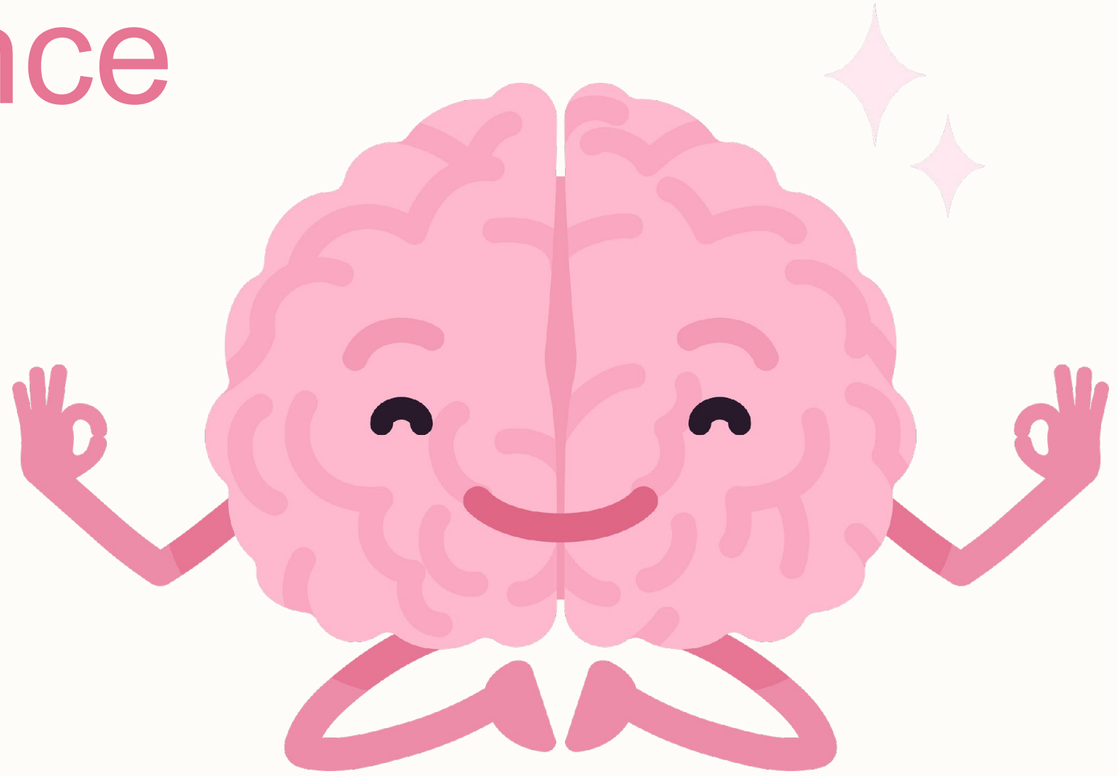
Sitting with Discomfort,

Distress Tolerance

Learning how to deal with uncomfortable feelings in recovery



Today’s Topic

- Understanding discomfort
- The cycle of avoidance
- The uncomfortable reality of recovery
- Practical distress-tolerance skills
- Video and discussion
- Personal coping plan and reflection

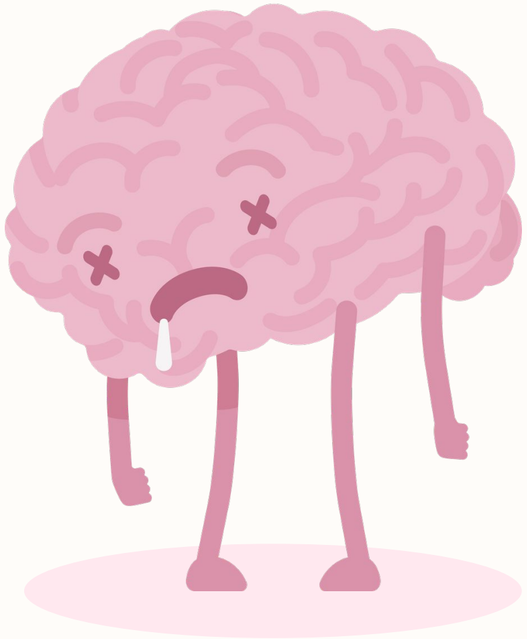
  Applying the skills to real-life situations.

