

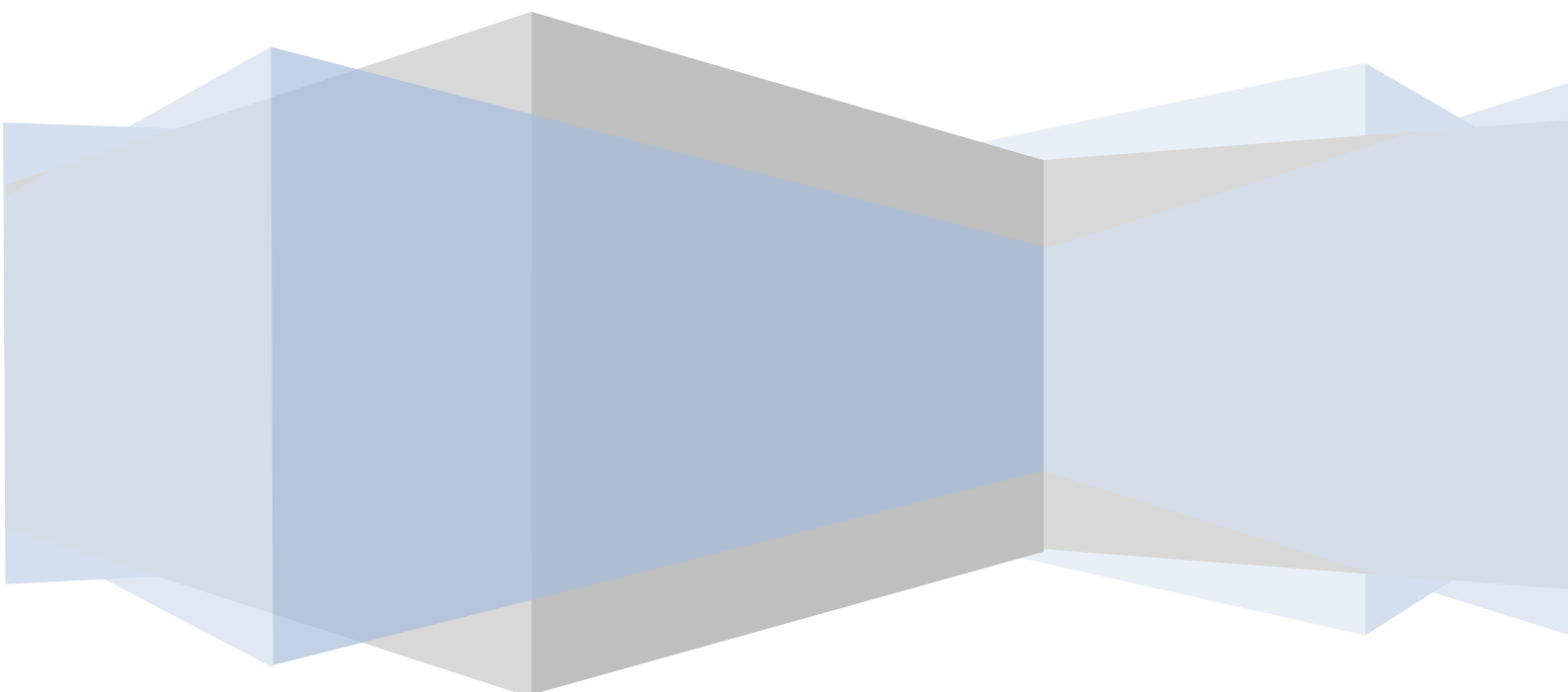
# Cwm Taf University Health Board – Psychological Therapies Department



## Distraction and Distancing

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### Stabilisation Pack



# Distraction

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When feelings of distress become overwhelming, it is not always possible to change the situation to make it better. In these situations we need to find a way of tolerating what is happening, if possible without using risky strategies such as self-harm (although this may be unavoidable at times.) Distraction is one way of doing this. It can be used alongside the strategies described in other sections of this manual, such as 'Mindfulness' and 'Grounding.'

