

Increase Your Tolerance For Emotional Discomfort

"It is important to learn how to exist with difficult feelings. You can do this by slowly developing your ability to stay present with increasingly greater amounts of sensation."

"In somatic psychotherapy, you can learn to increase your window of tolerance through an activity called pendulation. Pendulation involves alternating your attention between feelings of safety and feelings of distress as they are experienced in your body."*

Make sure you're in an environment that makes you feel as safe as possible. That might mean being alone, or it might mean keeping a hand on a pet for emotional support. It can help to feel cozy, so don't hesitate to use a blanket or stuffed animal.

- 1 Pick an event to think about—one that caused you distress. You may want to pick a mildly-distressing event (rather than something traumatic) so as not to trigger yourself during this exercise.

Recall the event and notice the emotions and sensations that course through your body.

- 2 Pick a single word that can easily bring you back to the sensation of distress. It could describe the feeling itself, or describe some other association you have with the feeling (a color, a smell, etc.)

Next, take a breath and find some positive sensation in your body—maybe there's a body part that feels especially relaxed, or you can remember how it last felt to be hugged. If you can't find a positive sensation, at least find some neutral sensation you can focus on.

- 3 Pick a single word that can easily bring you back to this positive or neutral sensation.

Now begins the pendulation.

- 4 Guide your attention back and forth between the distressing and calmer sensations you've just envisioned. Stay on the negative feelings, thinking about your distressing event, for as long as you can until the distress ramps up. Then, go back to the calming sensation, image, or word you've picked.
- 5 Repeat this process until you've extended the amount of time you can stay with the negative sensations.

As you become more comfortable with pendulation, this technique can be used to overcome distress associated with traumatic memories. However, we recommend having a professional to speak with before opening the Pandora's box of past trauma.