Opening Discussion

- What's a feeling you wish you could just fast-forward through?
- Have you ever made a situation worse because you couldn't sit with how you were feeling?
- How do you know when to sit with discomfort v.s. when it is time to distract yourself?

Understanding Discomfort





You cannot always control what you feel, but you can learn to control how you respond.

- Cravings
- Boredom
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Stress

What are some feelings or situations that make you want to escape, distract yourself, or reach for something?"

The Negative Reinforcement Cycle

(The cycle can become automatic)



1. Uncomfortable Feeling

Anxiety, boredom, stress, loneliness, etc.



2. Use a Substance

Alcohol, drugs, or other escape behavior



3. Temporary Relief

The uncomfortable feeling decreases (for a while)



4. Learn the Connection

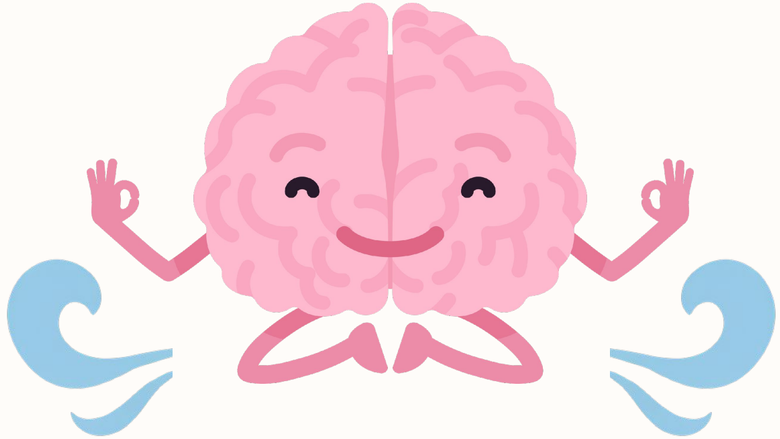
Our brain learns: “Using helps me feel better.”

The Reality of Recovery

Sometimes recovery means:

- Being bored when you used to be high.
- Feeling anxious without your usual escape.
- Experiencing loneliness without immediately numbing it.
- Having an uncomfortable day without looking for relief.
- Learning to enjoy ordinary experiences again.

We need to learn that discomfort isn't necessarily an emergency while still build lives that are enjoyable, meaningful, and worth protecting



Skill #1: DBT STOP



Stop

Stop what you are doing for a moment.



Take a step back

Give yourself some distance.



Observe

Notice your thoughts, emotions, and body sensations.



Proceed mindfully

Choose a calm and helpful next step.