Most people already use some kind of distraction. Here are some ideas that you might want to try in addition:

**ACTIVITIES** that take up your attention, such as cleaning the house; tidying up; having a phone conversation with a friend; knitting or sewing; jigsaws; cooking; walking, gardening and other types of exercise. The choice of activity doesn't really matter as long as it fits you and your lifestyle and is enough to hold your attention.

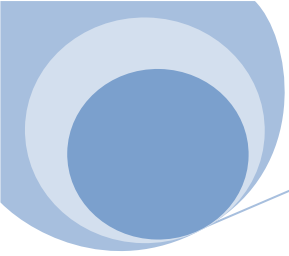
**OCCUPYING YOUR THOUGHTS** by online games; reading; watching funny and feel good videos/movies; concentration exercises like counting back from 100 in 7's, counting your breaths, or looking through photographs of happy memories.

**USING SENSATIONS** such as splashing your face with cold water; drinking something cold; using an ice cube on your skin; using an elastic band around the wrist and flicking it; having a hot shower; smelling flowers; perfume or candles.

**RELEASING FEELINGS** if the situation allows it, by punching a pillow; letting yourself cry; writing or painting; dancing to loud music.

## Tips for distraction techniques

- Choose something you enjoy doing if you can.
- It may be helpful to choose a distraction that creates the opposite emotion to what you are feeling. For example, if you are angry and frustrated, you could try a relaxing activity. If you are very anxious, you could try something which helps you to feel safe and soothed. Reading or watching television work for some people but are too passive for others. In such cases, activities such as exercise, walking and tidying might work better.
- It is a good idea to do the distraction activities as mindfully as possible, which means giving them your full attention, focusing on the present moment, and doing only one thing at a time. Our minds will naturally wander away from the task, but when you notice this you can gently



bring your attention back to what you are doing. More information on this can be found in the 'Mindfulness' section.

### Creating a distraction plan

You could write a personal distraction plan and keep it in a prominent place, ready for when you need it. If you draw up a list of activities, you can work through them one by one.

## Distancing

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When feelings of distress become too overwhelming, it can sometimes be necessary to try to distance yourself from these feelings for the time being. This is not to say that you ignore them, or try to get rid of them, but just acknowledge that they are there, and that you will deal with them later. This can provide a sense of relief. The idea is similar to dissociating (See leaflet on 'Dissociation'), but is in your control, and therefore can become a useful skill.

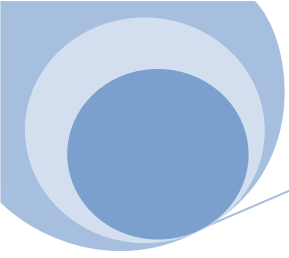
The techniques below all describe methods you could try to create a temporary distance from difficult and intense feelings. You can then go back to them when you are feeling strong enough to manage them again.

**THE CONTAINER:** You could try to place all the intense feelings into an imaginary container that is strong enough to hold all them, to give some temporary emotional distance. Imagine what this container looks like. How big is it? How does it close? Where do you leave it?

**CLOSING THE BOOK:** You could try placing images, memories or emotions into an imaginary book of things that trouble you, and then close this book.

You may also wish to try and lessen the intensity of an emotion with the following exercises

**TURNING DOWN THE SIZE WITH A REMOTE:** Imagine the distressing image, thought or sensation and place it on a TV screen. Now try and shrink the image so that it is in a small corner of the television, perhaps the size of a 50 pence piece. You can then use your remote to increase and reduce the size of the image. Try and increase it to a size that feels tolerable. Remember you can always reduce it again if needed.



### **Distraction Resources**

This website is mainly about self-harm, but it also has a good list of distraction ideas, as well as links to videos and online games:

[www.Scar-tissue.net](http://www.Scar-tissue.net)