Short-Term Distress Menu - Session activity

Facilitate a structured practice of short-term distress menu with preparation, reflection, and an agreed closing.

Mental health professionals | 30 minutes

Fictional example: Taylor chooses quiet music while waiting for an uncertain result.

0-5 min | Agree on purpose and fit

Explain the educational scope. Ask what would be useful, check readiness and access needs, and establish choices to observe, adapt, or pass. Use an ordinary example; do not solicit trauma narratives.

5-10 min | Orient with an example

Short-term coping aims to get through a moment without adding avoidable harm. Fictional example: Taylor chooses quiet music while waiting for an uncertain result. Ask what is observed and what remains uncertain.

10-20 min | Practice and compare

Build a menu of accessible distraction, soothing, and support options with a clear time to reassess. Offer quiet individual work, a supported conversation, or an observing role. Compare two possible responses without evaluating people as right or wrong.

20-25 min | Reflect on meaning

Which option fits this moment, and when will you reassess? Ask what fit, what did not fit, and how culture, power, disability access, or external conditions affect the options.

25-30 min | Integrate and close

Invite one optional next step or support request. Orient to the current setting, allow an unfinished question to remain unfinished, and agree how to revisit it. End early or adapt if activation increases.

Adaptations

For a group, use fiction and no compulsory round-robin disclosure. For remote use, allow off-camera reflection and private notes. For brief use, keep one example and one question while retaining opening and closing choices.

Reflection

What adaptation or follow-up is needed?

Scope and adaptation

These are selected DBT-informed educational exercises, not comprehensive DBT, phone coaching, or crisis care. Use individualized clinical assessment and existing care plans. No cold-water immersion, breath holding, intense exercise prescriptions, exposure assignments, or risk scoring are included. Behavior chains and opposite-action decisions need clinician guidance when risk or complexity is present.

Original AI-assisted educational draft; independent clinical review pending. Version 1.0. Background: Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training: Fundamentals. Full source links and scope: library.morethantherapy.org/approaches/resources/DBT-A07-4