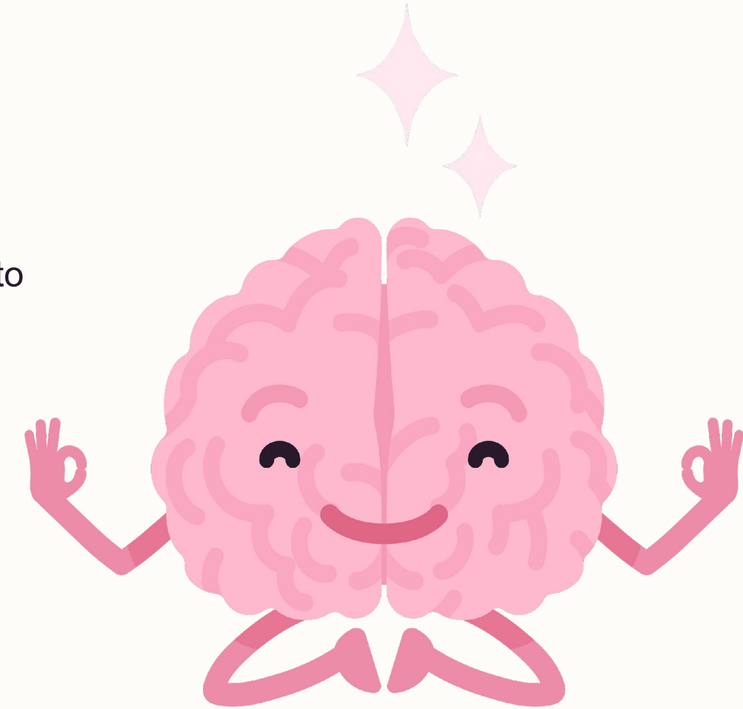
Skill #2: Urge Surfing

What is urge surfing?

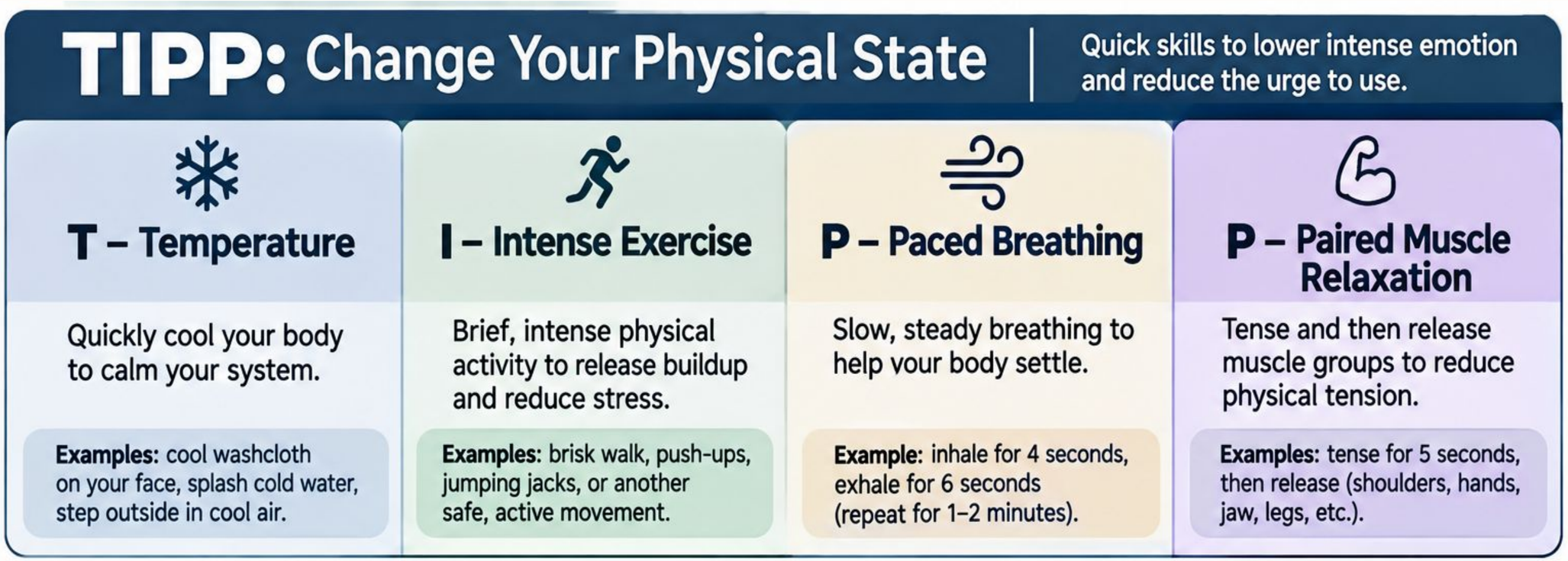
Urge surfing is a mindfulness-based coping skill that involves noticing a craving without immediately reacting to it. Instead of fighting the urge or giving in, you observe it and allow it to be there.

