
Exercise: Distract Yourself from Self- Destructive Behaviors

Here are some safer actions that you can use to distract yourself from your self-destructive emotions and thoughts. Check (✓) the ones you're willing to do, and then add any healthy, nonharming activities that you can think of:

___ Instead of hurting, yourself, hold an ice cube in one hand and squeeze it. The sensation from the cold ice is numbing and very distracting.

___ Write on yourself with a red felt-tip marker instead of cutting. Draw exactly where you would cut. Use red paint or nail polish to make it look like you're bleeding. Then draw stitches with a black marker. If you need to make it even more distracting, squeeze an ice cube in the other hand at the same time.

___ Snap a rubber band on your wrist each time you feel like hurting yourself. This is very painful, but it causes less permanent damage than cutting, burning, or mutilating yourself.

___ Dig your fingernails into your arm without breaking the skin.

___ Draw faces of people you hate on balloons and then pop them.

___ Write letters to people you hate or to people who have hurt you. Tell them what they did to you and tell them why you hate them. Then throw the letters away or save them to read later.

___ Throw foam balls, rolled-up socks, or pillows against the wall as hard as you can.

___ Scream as loud as you can into a pillow or scream some place where you won't draw the attention of other people, like at a loud concert or in your car.

___ Stick pins in a voodoo doll instead of hurting yourself. You can make a voodoo doll with some rolled-up socks or a foam ball and some markers. Or you can buy a doll in a store for the specific purpose of sticking pins in it. Buy one that's soft and easy to stick.

___ Cry. Sometimes people do other things instead of crying because they are afraid that if they start to cry they'll never stop. This never happens. In fact, the truth is that crying can make you feel better because it releases stress hormones.

___ Other healthy, nonharming ideas: _____

Here's an example of using alternative actions to distract your self-destructive emotions. Lucy often cut herself when she felt upset or angry. She had dozens of scars on her wrists and forearms. She wore long-sleeve shirts even in the hot summer because she was embarrassed when other people saw what she had done to herself. But after getting some ideas from this workbook, she made a distraction plan. So the next time she got angry with herself and felt like cutting, she looked at her plan for alternative actions. She had written down the idea of drawing on herself with a red marker. She drew a line exactly where she would have cut herself. She even used red paint to make it look like she was bleeding. She carried the mark on her arm for the rest of the day to remind herself how sad and overwhelmed she felt. But then, before she went to sleep, she was able to erase the "scar" and "blood" from her arm, unlike the rest of the marks from her permanent injuries.