things like alcohol, drugs, self-harm, sleeping all day, fights and arguments.

2. Accept your emotions. This is not easy to do. Allow your emotions to come and go while staying attentive to the world around you.

3. Change your space. If you're inside, get outdoors. Alone, get with people. Sitting down, get moving.

The mind goes blank in a crisis

It's hard to think straight in a crisis. It's hard to think at all, and you're not likely to remember the things that work, including the stuff on this page. Write down the ideas that work for you and keep the list handy. Store it in your phone.

Add to the list anything that's easy to do and makes the moment a little more tolerable. Favorite songs, photographs, friends you can call on. Aromatherapy. Distracting activities like a jigsaw puzzle or a good movie. Things that remind you of better times, of past successes or accomplishments.

The best ideas are simple but strong. Powerful enough to ease the magnetic pull of a crisis, at least a little.

Suicidal crises

Crises feel like they will last forever, but they don't. Here's an important example. On average, a suicidal crisis lasts 60-90 minutes.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. It creates problems beyond death, causing pain for generations to come in those left behind. Contact us if you struggle with suicidal thoughts or reach out to:

- Call or text 988; chat 988lifeline.org
- Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741
- Call 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 for Disaster Distress Helpline

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 7/1/2025