How to practice it:

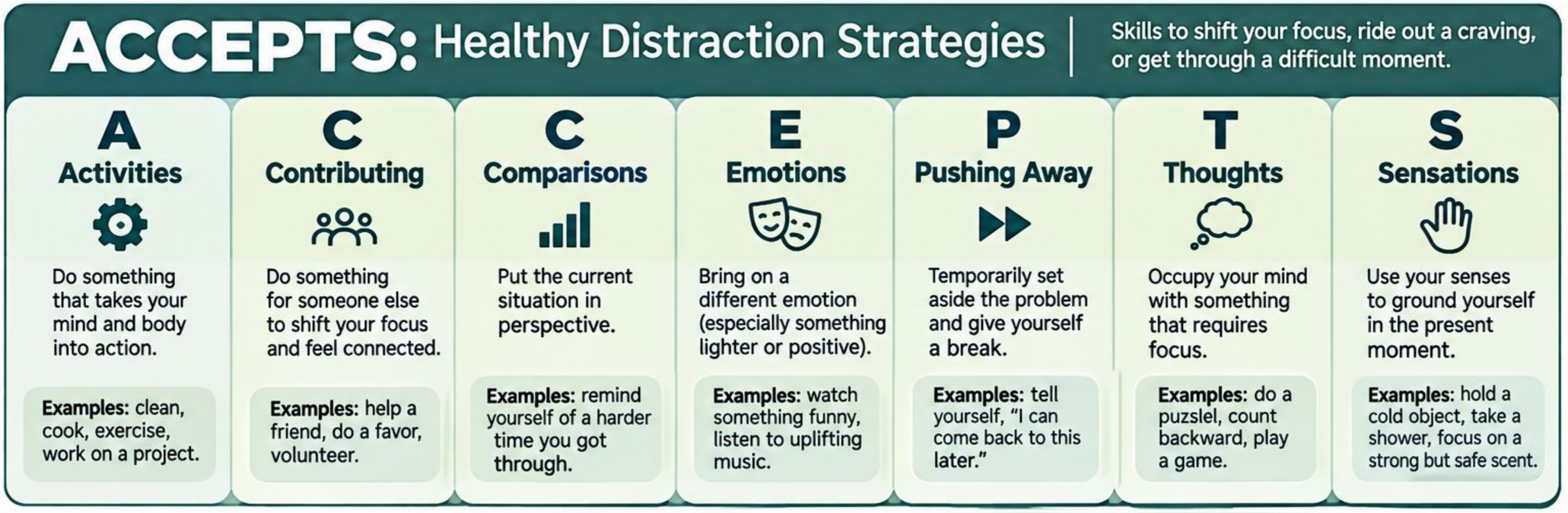
1. Recognize it: Notice that an urge is happening. Remind yourself, "I'm having a craving."
2. Observe it: Where do you feel it in your body? What thoughts are coming up?
3. Allow it: Try not to fight, judge, or immediately satisfy the urge. Let it exist without acting on it.
4. Ride the wave: Bring your attention to your breathing and observe how the urge changes over time.
5. Choose your response: You can experience an urge without making the decision to use.



