



Urge Surfing Exercise

Find a quiet place where you will be relatively free from distractions and unlikely to be bothered by anyone. Sit in a comfortable position. Write down how strong your urge is on a scale from 0 (no urge at all) to 10 (the strongest urge you've ever had). Then, write down how much you feel as if you can handle your urge on a scale from 0 (can't take it for one more second) to 10 (could handle it for ten hours straight if you had to).

Imagine that you're standing on a surfboard on the ocean in a warm, tropical place. You can see the white, sandy shore in front of you, there's a slight breeze, and you can smell the salt of the ocean.

There are a few fluffy, white clouds overhead, and the sun feels warm on your back. Really transport your mind to this scene. Now, imagine that your urge to harm yourself is the wave that you're riding. Really notice what the urge feels like in your body. Zero in on the sensations you feel (for example, tightness in your muscles). Now, imagine that you're surfing the wave, and the wave is your urge. As your urge rises and becomes stronger, the wave gets higher, but you keep on surfing on top of it. Imagine that you're an excellent surfer who can handle any wave that comes your way. As the urge gets stronger and stronger, the wave gets higher and higher until it crests. Imagine that you're riding the wave to shore. As you watch and surf the wave, notice what happens to it. Notice if it gets higher and stronger, or if it starts getting lower and weaker. When it gets weaker, imagine that you're sliding with your surfboard in to shore. When it starts to build again, imagine that you're back out there on the wave, just riding it. Keep doing this for about ten minutes or so. Or, keep doing it until you feel as if you have a handle on the urge and will not act on it.

At the end, write down how strong your urge is on a scale from 0 to 10 and how much you feel as if you can handle your urge on a scale from 0 to 10.

Also, keep in mind that if using the imagery of a wave on an ocean doesn't work for you (or isn't your cup of tea!), you can also do this exercise by simply noticing how the physical feelings and sensations of the urge come and go.

Adapted from FREEDOM FROM SELF-HARM: Overcoming Self-Injury with Skills from DBT and Other Treatments (New Harbinger Publications)