Soothing the Five Senses

Soothing the five senses is a relaxation technique that is used in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). DBT is a cognitive behavioral treatment developed by Marsha Linehan, PhD, ABPP. “Dialectic” means weighing and integrating contradictory facts or ideas with a view to resolving contradictions, in DBT the dialectics are acceptance and change. Relaxation techniques assist with stress relief and can help your body relax by lowering your heart rate and blood pressure. When your body is relaxed, your mind can function better. This worksheet explains how to use each of the five senses to relax.

Self-soothing using your sense of vision

We process so much of our surroundings through sight. Some images can make us feel bad, or good. Try to identify some things that you find nice to look at:

___ Look through a photo album or through pictures on your phone or camera of loved ones or places you enjoy.
___ Draw or paint a picture that is pleasing to you.
___ Have books in your room that are nice to look through.
___ Decorate your room with photographs or posters that you enjoy looking at.

Self-soothing using your sense of hearing

Certain sounds are soothing to us. Every person has a different taste. Try to identify some sounds that help you relax, or some you may be willing to try:

___ Listen to soothing music- classical, opera, pop, rap, jazz, country, folk, soul… whatever relaxes you.
___ Listen to a podcast.
___ Listen to peaceful sounds outside in a park or near a body of water, or listen to a recording of nature sounds.
___ Listen to a white noise machine.
___ Listen to a recording of a relaxation exercise.

Self-soothing using your sense of taste

Taste is a powerful sense and can trigger memories or feelings. If eating food is soothing to you, try some of the following suggestions:

___ Enjoy your favorite meal, eating slowly and savoring the way it tastes.
___ Chew gum or suck on a hard candy.
___ Drink a hot beverage, like coffee, tea, or hot chocolate.
___ Savor a food that soothes you, like ice cream or chocolate.

Self soothing using your sense of touch

Your sense of touch is powerful. Different tactile sensations can be very positive. Try to find something you like or try something new:

___ Take a hot or cold shower.
___ Rub lotion onto your skin.
___ Get a massage or give yourself a massage.
___ Play with a pet.
___ Wear soft and comfortable clothes, like sweatpants and a sweatshirt.

Self-soothing using your sense of smell

Smell is one of the senses that can trigger memories, both bad and good. If using your sense of smell is soothing to you, try to identify some smells that may make you feel good or might want to try:

___ Wear scented perfumes or cologne that make you feel happy, confident, or sexy.
___ Go somewhere with a pleasing scent, like a bakery or restaurant.
___ Bake something that smells good to you, like chocolate chip cookies.
___ Buy fresh-cut flowers for yourself or a friend.