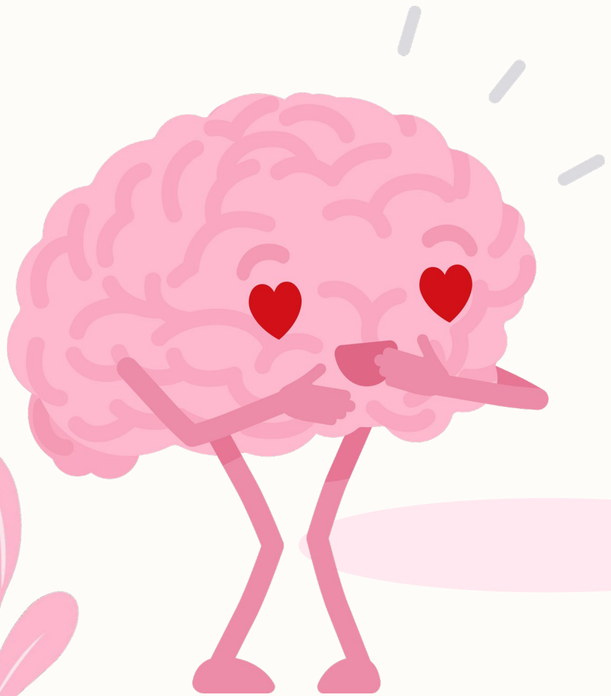
Skill #3: DBT TIPP



Skill #4: DBT ACCEPTS



Video: Applying in Life



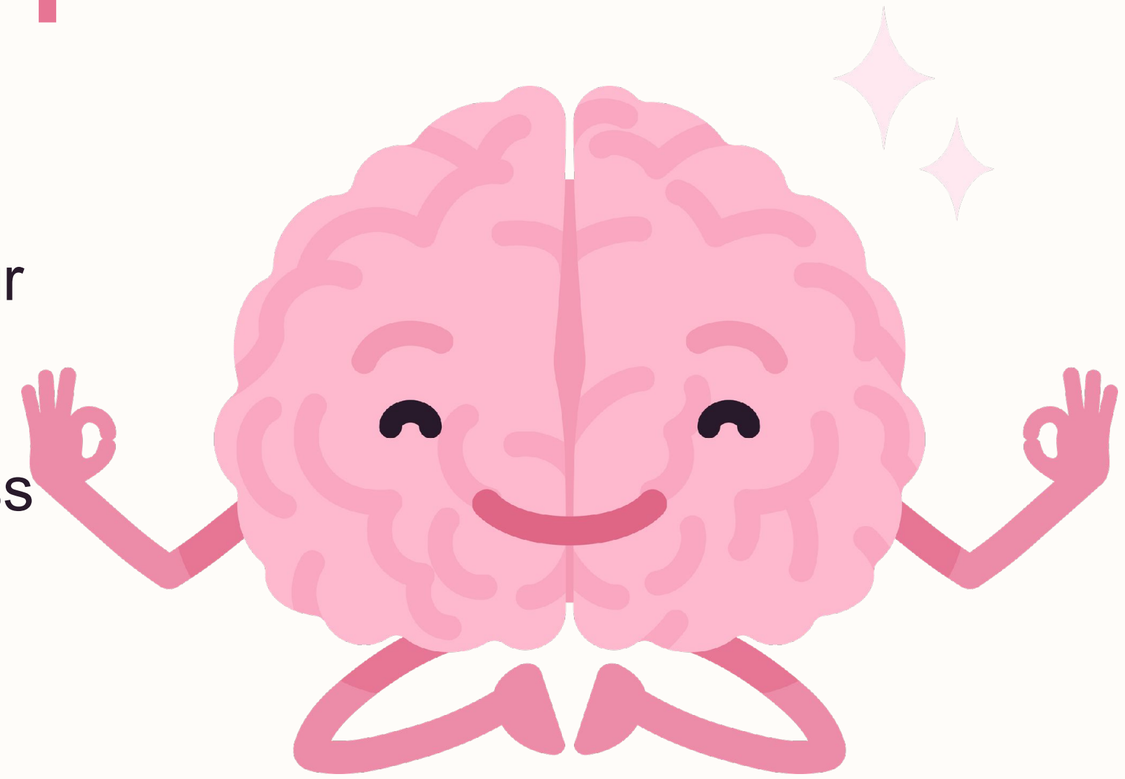
Urge Surfing

Disscussion

-What stood out to you?

-What skills are most realistic in your daily life?

-What still seems hard about distress tolerance?



Discomfort

- What feelings or situations are hardest for you to sit with?

How does boredom affect recovery?

- What do you find yourself doing when you want to escape an uncomfortable feeling?

- What makes it difficult to choose a healthy coping strategy in the moment?

