DTS

Distress Tolerance Scale (DTS)

The DTS is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure perceived tolerance of emotional distress, that is, a person's ability to withstand, appraise, and regulate negative affective states. The tool explores four complementary dimensions: tolerance, attentional absorption, appraisal of distress, and regulation efforts. Widely used in clinical psychology and research, it helps identify a transdiagnostic vulnerability involved in anxiety disorders, addictive behaviors, emotion regulation difficulties, and various forms of psychological distress. It does not make a diagnosis on its own, but provides a useful benchmark for assessing emotional functioning and monitoring clinical progress.

Number of questions	15 questions
Estimated duration	3 minutes
Language	English
Original name	Distress Tolerance Scale
Target audience	Adults
Authors	Jeffrey S. Simons, Raluca M. Gaher (2005)
Category	Emotion regulation, Anxiety

Preview of the 15 questions

Feeling distressed or upset is unbearable to me.

Strongly agree | Mildly agree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly disagree | Strongly disagree

When I feel distressed or upset, all I can think about is how bad I feel.

Strongly agree | Mildly agree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly disagree | Strongly disagree

I can't handle feeling distressed or upset.

Strongly agree | Mildly agree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly disagree | Strongly disagree

My feelings of distress are so intense that they completely take over.

Strongly agree | Mildly agree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly disagree | Strongly disagree

There's nothing worse than feeling distressed or upset.

Strongly agree | Mildly agree | Agree and disagree equally | Mildly disagree | Strongly disagree

Scoring & interpretation

The DTS comprises 15 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Scoring aims to obtain a total distress tolerance score, with the positively worded item reversed depending on the version used. The global score is most often calculated as the mean of the 15 items and, if needed, the means of the Tolerance, Absorption, Appraisal, and Regulation subscales. High scores reflect better perceived tolerance of emotional distress, while low scores suggest difficulty withstanding and managing negative affect. There is no universally accepted diagnostic cutoff, so interpretation is preferably dimensional, clinical, and comparative over time.