

## Clinical Tool: Building Skills

### Increase Distress Tolerance

Distress tolerance skills refer to a type of intervention in Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT) where clients learn to manage distress in a healthy way. These skills are helpful for situations where a client might not be able to control a situation, but they need to manage their own response.

Distress Tolerance skills are used to help us cope and survive during a crisis, and helps us tolerate short term or long term pain (physical or emotional). The aim for AHPs is to develop a repertoire of coping skills with the young person that they can draw upon at times of distress. These skills typically entail a mixture of mindfulness skills including mindful breathing; cognitive reappraisals and perspective taking; distraction via experiential relaxation exercises; minimizing self-destructive behaviours; and radical acceptance a mental position that acknowledges the present moment (no matter what it is) without judging the events as good or bad. Further information on distress tolerance skills is readily available – see one resource below.

Provide link to the following worksheet

<http://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/dbt-distress-tolerance-skills.pdf>

### Foster and encourage healthy romantic relationships

The following links provide valuable resources that can help a young person to understand healthy relationships and recognise warning signs and characteristics of unhealthy relationships.

- [body talk website](#)– lots of information for young people about healthy and unhealthy relationships
- [headspace factsheet– building healthy relationships](#)
- [Reachout factsheet – is your relationship past its use-by date?](#)
- [Kids helpline – building respectful relationships](#)

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is prevalent among young people. Health professionals are in an ideal position to detect IPV and intervene early if it is suspected. Suspected IPV should be addressed in a supportive, trauma-informed way ([see trauma informed care](#)) with an emphasis on supporting the young person's safety and addressing any immediate safety concerns. Providing psychoeducation on healthy and unhealthy relationships, including reinforcing that IPV is not their fault that anyone can be affected by IPV and it is not part of a healthy relationship can be very helpful. Many young people affected by IPV may feel isolated from family and friends, normalising this in the context of their experiences, supporting their social connectedness, and linking them in with support services is an important part of working toward recovery.

Safety planning is important if there is any current IPV or risk of ongoing exposure to IPV. Ensure the young person is aware of domestic violence organisations and how to access them, and has crisis contacts readily available.

For more information see [headspace's Evidence Summary – Working with adolescents: Keeping relationships in mind](#).

### Assertiveness and negotiation skills

Assertiveness refers to the ability to communicate personal needs, thoughts and feelings in a direct and honest manner without being aggressive or passive.

Young people need to learn to be assertive enough to say no to unwanted sex, sex without a condom or drugs. They need to be told that it is OK to say “no”. They face overwhelming pressure to conform to the desires of others. Peer pressure can be counteracted with some assertiveness training.

Some helpful links include:

[Centre for Clinical Interventions \(CCI\) self-help resource on assertiveness skills](#)

[Psychoeducation for younger adolescents on assertiveness](#)

### [Tips for assertive communication with a partner about using condoms](#)

Young people with low assertiveness have difficulty expressing their needs, thoughts or wishes. This may present as difficulty saying “No” or disagreeing with others. It may also present as angry or aggressive responses to situations where the young person is not able to articulate or express their needs.

### Assertiveness Tips

Some assertiveness tips include:

- **Value yourself and others** around you.
  - Think about what you want. Think about whether it is inline with what you value. Think about whether it is fair and respectful.
  - Discuss your needs and feelings clearly, openly and honestly.
  - Stay calm, cool and collected while talking about them.
- Be open to new ways of thinking about yourself, others and situations.
  - Be open to fair criticism and not be afraid to make fair criticism yourself.
  - Acknowledge your and others rights.
  - Negotiate and make compromises, while considering my needs and the needs of others.
  - Problem-solve and collaborate with others to do this.
  - The key to assertiveness is clear, open and honest discussion that does not blame, ridicule or put other people down. A way of saying things in an assertive way is to use the following formula:
1. **I feel** anxious. (this must be what you *feel* - not what you *think*)
  2. **when you**... don't use condoms
  3. **because**... I don't want to get pregnant or get any STIs
  4. **I would like**... to use condoms when we have sex from now on
  5. **What do you think? How can we resolve this?**